



2025-2026
Experience-Centered
Seminars
Course Information

March 2-20, 2026

Placement Criteria and Seminar Descriptions

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Placement Criteria

As you consider which seminar your student is interested in, it's important to remember that ECSs are academic classes. They are experiential learning opportunities with an educational foundation. This year, you will be able to rank your selections, but PARENTS will be filling out the preference form. With that in mind, families discuss and select three ECSs that their students would enjoy participating in. It is our hope that students will submit their three options based on the alignment between their personal passion(s), intrigue, or value system, and the topic that each ECS will explore. Upper School faculty and administration will place students in one of their three Seminar choices, weighing a variety of factors including (in no particular order):

- Grade Level
- Academics
- Extracurricular interests
- Past ECS experiences and behavior
- Behavior at school
- Group dynamics of each trip
- Size limitations of each trip (transportation, sleeping arrangements)
- Demands of the ECS (e.g., physical demands, time commitments)
- Student input

Our goal is to create the best educational opportunity for every student in every Seminar.

Before submitting the ECS Preference Form, which will be sent out on Wednesday, May 2, 2025, and due back on Monday, May 12, 2025. Please note the following points:

1. Graduation from CSS is contingent upon each student completing and passing an ECS for each year of attendance in the Upper School division. An ECS is equivalent to one (1) Carnegie unit of instruction (defined as 120 hours of contact time with an instructor). As such, each ECS is recorded on a student's transcript and counts towards the calculation of the Grade Point Average.
2. Students receive a letter grade for ECSs. They are NOT pass/fail.
3. Attendance is a critical component of the ECS experience. Missing just one half-day of an ECS is roughly equivalent to missing an entire week of a traditional class. Per the CSS Parent-Student Handbook, "excused absences that cause a student to miss significant portions of an ECS will be managed in a variety of ways but often involve supplementary, independent work and the design of alternative, relevant experiences by the students. The family will be

expected to cover non-refundable course costs incurred by CSS on behalf of the student even if the student is unable to reap the benefits of the experience due to conditions beyond their control.” In most cases, reservations for transportation and housing are difficult and costly to change, and penalty charges may become the responsibility of the family that has requested the change. Consider ECS preference rankings carefully and thoughtfully with regard to potential personal conflicts to avoid making changes later. Multiple unexcused absences will result in a lower letter grade.

4. Students are encouraged to choose three Seminars based on individual interests and/or career ambitions, NOT according to social influences. It is our hope that students will submit their three options based on the alignment between their personal passion(s), intrigue, or value system, and the topic that each ECS will explore.
5. At CSS, we use technology very intentionally to meet our educational objectives. School policies limit the use of personal tech devices in divisionally specific ways. In the Upper School, we generally emphasize responsible use. However, students cannot use phones during class other than as authorized by a teacher. ECSs represent a significant reduction or a complete break from personal tech use for our students. We have observed (and research supports) that there are substantial benefits for personal social skills and group dynamics when students take a break from technology. Parents need to understand, before committing to a traveling ECS, that their students **WILL NOT** take a cell phone with them on any ECS.
6. Families, please look closely at the cost of the ECS, as you are committing to pay the cost once your student is assigned to a Seminar. Also, students tend to value ECS experiences more when they help pay for them. We encourage students to apply themselves to earn part of the cost of their eventual ECS.
7. For the 2025-2026 academic year, we are rolling out the ECS options and building rosters prior to the start of the new fiscal year on July 1, 2025, so that we can spread the cost of Seminars out over 10 months. You will see an Ex Ed fee on your annual billing statement, which will be the fee for the CSS portion of your ECS. If you are on a non-local ECS, billing for the travel portion of your ECS will go through a third party, who is either EPI or 4 Points this year, and a wrap-around fee will be added to incidentals..
8. Students who have demonstrated behavioral problems or social-emotional concerns at school may be restricted from attending a national or international Seminar. It may not be possible to reimburse families for costs incurred if a change in Seminars must be made due to a disciplinary issue or a

social-emotional concern. **CSS reserves the right to change or revoke an ECS placement up until the day of departure.**

9. All CSS Experiential Learning programs go through a rigorous risk management process. You may request to view our risk management plan by reaching out to Emily Fuller, efuller@css.org.

