Guidelines for Honors Theses
In
The Cinema and Media Studies Program

Students wishing to do an honors thesis in CAMS should recognize that thesis work is a serious and demanding year-long endeavor. A thesis gives you the opportunity to embark on a larger, more sustained and ambitious project than you have ever done before. The size, depth, and scope of an honors project constitute its greatest satisfactions—but also typically produce frustration and anxiety, especially at the end of your senior year. There is only one reason to do an honors thesis: you have a project in mind that you feel compelled to do, a topic that you can’t help but want to explore at length and in depth. We urge all students considering honors work to understand that topic comes first; the desire to “do an honors thesis” must necessarily be secondary (or tertiary, or quadruciary).

Prerequisites:

1. **GPA:** The college-wide requirement for honors is that a student have a GPA of 3.5 or higher “in all work in the major field above the 100-level” (see *Articles of Government, Book 2, Article IV, Honors*). The Departmental Committee may petition to the CCAP on behalf of a student whose GPA falls between 3.0 and 3.5 if the committee believes that student’s GPA doesn’t reflect her excellence.

2. **Thesis Proposal:** Any student wishing to do a thesis must have a pretty good idea of her topic and her plan of attack by the end of her junior year, and must have identified a member of the CAMS faculty who has agreed to serve as her thesis advisor. In consultation with that advisor, students must prepare a clearly defined proposal, due to the CAMS co-directors by April 15 of her junior year. The proposal should describe the topic, the motivation for pursuing this topic, and the work the student intends to do over the summer to prepare for and ground her thesis work during her senior year. A more detailed proposal is due no later than the end of the first week of classes in the fall semester.

3. **Departmental Approval:** A student’s proposal must be approved by the departmental committee, who will meet early in the fall semester to assess the proposal and determine whether the project can be met in the time frame of a year and at the high level of intellectual standards required of an honors project.

Please note that the Committee on Curriculum and Instruction (CCAP) has final approval at the beginning and end of the honors process—in
determining candidacy for honors, and in determining successful completion of the honors project. The “department committee” must submit names of students standing for honors to CCAP at the beginning of the academic year, and names of students completing honors at the end of the year. For CAMS (a program, not a department), the “department committee” consists of our three official CAMS faculty, Maurizio Viano, Nick Knouf, and Wini Wood, but it can also include, at our discretion (or your desire) other faculty members who participate regularly and actively in the CAMS program.

Credit and registration procedures for an honors thesis:

Students doing honors theses enroll in CAMS 360 in the fall semester and CAMS 370 in the spring semester, and thus receive two units of thesis credit. Please note that in CAMS, these two units must be in addition to the 10 units required for the major. Thus, the major is a 12-course (at least) major for honors students.

Students cannot self-register for CAMS 360 or 370. Once the departmental committee has approved a student’s thesis project, the CAMS co-directors instruct the registrar to enroll that student in CAMS 360 for the fall semester (all of this must be done by the end of the second week of classes in the fall). In January, a mid-thesis check-in meeting is held, and if the student is deemed to have made sufficient progress on the thesis by the end of Wintersession, the program directors enroll the student in 370 (again, by the end of the second week of classes).

Normally, the grade received for CAMS 360 is a TBG (“to be graded”). A letter grade is assigned to both semesters of work upon successful completion of the honors thesis in the spring semester.

Thesis units must be graded with a letter grade.

Selection of a thesis advisor and committee:

Normally, a student will select as her thesis advisor a professor with whom she has already worked, one who knows her work and can advise the project she proposes. A student should be aware, however, that not all professors will or can agree to advise a thesis. In certain cases, a student who has a particular project in mind can consult with the program co-directors to locate the advisor who is best equipped to provide intellectual guidance and resources for the project.
Ultimately, the thesis will be read and approved by a committee of at least four and no more than five examiners. The committee includes the thesis advisor, the department chair or designee, one other member of the department, and an “outside reader” assigned by CCAP (in practice, however, the student herself often selects the outside reader). That person must come from a department other than the student’s major department.

