The College of Social Studies (CSS) is a rigorous, multidisciplinary major focusing on History, Government, Political and Social Theory, and Economics. Founded in 1959, the CSS is reading and writing intensive, encouraging intellectual independence with weekly essays, small group tutorials, and a vibrant intellectual environment. After applying to the CSS during their freshman year, students begin the sophomore year with intensive tutorials in History, Government, and Economics along with a Social Theory Colloquium. In order to allow students to focus their energies and develop a faculty for independent analysis, there are no grades awarded during this year, and grades for all classes are converted to CREDIT. At the end of the sophomore year, students participate in Comprehensive Examinations administered by outside examiners. These exams consist of a week-long series of written essays in each subject area, and an oral examination. Each student receives a grade of High Distinction, Distinction, Commendable, Satisfactory, or Fail with the modal grade being Commendable. Only the result of the Comprehensive Examination appears on the student’s transcript: subsequent courses in the junior and senior year are graded in the conventional manner.

After the sophomore year, CSS students take classes that build from the original Tutorials and Colloquium by evaluating theories and exploring their application to historical test cases and contemporary debates. During their junior year, students participate in a Colloquium on Contemporary Philosophy, as well as small group tutorials in two of the three other subject areas of their choice. These tutorials either follow the same weekly system of the sophomore year or culminate in an extensive term paper. During the first semester of their senior year, students participate in a multidisciplinary Colloquium which examines debates and issues in contemporary social, economic, and political theory. The rest of senior year is devoted to a senior project, either a senior essay or an honors thesis project. Having spent three years reading and learning in an intimate intellectual environment, CSS students are able to construct their own arguments independently, and to make original contributions to their fields of choice.