Automotive: Technology, Innovation, and Careers

Instructors: Mr. Takacs & Mr. Bunch

Expected Cost: \$350–\$450

Travel: Local field trips (no overnights)

Essential Questions:

- How have new methods of powering vehicles changed their performance and potential?
 - Is autonomous driving the future — or just a dream?
 - What careers are available in today's evolving automotive industry?
-

Course Description:

From the early days of Ford's Model T to the cutting-edge designs of today, the world of automotive technology has seen revolutionary change. This ECS dives into the modern automobile, exploring advances in mechanical engineering, alternative fuels (like hydrogen, lithium-ion batteries, and biofuels), and the rise of autonomous vehicles. Students will investigate how technology is reshaping everything from performance to environmental impact — and will get a firsthand look at the many career pathways tied to this fast-evolving field.

Expect hands-on learning through visits to local repair shops, showrooms, race tracks, and test tracks, offering a broad introduction to the vibrant and ever-changing world of automobiles.

Student's Interests that Match this ECS:

- Engineering and design
 - Mathematics and physics
 - Building electric motors
 - Basic automotive maintenance and troubleshooting
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Students Who Should Select this ECS:

- Tinkerers who love to understand how things work
 - Engineers-in-the-making with a need for speed (and curiosity)
 - Dreamers ready to imagine the future of transportation
 - Future mechanics, designers, or just plain car enthusiasts
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Cell Phone Policy:

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Broadcast Journalism: Storytelling Through Sound and Screen

Instructors: Sam Wells and Jonathan Andujar

Expected Cost: \$650

Travel: Local field trips (no overnights)

Essential Questions:

- How has the evolution of broadcast media expanded genres and storytelling forms?
 - In what ways have radio and television shaped public opinion?
 - What resources are necessary to create a high-quality piece of broadcast media?
 - What team roles are essential for producing successful broadcasts?
 - How does rhetoric influence the ethics of journalism?
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Course Description:

What were the early days of radio like? Who inspired it, and how did it change the world? What happened when television invaded the American living room, and how did it reshape society — and radio itself? How has the rise of the internet and streaming media transformed broadcasting once again?

In this lively ECS, students dive into the fascinating history and future of broadcast media. We'll explore the invention of radio, iconic personalities like Orson Welles, George Burns, and Gracie Allen, and the golden era of early television with legends such as Jack Benny and Red Skelton.

Students will experience broadcasting firsthand — writing, producing, and recording their own radio or television segments in local studios. They'll learn both the technical and creative sides of the industry and walk away with a polished final project to share with the school and keep as a personal achievement.

Student's Interests that Match this ECS:

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- War of the Worlds and early broadcast dramas
 - Exploring the power of pop culture
 - Writing for radio, television, and streaming platforms
 - Copywriting, scripting, and storytelling
 - Media history and innovation
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Students Who Should Select this ECS:

- Future media moguls and broadcast storytellers
 - Curious minds fascinated by history, culture, and communication
 - Creative writers who want to see their words come to life
 - Tech-savvy students ready to jump behind the mic or camera
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Woodcarving in Alaska: Art, Culture, and Community

Instructors: Mr. Wolfe & TBD

Expected Cost: \$3500-\$4000

Travel: TBD

Essential Questions:

- How does woodcarving reflect the cultural values and history of Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples?
 - What can artistic traditions teach us about community, survival, and storytelling?
 - How can service learning deepen our understanding of another culture?
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Course Description:

On this ECS, students will explore the distinct wood carving styles of the Pacific Northwest's ancient peoples. Through studies of cultural practices, legends, and economic structures, students gain critical context before heading north and immersing themselves in the Pacific Northwest. Talks with local experts in Pacific Northwest First Nations history and art will inform students as they journey to Alaska. One possible destination is Haines, Alaska. Students will have the opportunity to visit with local families, immersing themselves in the living traditions of woodcarving, dancing, and storytelling. A service-learning component will allow students to contribute meaningfully to the village and its school community. Past participants' works even hang today in our own Maytag dining hall — a lasting legacy of this incredible journey.

