Guidelines for Honors Thesis in the Cinema and Media Studies Program

The honors thesis is an opportunity for you to produce a larger, more sustained and ambitious project than anything you have embarked on in your undergraduate education. It is also a significant undertaking. You should do an honors thesis if you have a project in mind that you feel compelled to complete, a topic that you feel driven to explore at length and in depth. Honors work in CAMS requires commitment to a multi-stage, year-long process that results in a roughly 70-100-page document (12pt double-spaced, including bibliography) or a production project accompanied by a 20-page essay. The size, depth, and scope of an honors project constitute its greatest satisfactions, giving students greater leeway to engage in comprehensive research, creative work, and creative critique.
Overview

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 CCAP on behalf of a student whose GPA falls between 3.0 and 3.5 if the committee believes that student’s GPA does not reflect their capability to carry out a thesis project.

2. **Thesis Advisor:** Normally, a student will select as their thesis advisor a professor with whom they already have worked, one who knows their work and can advise the project they propose. *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 director to locate the advisor who is best equipped to provide intellectual guidance and resources for the project. Please note that faculty members on sabbatical leave cannot supervise thesis work. Visiting faculty are not expected to serve as thesis advisors.

3. **Thesis Proposals and Bibliographies:** This is a two-stage process, involving 1) a *preliminary proposal and bibliography* due to the departmental committee by May 1st, and 2) a *formal proposal and bibliography* due no later than the first day of the fall semester. For the *preliminary proposal*, students must have a concrete and viable idea of their topic, approach, research strategy, and timeline. They must have identified a member of the CAMS faculty who has agreed to serve as their thesis advisor. In consultation with the advisor, the student’s preliminary proposal (2-3 pages, double-spaced) will describe the topic, the motivation for pursuing it, and the work the student plans to do over the summer.

By the first day of classes in the fall semester, students are required to submit a *formal proposal* (2-3 pages, double-spaced) describing the premise, methodology, and significance of the research project and detailed plans for completing the thesis, as well as an annotated bibliography.

In addition to the proposal, students who wish to pursue a thesis are required to submit a preliminary bibliography of one to two pages and are encouraged to consult their advisor about best ways to build and organize this part of the proposal. Students who elect a production project should consult with their advisor regarding requirements beyond the thesis proposal.

4. **Departmental Approval:** A student’s proposal must be approved by the departmental committee, who will 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. The departmental committee will make a preliminary decision by June 1st of the student’s junior year. Before students can be registered for honors the departmental committee must formally approve proposals by the beginning of the second week of classes in the fall of the student’s senior year.

*Note: Students applying for the Levitt Scholars Program should submit the formal version of the proposal and request approval by May 15.*
Proposal

Students should submit their proposals to the CAMS departmental committee which consists of the two official CAMS faculty, Codruța Morari and Nicholaus Gutierrez, as well as the production faculty members advising a production thesis, but it can also include other faculty members who participate regularly and actively in the CAMS program. CAMS students can choose to do either a written thesis or a production thesis. The proposal should be written accordingly:

For students pursuing a written thesis:

The proposal should include a clear description of the topic and/or research question, a list of primary and secondary objects (such as a filmography, or primary theoretical texts), an argument justifying why such a project should be undertaken; it should also include information about the proposed methodology (for example, close analysis of specific films, aesthetic, socio-historical, or economic analysis, media archaeology, etc.); students are encouraged to include a timeline, a description of the proposed outcome, and a working bibliography of 1-2 pages. Length: About 2-3 pages (excluding timeline and bibliography), double-spaced.

For students preparing a production thesis:

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 a 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, portraiture 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).
Schedule

Junior Year

May 1st

Preliminary Proposal Due

NOTE: If you are applying for the Levitt Fellowship, your Formal Proposal is due May 15.

