

EXPLORING CAREERS:

Central Superior Services (CSS)

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This handout was compiled using information gathered through online research, and a series of interviews with people working in this field (including LUMS alumni, recruiters, and other experts). **The information presented in this handout is currently exclusively geared towards the Pakistani job market.** Please note this resource was last updated on **06/08/2025**, and some information may be outdated. Readers are encouraged to reach out to people currently in the field and online resources for more updated information as needed. To assist students with the CSS exam preparation process, this handout provides tips on what **academic** and **non-academic** choices students should make [in LUMS](#) and [after LUMS](#) based on interviews with LUMS alumni that have successfully passed the exam. For in-depth information regarding the details of the CSS exam and additional resources to consult, please check out [here](#).

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SECTION 1. WHAT ACADEMIC CHOICES DO I NEED TO MAKE IN LUMS IF I WANT TO JOIN THIS FIELD?

- A. Majors and Minors
- B. GPA
- C. Useful courses for knowledge and skill development
- D. Research
- E. Other Tips

A. MAJORS AND MINORS

Note: This information was collected in summer 2021 and might be incomplete or outdated. For more updated information, kindly contact [CSO](#) or alumni/professionals currently working in the field and check the [Undergraduate Student Handbook](#) (please download the handbook relevant for your academic year) for information on requirements of various majors and minors offered at LUMS.

General Requirements:

- **There are no major and minor requirements to appear for the CSS examination as the only requirement is having a bachelor's degree** and graduates taking the exam come from a variety of backgrounds, with placements depending on how well they do in the written exam, the psychological test, and viva voce (interview). Upon passing the exam, 12-18 months of compulsory training is provided to develop the relevant technical skill set required by CSS officers. The training includes 5-8 months of Common Training Programme and 9 months of the Specialized Training Programme.

Useful to have:

Note: There is a misconception that Political Science majors are best suited for students interested in taking the CSS exam. While having a social science major such as Political Science could be useful, students from all academic backgrounds can equally do well in the exam.

- **It may be useful to take a liberal arts/social science major** (Economics, Anthropology and Sociology, Political Science, etc.) as the coursework develops reading, writing, and research skills which are needed for CSS examination preparation. These majors also have relevant courses that could be useful for taking optional subjects such as Economics, Political Science, International Relations, etc.
- **Business majors are also useful** as they too develop communication, presentation, and writing skills which could be helpful in the written exam and psychological test preparation. These majors also provide coursework that could be useful for students interested in taking optional business subjects in the written exam (Business Administration, Accountancy & Audit, etc.).
- **Social Science minors such as Public Management, Comparative Literary & Cultural Studies (CLCS), History, Philosophy, Psychology, etc. could be useful** as they provide the relevant soft skills to prepare for the exam. It could be good to have a minor that covers the desired optional subjects (E.g. Public Administration, History, Philosophy, Psychology, etc.)

B. GPA

- **There is no cut-off GPA requirement** that is a pre-requisite for the CSS examination as the only requirement is that exam takers should have a bachelor's degree. Having a low GPA should not deter students from taking the CSS exam as there are no GPA requirements.
- **However, a high GPA (3.2+) is recommended** since the CSS exam pass rate is extremely low, therefore a high GPA may be required for pursuing alternative career/professional development opportunities.

C. USEFUL COURSES FOR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Note: This is not an exhaustive list. Please refer to the [course memos](#) (courses being offered in a specific semester and their requirements) for a more updated list of courses and the [course outlines](#) (resources to help students understand the course) to know the topics being taught within those courses. Furthermore, students are also encouraged to refer to [CSS Subjects' curriculum](#) and plan on taking classes that cover the material that they will be tested on.

General Requirements:

- **There are no specific coursework requirements for taking the CSS exam.** Students should plan on taking courses that will develop the required general skills (communication, writing, reading, research, etc).
- Students should also plan on taking courses that will contribute to increasing the knowledge required for the required and optional subjects ([mentioned below](#)) that they are interested in.