It is up to the student and the thesis advisor to decide whether to involve the other committee members early in the process. If the thesis is one that requires interdepartmental expertise, the student may want to work with thesis co-advisors, or use her other committee members actively throughout the process. In many instances, however, students work primarily with their advisor, involving the full committee only when the thesis is in its final stages.

Schedule and Process

Spring of your junior year: preliminary proposal: Again, according to Articles of Government, Book II, Article IV, “normally, a student will apply to her major department in the spring of her junior year to write a thesis.” For CAMS, this application process usually takes the form of a discussion with the person the student proposes to be her thesis advisor, who assesses the potential for a project to be undertaken and advises the student on work to be done during the summer to give the project a good start. Beginning in Spring 2017, we will be requiring a written proposal submitted to the advisor and the two program co-directors.

Fall written proposal: A fairly detailed written proposal is due to the advisor and departmental committee no later than the end of the first week of classes in the fall semester of the senior year. The committee will read all submitted proposals and notify students by the beginning of the second week whether the thesis project has been accepted. Practically speaking, this means that a student should have a backup enrollment plan in place in case she needs to take a regular course rather than a 360.

The written proposal need not be long, but it must be specific: what, exactly do you plan to investigate, and why? What is the scope and scale of your investigation? What is theoretically interesting about the object of your investigation? What approach do you plan to take? The proposal should include a timeline, a description of the proposed outcome, and a brief bibliography (the bibliography won’t be full and complete at this point, but we need it to assess your familiarity with the proposed field of
investigation). Length: About 4-6 pages, including timeline and bibliography, double-spaced.

Students in CAMS can choose to do either a production thesis or a “studies” thesis. In either case, we expect the product be rigorous and intellectually grounded. A production thesis proposal should include an outline of the intellectual preparation a student intends to do as an underpinning for the project, as well as a detailed production timeline. It should show an awareness of similar works, and statement of how you see your work responding to or reacting to the work of others. What new technical ground do you hope to explore for yourself (for example, you might want to explore landscape or location shooting, portrature or characterization, an aspect of directing or working with a crew, deeper work with sound or music than you have been able to do in your earlier projects). What preparation do you have for undertaking this project, and what new skills will you need to learn? How do you propose to acquire those new skills?

Timelines should keep in mind the two-semester division of labor. Your proposal should indicate what you expect to submit for approval by the end of the first semester (for example, a completed and revised screenplay, or an extended bibliography and draft of the first chapter of a written thesis).

**Mid-year check-in:** The departmental committee will meet with each thesis student and her advisor at the end of Wintersession to assess progress on the thesis. At that time, the student must have work ready to submit and discuss. The committee will decide if the student is in a good position to proceed with the thesis. Under most normal conditions, the student will be granted credit (and a grade of TBG) for CAMS 360, and will be enrolled in 370. If the student has not made sufficient progress, the thesis will be terminated and the committee will decide what grade to submit for CAMS 360.

The thesis advisor will usually hold a preparatory meeting with the student at the end of the fall semester to discuss progress and plan for work to be done during Wintersession. The advisor may also consult with the chair and the departmental committee prior to the mid-year check-in.

Thesis students should understand how important Wintersession is for making progress on the thesis. This is NOT a good time to pile on extra activities or internships; plan to devote the entire Wintersession to your project!
**Spring semester:** Inevitably, the spring semester is a stressful time for thesis students. Your project will be much bigger than anything else you have ever undertaken, and you need to plan the extra time it will take to write chapters of a lengthy thesis, or to edit a longer film, or to construct an installation. You will likely be competing for resources with other students—and you will be needing more resources than you have ever needed before. What this means is that you need to lighten your other loads in order to complete the thesis project successfully. Take fewer courses; don’t plan any trips with your friends during spring break; reduce your commitments to clubs, etc. Plan for things to go wrong at the last minute.

The thesis is due before the end of classes: usually around April 23rd or 24th. In other words, you will have less than a full semester to do the bulk of your project.

Also keep in mind that the project must attain a standard of excellence appropriate for honors at Wellesley. It must be finished, and it must be polished. Expect to submit work frequently to your advisor, who will return it with comments for revision. You should plan to have weekly or every-other-week meetings with your advisor throughout the semester, and at each of those meetings, you must have new and substantial work to show.