Student's Interests that Match this ECS:

- Indigenous art and culture
- Woodworking, carving, and traditional crafts
- Storytelling through visual arts

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- Learning through travel and service
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Students Who Should Select this ECS:

- Aspiring artists, builders, and creators
 - Students eager to experience Indigenous cultures firsthand
 - Adventurers who are ready for ferry rides, homestays, and hands-on learning
 - Reflective learners who want to leave a legacy through service and art
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Ecology and Conflict in Yellowstone

Instructors: Natalie Hanson and TBD

Expected Cost: \$3,900

Travel: In Yellowstone 3/7/2026–3/15/2026

Essential Question:

- How are ecological data collected, analyzed, and used to make decisions for our public lands?
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Course Description:

The grandeur of Yellowstone in winter provides a dramatic and unforgettable setting for scientific exploration. Set within the caldera of an ancient supervolcano and bordered by majestic mountains, Yellowstone is a living laboratory featuring 10,000 geothermal wonders — boiling springs, fumaroles, mud pots, and more geysers than anywhere else in the world.

Students will experience Yellowstone's extraordinary winter ecology firsthand, snowshoeing and hiking across rugged landscapes. Working alongside instructors from Ecology Project International, students will track wildlife and collect critical data on animal movements and demographics.

We will propose and attempt to answer ecological research questions based on field observations. With luck, we'll observe wolves in the legendary Lamar Valley, adding unforgettable moments to our scientific study.

Throughout the course, students will also engage with researchers and stakeholders to better understand controversies around wolf and bison management, reading, discussing, and debating public policy decisions that shape the future of America's public lands.

Note on Risks and Requirements:

This ECS involves flying to Bozeman, Montana, overnight stays in cabins, traveling on foot through potentially harsh winter conditions, and extensive outdoor

activity. Students must pack appropriate winter gear (packing list TBD), demonstrate physical endurance, and adhere closely to all safety guidelines.

Student's Interests that Match this ECS:

- Tracking animals and collecting wildlife movement data
 - Conducting field-based ecological research
 - Exploring controversies surrounding bison and wolf reintroductions
 - Discussing and debating public policy related to national parks and conservation
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Students Who Should Select this ECS:

- Future scientists, ecologists, or conservationists
 - Adventurers ready to trek snowy miles to find wildlife
 - Reflective thinkers who love blending research, debate, and outdoor exploration
 - Students eager to experience America's first national park up close — and leave it better than they found it
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Patagonia: Past, Present, and Future

Instructors: Marta Kunze and David Hillman

Expected Cost: \$4,700–\$5,200

Travel: Anticipated 3/3/2026–3/14/2026

Essential Questions:

- What is the importance of Patagonia in the world?
 - What current challenges threaten Patagonia's land, wildlife, and future?
 - How might Patagonia change in the coming decades?
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Course Description:

Argentina is a wonderland of soaring mountains, sweeping oceans, and incredible wildlife. In this expedition, students will travel to the "bottom of the world," starting in the vibrant urban center of Buenos Aires and journeying south to Ushuaia and Tierra del Fuego — the last stop before Antarctica.

Backpacking through the wilds of Patagonia, students will sleep in mountain huts, discover remote lakes, and take in unforgettable vistas in peaceful solitude. Along the way, they'll encounter penguins, explore marine ecosystems, and develop a deeper appreciation for this majestic, fragile region.

Students will reflect on environmental challenges facing Patagonia today — and consider how conservation efforts can protect this breathtaking corner of the world for future generations.

Student's Interests that Match this ECS:

- Exploring different cultures and world regions
 - Ecology, conservation, and biodiversity
 - History and Mythology of Patagonia
 - Hiking, backpacking, and outdoor adventures
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Students Who Should Select this ECS:

- Scholars ready to earn the best mountain views
 - Curious minds passionate about culture, ecology, and exploration
 - Reflective (or aspiring) journal keepers with sturdy boots
 - Adventurers seeking an epic journey filled with side quests and surprises
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