Key Useful Courses:

- **Students should take English writing courses** as the essay-based CSS exam components require a strong command of the English language and English Essay and Composition are two of the compulsory subjects in the exam. Courses such as "Introduction to English Literature" and "The Word and the World" could be very useful.
- **Students are recommended to enrol in reading-based courses** (E.g. Introduction to History, Introduction to Sociology, and Introduction to Anthropology, etc.) that help in developing a reading habit.
- **Students should take electives in diverse Social Science subjects** to increase their general knowledge and academic diversity which can increasingly help in preparing for the CSS exam. Furthermore, Political Science electives could be useful to study current, historical, and Pakistani affairs which also happen to be two of the compulsory subjects in the exam.

Courses useful for optional CSS subjects:

Note: If students are interested in a particular optional subject not mentioned in the list below, they should plan on taking courses in that subject. If LUMS does not offer the following classes or classes at LUMS do not cover any of the following concepts, online courses that cover the topics can be taken as well. Please check out the full [list of optional subjects](#) being offered by CSS.

- **For students interested in taking one of the business subjects (Accounting/Business Administration) as an optional subject**, they should take corresponding courses that can help in forming a solid foundation for subject preparation after graduation. For example, if students are interested in taking accounting, then courses such as Principles of Financial Accounting, Principles of Management Accounting, Corporate Financial Reporting, etc. are generally useful.
- **For students interested in taking Economics**, courses such as Introductory MicroEconomics and Introductory MacroEconomics could be useful in the preparation of the subject.
- **For students interested in taking Computer Science**, courses such as Computational Problem Solving, Introduction to Programming, and Data Structures could be useful.
- **For students interested in taking one of the Science subjects (Physics/Chemistry/Mathematics, etc.),** they should take introductory/intermediate courses in the respective Science subject which can help in forming a solid foundation for relevant subject preparation after graduation.

- **For students interested in Business Administration**, introductory courses in Management Science, Corporation Communication, and introductory Finance courses could be useful.
- **For students interested in taking one of the Law subjects (Constitutional Law/International Law/Islamic Law/Mercantile Law)**, various relevant law courses provided by the school of law (SAHSOL) should be taken as electives.

D. RESEARCH

- **Taking part in research projects (SPROJ), research-intensive courses, etc.) is not a requirement to take the CSS exam but can be helpful for the written exam preparation.** Since exam preparation is research and reading-intensive, taking part in research projects may help in developing required skills such as research, writing, and reading skills.

E. OTHER TIPS

- **Students should also refer to the [LUMS Advising Website](#)** for more resources on exploring [majors](#) and [minors](#) at LUMS.
- **Students should opt for optional subjects that interest them** since they will be going over the same study material for months so they should avoid studying something that they are not interested in.
- **Students have the option to select from a list of 50 disciplines as their optional written exam subjects** which shows that students from diverse academic backgrounds take the exam.
- **Students should network and connect with other LUMS students/graduates** that are also CSS aspirants to seek academic-related advice and possibly form study groups after graduation. ([Career Services Office \(CSO\)](#) can also connect exam takers with relevant people)

SECTION 2. WHAT NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES SHOULD I PURSUE IN LUMS IF I WANT TO TAKE THIS EXAM?

- A. Internships
- B. Research Assistantships/Teaching Assistantships
- C. Job Shadowing
- D. Extracurricular Activities

A. INTERNSHIPS

- **Internships are not a requirement to appear or for passing the CSS exam.** Students can use internships or short-term work experience in the public sector to show interest in working long-term in the government during the viva voce.
- **For information on internship opportunities,** contact the [Career Services Office \(CSO\)](#) to get assistance in areas of career planning and higher education opportunities. Mentoring or outreach to relevant alumni will allow students to better their soft skills (professional, sense of maturity, ability to learn on the spot, etc.) that may be displayed during the viva voce/psychological test.

B. RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS/TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

- **Research Assistantships/Teaching Assistantships are not a requirement for taking the CSS but can be pursued** to reinforce technical concepts, develop research, reading, and writing skills, and increase subject knowledge.
- If students decide to pursue such opportunities, it is recommended to do it with a professor in their field of interest or one of the optional subjects that they would like to choose for the exam (e.g. Students planning on taking Economics as an optional subject can consider being a TA/RA for an Economics course).

