

Department of Media Study – Gold Form II - MFA Thesis Guidelines

Last revision March 2015

I: Thesis goals and guidelines

1. Overview

This document (gold form II) describes the MFA thesis project requirements and procedures. It is supplemental to the MFA schedule and requirements description (gold form I).

The MFA thesis project serves as the culminating creative project of the MFA program and consists of a production as well as a written component. The thesis project should demonstrate the student's technical and aesthetic development and a level of depth and proficiency in communicating in written form ideas pertinent to the student's field of concentration.

An MFA candidate should be able to:

- discuss his or her work in relation to art in general and to the traditions of the creative discipline and the medium of expression in which their work is articulated.
- offer evidence of having given serious thought to her/his cultural role, and to its possible relevancy and its potential contribution to contemporary art.
- display critical maturity in discussing the achievements of other artists beyond a statement of personal "taste."
- demonstrate a clear awareness as to how technical concerns and concepts in the production of creative work are relative to one's vision as an artist.
- demonstrate a measure of achievement in the command and presentation of ideas. This command should be apparent both in the student's production/art work and in her/his written work.

2. Criteria for successful thesis projects

The thesis project requires a written paper of substance (~10'000 words) as well as a production component. The proportions can be adjusted somewhat to suit the individual proposal. The *written* thesis *may* be critically or historically supportive of your *project* component—or *vice versa*.

Thesis projects must demonstrate originality and awareness of contemporary discourses in the media field in both content and presentation, as gauged by the faculty members of the candidate's thesis committee. The MFA in media production is a terminal degree, and serves as a qualifying criterion for admittance to the professoriate. The thesis project should exhibit mastery in relation to the candidate's chosen area of specialization within the media arts field. It is expected that the thesis project will display standards of professionalism in both its production and its written aspects.

3. Academic integrity and plagiarism

Absolute integrity is expected of every member of the UB community in all academic matters. When a student submits any work for academic credit, he/she makes an implicit claim that the work is wholly his/her own, done without the assistance of any person or source not explicitly noted, and that the work has not previously been submitted for academic credit in any area.

Plagiarism in any form is unacceptable. Students must understand that they may under no circumstances knowingly represent as their own any idea or expression of an idea or work of another in any academic examination or term test, or in connection with any other form of academic work. Any work submitted by a student for the thesis should be original work. Outside source material must be acknowledged. Penalties for committing plagiarism may include warning, probation, or dismissal. Individuals have the right to defend themselves and appeal any penalties.

II: Thesis

1. Overview

The following diagram gives a schematic overview of the DMS thesis process from semester 4 to 6.

S4

S4/5 Summer

S5

S6

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee Formation • Thesis Proposal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis Draft • Project Proposal • Application to Candidacy (ATC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Thesis • Project prototype, rough cut or first draft • Advising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised Thesis • Completed Project
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- committee formation (committee chair + 2 faculty)
- thesis proposal + topic+ abstract + bibliography (*400 words abstract*)
- thesis draft + project proposal + table of contents + summary + bibliography (*4'000 words draft*)
- complete thesis draft + project progress (*~10'000 words thesis*)
- final, revised completed thesis + completed project

2. Committee formation

Each student should begin forming a thesis committee no later than the beginning of their 4th semester. A thesis committee must consist of 3 or more faculty. At least 2 members of the committee must be full-time DMS tenure track faculty, with additional members coming from DMS or another department. The committee chair should be selected first. Additional members should be identified in consultation with the committee chair. Any committee member outside DMS must be approved by the 2 full-time DMS faculty on the committee before proceeding. One full-time DMS faculty on the committee must be designated committee chair. The choice of committee members must be made commensurate with the topic of the thesis research. Faculty members must have proven expertise in the research area the candidate wishes to investigate. The DMS chair or DGS reserve the right to request changes to the composition of thesis committees if the candidate fails to take this requirement into consideration. The committee should meet with the candidate at least 3 times. *It is the student's responsibility to schedule these meetings.* The student is also responsible for inquiring into faculty schedules to make sure that faculty will be available for the student to complete the thesis process.

3. Thesis proposal

Each student should meet with his/her thesis chair throughout their 4th semester to discuss the thesis project and to develop a proposal. The initial proposal includes:

- the thesis topic and a short abstract (*~ 400 words*);
- a thesis bibliography

In proposing a thesis project, students may be asked to establish their qualifications for undertaking such a project by providing samples of work from their portfolio demonstrating their experience and skill in the relevant area. Committee members may suggest or request changes to the proposed topic. The student must formalize the process by submitting a **thesis proposal form – committee selection** to the director of graduate studies which contains the names and signatures of the student's thesis committee. The student will then use the **thesis proposal form – progress map** to keep track of his/her progress during the thesis process (all forms are available online through the DMS website).

4. Thesis draft and project proposal

Here, the student should formalize the thesis idea and propose a production component for the thesis. In particular, the process requires a first substantial writing component. The **thesis draft** requires the student to coherently formulate a thesis idea and to put it into writing. It allows faculty to assess the student's ability to progress towards candidacy. Here is a list

of requirements for this stage of the thesis:

- a first structured draft of the written thesis, the thesis draft (~ 4'000 words)
- a written production proposal for the media production component;
- an explanation of how the student proposes to meet any technical challenges involved in completing the thesis project

- a thesis and production timeline, and (if applicable) a production budget;
- a list of at least two venues (festivals, conferences, etc., with submission deadlines) to submit the production element of the thesis for presentation outside the university, once it is completed;

A student should have a thesis draft *approved* by the thesis committee, following any revisions that the committee may request or require, during or by the end of the 5th semester.

5. Thesis draft and project proposal approval procedure

Please be advised that unless specific previous arrangements have been made, approvals cannot be considered during holidays, vacations, or any other time when faculty do not normally work. Students should arrange for all committee meetings, form submissions, etc. to fall within normal faculty schedules.

