

CSS Senior Year Planning Notes for 2026-2027

Senior Colloquium Senior Thesis OR Senior Essay

The CSS senior year program consists of two core elements:

1. The Senior Colloquium, taken in the fall term, and
2. A capstone research project culminating in either a senior thesis or a senior essay.

Senior Essay

A senior essay is a research paper, usually 30 to 40 pages, that is completed through an Individual Tutorial (CSS 401 or 402) with a faculty member or by enrollment in coursework with a faculty advisor (usually an advanced seminar in a social science discipline or related field) approved by the co-chairs. Senior essays can be completed in either the fall or the spring semester.

During the Drop/Add period at the start of the semester in which you are completing your essay, you enroll in an Individual Tutorial, either CSS 401 in the fall or CSS 402 in the spring, with the faculty member who has agreed to supervise your senior essay.

Senior Essay Proposal – due Wednesday, September 9

The senior essay must have a coherent theme and include a substantial amount of critical writing that develops the scope of the project. Your senior essay proposal should describe the general nature of the scholarship in a two-page statement stating the focus of the senior essay. Your proposal must include the name of your essay advisor.

For senior essays being completed in the fall semester, the proposal must be e-mailed to Martha as an attached file no later than **Wednesday, September 9**. For senior essays being completed in the spring semester, a preliminary proposal (including the name of the proposed advisor) must be emailed to Martha by Wednesday, September 9. For spring essays, a final proposal will be due by **Thursday, January 21**. All senior essay proposals must be approved by the CSS co-chairs.

Senior Thesis

You should have already obtained a commitment from a senior thesis advisor. If you do not yet have a confirmed senior thesis advisor, please inform the co-chairs. During the two semesters, students meet with their senior thesis advisors regularly, e.g. once a week, until completion of the thesis.

During the Drop/Add period at the start of each semester, you will add the Senior Thesis Tutorial, usually CSS 409 in the fall and CSS 410 in the spring. If you are a double major standing for honors in CSS and your other major, you may be required to enroll in a Senior Thesis Tutorial in that Department for one of the terms.

Senior Thesis Proposal – due Wednesday, September 9: The senior thesis proposal should contain (1) the tentative title of the thesis, (2) the name of your thesis advisor, and (3) a brief statement of the central problem of the thesis and the general approach to be employed. The proposal should normally be about two pages.

An updated Senior Thesis Proposal will be due on the first day of fall classes, Wednesday, September 9, with any changes clearly indicated.

Fall Senior Thesis Workshops

In November, a series of five or six Senior Thesis Workshops will be scheduled. Each student will make a brief presentation of work to date on the Senior Thesis, expanding on a workshop paper that will be distributed in advance to all participants. Workshop papers are due to Martha as e-mail attachments several days prior to the start of the first workshop, on a date to be determined. The Senior Thesis Workshop Paper should be five to seven pages in length and contain: (1) a detailed statement of the problem to be examined, (2) an explanation of its significance, (3) an account of the proposed methods of inquiry, (4) and a preliminary bibliography.

All seniors are strongly encouraged to attend the thesis workshops. Each workshop will typically also be attended by one or both co-chairs and the student presenters' thesis advisors. Other CSS tutors along with any interested faculty and students are welcome to attend. The Workshops are designed to inform the CSS community about the proposed content of the senior thesis, so as to stimulate interdisciplinary critique and provide thesis writers with ideas and suggestions at an early stage of their research projects.

Timeline for Identifying Problems with Senior Theses

CSS students will not be permitted to continue their senior theses unless satisfactory progress has been made by the beginning of the spring term. **On the last day of fall classes, December 11, a rough draft of a substantial portion of the senior thesis, e.g. a chapter, are to be submitted for initial evaluation to your senior thesis advisor. On the first day of spring classes, January 21, a substantial portion of the senior thesis, e.g. a second chapter, must be submitted to the senior thesis advisor along with a brief summary of the work accomplished to date, an outline of the remainder of the thesis and a discussion of the research (if any) that remains to be completed.** At the start of the spring semester, thesis advisors will be asked if their students have completed a substantial body of writing. Any student who has not made sufficient progress on the thesis to indicate the likelihood of successful completion by the Honors College deadline will be contacted within the first few days of the spring semester.

A student who has not made sufficient progress will be required to convert the senior thesis to a senior essay. Since such a student will generally have received an "X" for the fall thesis tutorial (normally CSS 409), the student and the senior thesis advisor have two options. If they determine that the senior essay can be completed by the end of the fourth week of the spring semester, the fall tutorial (CSS 409) will be changed to CSS 407, designating an individual tutorial with the thesis advisor who will submit a grade for that class when the senior essay is completed. If the thesis advisor and the student determine that completing the senior essay will require more than four weeks, the student will register for CSS 408, designating an individual tutorial with the thesis advisor who will submit a grade for the tutorial by the end of the spring semester. In that case, the grade of "X" will remain in the student's academic history.

Senior Year Timeline for 2026-2027 (subject to change):

- **Monday, September 7 - Friday, September 18:** Fall Drop/Add Period:
 - **Thesis Writers:** Request to enroll in a senior thesis tutorial, normally CSS 409.
 - **Fall Senior Essay Writers:** Request to enroll in an individual tutorial, namely CSS 401.
- **Wednesday, September 9:**
 - An updated Senior Thesis or Senior Essay Proposal is due to Martha.
 - If you have not completed Gen Ed expectations, you must submit a plan for completing Gen Ed credits to Martha and the co-chairs.
- **Friday, October 9:** Seniors in their final semester, i.e., students intending to graduate in December, must submit their major certification.
- **November:** Senior Thesis Workshops scheduled. Senior Thesis Workshop Papers will be due to Martha by e-mail attachment several days prior to the first scheduled workshop session.
- **Friday, December 11: Last Day of Fall Classes**
 - **Fall Essay Writers:** Fall Senior Essays are due to your senior essay advisor and to Martha.
 - **Thesis Writers:** A rough draft of a substantial portion of the senior thesis, e.g. a chapter when relevant, are to be submitted for initial evaluation to your senior thesis advisor.
- **Thursday, January 21 (First Day of Spring Classes):**
 - **Spring Essay Writers:** Spring Senior Essay Proposals are due to Martha by e-mail.
 - **Thesis Writers:** A substantial portion of the senior thesis, e.g. a second chapter, must be submitted to your senior thesis advisor. A brief summary of the work accomplished to date along with an outline of the remaining part of the thesis and a statement of the research (if any) that remains to be completed are due to thesis advisors. The CSS co-chairs and the senior thesis advisor will evaluate whether or not the student is progressing sufficiently to continue with a senior thesis. If the progress made to date by the student does not indicate likely completion of a thesis by the Honors College deadline, the student will be required to convert the thesis to a senior essay.
- **Thursday, January 21 - Wednesday, February 3: Spring Drop/Add Period.**
 - **Thesis Writers:** Enroll in a senior thesis tutorial, usually CSS 410.
 - **Spring Essay Writers:** Enroll in an individual tutorial, CSS 402.
- **Friday, March 5:** Seniors in their final semester must submit their major certification.
- **Monday, April 12 – Thursday, April 15 at 4:00pm:** Senior Theses are due in WesPortal Honors College.
- **Wednesday, May 5: Last Day of Spring Classes**
 - **Spring Essay Writers:** Spring Essays are due to senior essay advisor and to Martha.
- **Saturday, May 22 1:30-3:00 pm:** CSS Reception for Grads and Families in the CSS Lounge
- **Sunday, May 23:** Commencement