C. JOB SHADOWING

- **Job Shadowing is not a requirement for taking the CSS exam but is very helpful** in gaining exposure to the field and learning about various ministries from the people that are being shadowed and their coworkers.
- **Students should reach out to alumni who are working as Civil servants or other senior grade officers** asking them if they would be willing to be job shadowed during which students should observe them and take notes, ask them insightful questions related to their ministry, discuss their professional goals with them, and get CSS exam studying tips, etc.

D. EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- **Any extra-curricular activities (clubs, societies, volunteering experience, etc.) are good to pursue** as they demonstrate leadership, organisational skills, public speaking skills, and other relevant soft skills needed to be successful in CSS.
- **Students should pursue leadership roles in clubs and societies** as it helps build up leadership skills which they can bring up during the psychological test and viva voce.
- **Students can take part in sports and other athletic activities** for improving/maintaining physical and mental health and reducing anxiety and stress that comes along with studying for long hours. Good physical and mental health will help students do well in the required CSS medical and psychological tests.
- **Students are encouraged to pursue diverse non-academic activities** to increase general knowledge and highlight their personality during the psychological test/viva voce.
- **Reading newspapers/current affairs articles is highly recommended** for not only keeping up to date with national and global affairs but also for developing a reading habit necessary for exam preparation.

SECTION 3. WHAT CAN I DO TO ENTER OR TRANSITION INTO THIS FIELD AFTER GRADUATING?

- A. Entering this field as a Fresh Graduate
- B. Value of Graduate study for entry
- C. Value of Professional Development/Training for entry
- D. Value of working in related careers to improving chances of entry
- E. Other experiences/tips for improving chances of entry into this field
- F. Transitioning into this field

This section is relevant for i) fresh graduates who have just started exploring this field, ii) alumni who have not been able to pass the CSS exam and, iii) alumni who want to transition into this field.

A. ENTERING THIS FIELD AS A FRESH GRADUATE

- **Fresh graduates are eligible for registering for the CSS exam** provided they have their undergraduate diploma with them. If they do not hold the required degree before registration, they may need to provide a certificate from LUMS detailing that they have fulfilled all degree requirements and are on track to graduate by the respective date.
- **There is no reason for students to delay taking the exam** provided they are 100% committed to this field and have prepared sufficiently for the exam. Alumni have recommended that students should give themselves 4-5 months of full time exam preparation after graduation (Note: CSS exam preparation is very intense and full time exam preparation means focused regular study for those months).

B. VALUE OF GRADUATE STUDY FOR ENTRY

- **Graduate study is not a requirement to take the CSS exam and is not recommended** since full time self-study is usually sufficient for passing the exam and all the required technical skills are gained during the training period after successfully passing the exam.
- **However, some alumni may still choose to pursue graduate studies** for keeping their options open to alternative professional opportunities since it happens a lot that students don't pass on their first attempt and while studying for their second attempt, they also enrol in a Master's programme. Furthermore, graduate studies can also help fresh graduates in increasing their subject knowledge and improving their research and writing skills that are required for passing the exam.
- **If students do decide to pursue graduate studies before taking the exam**, they should plan on completing their graduate degree before the age of 30 as that is the cutoff age of taking the exam.

C. VALUE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/TRAINING FOR ENTRY

- **Fresh graduates can opt to study for the CSS exam through a tuition centre** where students are taught how to properly attempt the written exam and prepare for the viva.
- **Fresh graduates can also take private CSS sessions** which are held by LUMS alumni that have cleared the exam. (Other non-alumni CSS passers also offer private tutoring sessions).
- **Online platforms such as LinkedIn Learning, Coursera, Skillshare, and Udemy** offer courses covering optional exam subjects at varying knowledge levels.

D. VALUE OF WORKING IN RELATED CAREERS TO IMPROVING CHANCES OF ENTRY

- **There is not much value in working in related careers to increase chances of entering this field** since passing the CSS exam is the sole hard requirement.
- **Students can pursue work experience opportunities during the interim period when they are waiting for their exam results.** CSS exam takes place in February and the results come in October which is sufficient

time to test alternative professional opportunities in case students are unable to pass the exam and decide to transition to other career fields.