In particular, students are responsible for the delivery of thesis draft and project materials to each signatory, allowing one week for review by each person. *In addition*, extra time should be allocated for the student to make any corrections or revisions the thesis committee may require. Moreover, the thesis committee will probably need additional meetings if revision of the proposal is deemed necessary. If after a semester of review the student's thesis draft or project proposal is not accepted by their thesis committee, a letter will be written to the student noting the final determination of the committee and summarizing the reasons for this determination. A copy of this letter will be held on file in the department office, along with a copy of the thesis proposal, and the student will not be permitted to continue in the MFA program. Students may request a meeting with the director of graduate studies for clarification.

III: Application to candidacy

1. Application to candidacy process

During the summer between semester 4 and 5 (S4/5), the student should begin the application to candidacy process. Submission deadlines are based on his or her anticipated degree conferral date. See the deadlines chart on the graduate school website (deadlines subject to change – caveat) <http://www.grad.buffalo.edu/policies/deadlines.php>.

Students must meet with the Graduate Advisor, Ann Mangan, before applying to candidacy. Notice that the departmental deadline for processing the application to candidacy is substantially earlier than that listed in the academic deadlines chart. The application to candidacy form and instructions can be found on the graduate school website at <http://www.grad.buffalo.edu/forms/index.php>. See the DMS academic advisor for required departmental information and attachments, and course requirements sheet. The thesis proposal forms (committee selection + progress map) are to be appended to the application to candidacy. For more details on the application to candidacy see the gold form I.

IV: Advancing the thesis to completion

1. Advancing the thesis – complete thesis and project development

The success of a thesis depends largely on the student meeting regularly with their committee to insure the project is advancing as expected and will meet appropriate levels of achievement. The thesis proposal form – progress map is intended to document this. Any significant changes to the project must be approved in writing by the committee. Students should aim to have a complete thesis draft (all chapters, bibliography, table of content, etc., pending revisions) ready by the end of the 5th semester. At this point the student should be immersed in his/her media production (having a full sketch of the project ready) and able to discuss it (including budget, schedule for completion) with the thesis committee. Students are encouraged to solicit feedback from committee members as early as possible.

Students should submit *only* proofread written materials to the committee. Materials not sufficiently proofread will be handed back to the student for further work before any review. Students needing assistance with this part of the thesis

should seek remedial help from the Writing Workshop or pay a professional proofreader. Students should consult the latest edition of *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Univ Chicago Press). This manual can be supplemented with the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, (Univ Chicago Press). Students working on a thesis project must enroll for a total of 7 credits of thesis guidance (DMS700 for the written portion) and project supervision (DMS 598 for the production portion), in any combination of credits required, with DMS faculty who are providing advisement. *Students should be prepared to devote a substantial portion of time to their thesis for at least one year.*

2. Completing the thesis

Upon completion, the student submits the 'finished' thesis project to his/her committee. The committee may at this time require revisions or even a substantial amount of further work, so it is strongly advised that students consult their committee members regularly. In general, students submitting during the academic year a *complete thesis draft two months prior to the requested graduation* date will have no problem meeting their requested graduation date provided the committee members request only minor modifications. *The final, revised and complete submission* (that takes all committee member comments into account) must occur no less than *3 weeks prior to the due date*.

If the project passes, the student will be recommended for graduation. If the project does not pass, the student's graduation will be postponed. The thesis project is successfully completed once the committee members have signed off on the thesis m-form.

3. Thesis presentation

Thesis candidates must publicly exhibit the production portion of their thesis in such a manner as to make it readily viewable by the thesis committee, the students, and faculty of the department, and, if possible, the UB community. Such exhibitions must be arranged in consultation with and approved by the thesis chair. Two copies of the exhibition announcement should be submitted to the graduate secretary. Once completed, all thesis projects are expected to be submitted to at least two appropriate venues (festivals, conferences).

4. Submitting the final completed written thesis to DMS and the graduate school

The director of graduate studies must receive an electronic copy of the written thesis (that has been accepted by the thesis committee) before the m-form can be signed and submitted to the graduate school. After approval, students submit the m-form and an electronic copy of the written thesis, which will be included in the UB libraries, to the graduate school. Note that the graduate school requires a submission fee for accepting the electronic thesis. After the director of graduate study sign-off, students must submit one unbound hard copy of the written thesis to DMS, along with the other required materials including a copy of the media production project in the highest quality format possible. Any performance, web-based, or installation elements must be suitably documented, and the presentation as a whole should conform to professional portfolio standards. This material will reside in the DMS archives.

Below a detailed list of the materials to be submitted to DMS after the thesis committee and the director of graduate studies have signed off on the written thesis:

One unbound copy of the final, completed written thesis as well as

... for film or video production:

- a production notebook or written synopsis of the project putting it in the context of the traditions of the discipline and the medium of expression (~ 4'000 words), and
- a dvd (or other high resolution format) copy of the final project.

... for a screen play:

- a production notebook which may include a logline, brief synopsis, and longer treatment of the screenplay (~ 4'000 words) or,
- a thesis treatment which addresses the historical, thematic, structural, and theoretical issues of particular concern to the writer (~ 4'000 words), and
- the final script.

... *for new media*:

- materials as determined by the thesis committee. For computational media this includes source code (with hardware specifications). For performance and installation based work this includes documentation of the event.

Once these materials are deposited with the graduate secretary and the director of graduate studies has signed the m-form, it is the responsibility of the student to deliver the m-form to the graduate school by the posted deadline, and to file their thesis paper electronically (including payment of the graduate school's filing fee). Detailed instructions for submission can be found at <http://www.grad.buffalo.edu/edt>