By late March, you should begin thinking about an outside reader for your thesis. Consult with your advisor if you wish; either you or the advisor can issue the invitation to the outside reader. The two requirements are that the outside reader must be a tenured member of the Wellesley faculty, and must NOT be in the department for which you are writing the thesis. Your advisor will submit the name of the outside reader to CCAP.

By the first of April, you will be on the home stretch. Your only friends at this point will be other students who are “thesis-ing.”

**The deadline for thesis submissions is firm**—there are no extensions for this important date. You must submit your thesis to: the Registrar’s office; your advisor; and each of the departmental committee members (the Registrar’s office will send its copy of the thesis to your outside reader). Thesis submissions are now electronic, but many professors still prefer to read paper copies of the thesis, which they can annotate for the thesis exam. **It is your job to ask each committee member if they want a paper copy, photocopy it and bind it into book form, and hand-deliver it to that professor’s office.** Copying and binding can be done through the copy center at Green Hall. Normally, this is all completed by the end of the day theses are due.
**Format for submissions:** If you are writing a conventional thesis, your submission takes the form of a bound book: whether electronic or paper, it will have a title page, page numbers, chapters, and a bibliography. Neither Wellesley nor the CAMS program stipulates a particular style, but we recommend either MLA or Chicago style (Chicago is the preferred style for many publications in film studies). APA is fine, too, especially if your thesis takes a social-science-y bent. Length: 50-100pp, double-spaced, 12-point font.

If you are doing a production thesis, you must also submit quite a bit of written work. Most important is a 20-page essay describing the work, your approach, any research you did to prepare the project, and a theoretical assessment of the project. Your advisor can help you figure out what to include in this essay, but by the end of the project, you will likely have plenty to say about your goals and ideas for the project. You should also prepare a binder of supporting materials. For example, for a film project, the binder would include your treatment; your screenplay (perhaps even earlier stages of the final screenplay); storyboards; your shooting schedule; character descriptions, etc. Think of this binder as a map that illustrates how such a project might unfold for future students *(by the way, you can consult the submissions of previous thesis students in the library if you want to use the roadmaps your predecessors have left for you….)*

The production thesis must also include the product, of course. In many cases, this will be a video. You must supply one video (usually, a DVD) for each member of your thesis committee. If the final product takes another form—an installation, for example—the installation must be mounted and available for all thesis committee members to inspect over a period of time, so you will need to arrange for this. For installation or other ephemeral work, the supplementary binder is of special importance.

**The thesis exam:** The culmination of all this work is a 45-minute examination (or “thesis defense”), during which members of your thesis committee will question you about your work. Thesis defenses are always held on a reading-period day; your advisor will contact the members of the committee to schedule an exact time and day (usually, scheduling is done shortly before or after you submit the finished thesis).

The questioning during the defense will focus on the content of your work, and provides you with an opportunity to talk about a subject you have come to know very well. Your best preparation for the defense is to review your own work, get a really good night’s sleep, eat a good breakfast beforehand, and dress rather nicely.
Normally, after 45 minutes have passed, you’ll be asked to leave the room while the examiners confer about the content of the thesis and the nature of the exam. Then they will call you back into the room and give you your results.

**After the exam:** It is not uncommon for examiners to request minor revisions to your thesis. Only minor revisions are allowable: if substantial revisions are necessary, it means that the thesis has not been completed to satisfaction. If your committee suggests revisions, the Registrar’s Office will give you a due date for those revisions (usually near the end of the exam period). It is then up to you not only to get a revised thesis to the Registrar, but also to get revised copies to your examining committee. If you have submitted a film that needs revision, you will need to burn new DVDs to distribute.

The final revised copy of your thesis (a bundle, in the case of a production thesis) is deposited with the Registrar, who in turn sends it to the library, where it remains in perpetuity, for anyone to read. (see the Articles of Government for exceptions to this rule).

**Once the Registrar’s Office has your name as a thesis student, you’ll receive regular information and updates from them. Whatever you hear from the Registrar takes precedence over anything written in this document. If you spot conflicts between our information and theirs, be sure to ask us about them.**

*Updated August 2016, by Wini Wood*