E. OTHER EXPERIENCES/TIPS FOR IMPROVING CHANCES OF ENTRY INTO THIS FIELD

- **It is important to have a positive support system during exam preparation** since the process is long and taxing therefore it can help to balance out study life.
- **LUMS Alumni can opt to study at the [LUMS library](#)** (like many other CSS aspirants in the past) to study without any family distractions and utilise the vast variety of resources available there.
- **Fresh graduates should connect with [LUMS CSO](#)** to be informed of the preparatory sessions happening on campus (or online). [LUMS CSO](#) also offers services like **mock interviews** which could particularly help students in the oral assessment part of the exam.
- **CSS exam takers should not take shortcuts during preparation** (E.g.. memorising essays or relying on guess papers, etc.)

F. TRANSITIONING INTO THIS FIELD

- **Transitioning into CSS from any career field is possible but professionals should plan on registering for the exam by the cut-off age of thirty years.** They should also be prepared to take a break from their job as it is difficult to work full time while simultaneously preparing for the exam.

APPENDIX I: FIELD & EXAM OVERVIEW

- A. What is the Central Superior Services Exam?
- B. Sources you should consult for more information

A. WHAT IS THE CENTRAL SUPERIOR SERVICES (CSS) EXAM?

The Central Superior Services (CSS) can best be described as the elite Pakistani bureaucracy where civil servants run the civilian bureaucratic operations, 12 government directorates, and their associated cabinet secretariats.

Selection to Civil Service of Pakistan is an extremely competitive 18-month long process consisting of the following:

- **Submit the online and hard copy of the application form along with the relevant documents** (college transcripts, experience certificates, bank receipt of exam fee, etc.), often before October.
- **Take the MPT (MCQ-based preliminary Test)**. It tests basic Math, English, Urdu and General Knowledge and must be qualified before sitting in the written exam. The MPT takes place every year in October/ November.
- **Take a series of competitive written exams in the month of February** (Written exams consist of compulsory and optional subjects). Results are usually released in October (although they can be delayed till a further date as well). Successfully passing the exam makes students eligible for taking the medical and psychological examination.
- **Take the Medical test between November and January**. The medical exam is arranged by the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) office to evaluate whether the candidate has sound physical and mental health. Successfully passing the medical test makes the candidate eligible for taking the psychological test and viva voce.
- **Take the competitive Psychological test between December and January**. The test involves a series of individual and group activities which are evaluated by a trained psychologist. Shortlisted candidates are called for the viva voce.
- **Appear for the viva voce between December and March**. Viva Voce (Formal interview) is the final step that evaluates the candidate's moral characteristics and technical skillset. The list of candidates that successfully clear their viva voce and meet the quota/merit is released at the end of April.

B. SOURCES YOU SHOULD CONSULT FOR MORE INFORMATION

- [Federal Public Service Commission](#) for announcements on any CSS exam format changes and Provincial specific information.
- [CSS Optional and Compulsory Subjects](#)
- [CSS - Details regarding written exam subjects](#)
- [CSS Exam - General Information](#)
- [CSS Exam - Medical Test, Psychological Test & Viva-voce](#)
- [CSS Exam - Analysis of CSS Service Groups](#)
- [Societies at LUMS](#)
- [LUMS OAASS Website](#) for [upcoming events](#) that could be relevant to CSS exploration, and other resources such as [support services](#), [majors](#), and [minors](#) exploration that could help you in navigating CSS-related decision-making during LUMS.

APPENDIX II: CONTRIBUTORS AND OTHER RESOURCES CONSULTED

- A. Contributors
- B. Online Resources Consulted

A. CONTRIBUTORS

- Aleena Amir (FSP, CSS 2022)
- Saira Naeem '12 (LUMS)
- Zerveen Aamer '18 (LUMS)
- Mustafa Ahmed '19 (LUMS)

B. ONLINE RESOURCES CONSULTED

- [CSS Preparatory Session # 1](#)
- [Course Outlines](#)
- [Support Services: Referral Guide & Directory for Faculty & Staff at LUMS](#)
- [In Conversation with Uzair Ali - 3rd in Pakistan \(CSS 2019-20\)](#)
- [Undergraduate Student Handbook](#)
- [Course Memo and Schedules](#)