Senior Year

1st Day of Fall Term

Formal Proposal Due

Fall Semester Exam

December Review or Mid-Thesis Review

Reading Period

Spring Semester

Thesis Oral Examination

Reading Period

Thesis students should consult the College legislation and timeline regarding Honors on the Registrar’s page.

Credit and Registration Procedures

The departmental 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. Honors students are registered by the program director in CAMS 360 in the fall semester and CAMS 370 in the spring semester, and thus receive two units of thesis credit towards their degree. These two units must be in addition to the 10 units required for the major. Thus, the CAMS major is a 12-course major for honors students.

A letter grade is assigned to both semesters of work upon successful completion of the honors thesis in the spring semester. Students who do not meet expectations to continue in CAMS 370 will have CAMS 360 converted to an independent study; the grade will appear on their transcript and count towards the degree.

Selection of Thesis Committee

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 faculty member.

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 their 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.

**Process**

**Fall Semester:** In the beginning of the fall term, the thesis advisor and the student will establish the pattern and frequency of their meetings, as well as a working plan that will culminate in the December review. 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.

**December or Mid-Thesis Review (Reading Period, Fall Semester):** The departmental committee will meet with each thesis student and their advisor in December to assess progress on the thesis. If the student is in good standing, they will be granted credit (and a grade) for CAMS 360 and will be enrolled in CAMS 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 schedule the review during the December reading period. In preparation for the December review, and 7-10 days before the review, the student must submit the following materials:

- In the case of a written thesis, the student is required to have completed a draft of the introduction and one chapter, and to have a detailed outline for the remaining chapters.
- In the case of a production project, the student should have enough visual work in progress to present to the committee and receive constructive feedback. For example, a rough cut with enough footage to communicate the direction of the film, and accompanying sketches in the case of installations.

The December review will provide the student the opportunity to discuss progress and plan for work to be done during the winter break.

**Spring Semester:** The thesis is due before the end of classes: usually around April 23rd or 24th. The project must attain a standard of excellence appropriate for honors at Wellesley.

_The deadline for thesis submissions is firm_—You must submit your thesis to: the Registrar’s Office; your advisor; and each of the departmental committee members.

**Submission Requirements**

If you are writing a 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. Length: 70-100 pages, double spaced, 12-point font. Consult with your advisor regarding any preferences for citation style.
A production thesis' main component is the visual component in the media proposed. In many cases, this will be a video. Your dossier should include a final cut of your film/video and be uploaded to Google Drive to share with your thesis committee. That final file will remain in the college's archive. If the final version is in another medium or has several components — an installation, for example — the installation must be mounted and available for all thesis committee members to view before the thesis defense. Additionally, it must be photographically documented and that documentation must be included with the final dossier. For installation or other ephemeral work, the supplementary documentation is of special importance. For a photography thesis, scanned or digitized documentation of the work in its different forms/stages and final iteration.

If you are pursuing a production thesis it must be accompanied by a roughly 20-page essay that includes historical influences for the work, a theoretical assessment of the project and reflections on the end product. Your advisor can advise you on format, recommend reference texts, and help you articulate your goals for the project. You should also prepare a dossier of supporting materials. For example, for a film project, this would include a treatment; a screenplay (perhaps even earlier stages of the final screenplay); storyboards; a shooting schedule; and other relevant production sheets. In the case of installations, it should include tech sheets with specs for equipment used, floor plans, elevations and sketches that trace the project's development.

The Thesis Defense: The culmination of the thesis work is a one-hour thesis defense, during which members of your thesis committee will ask questions about your work. The thesis defense is 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).

A thesis review starts with a brief (5-10 minutes) presentation of the project, followed by a 30-minute examination by the committee members who will ask questions focusing on the content, methodology, and execution of your work. The non-departmental member can ask questions once the examination is completed but is not expected or required to do so. Their role is to monitor that defense protocols are followed properly and then to submit the honors decision to the Registrar. The thesis defense concludes with the committee deliberation during which the student is asked to leave the room.

Revisions: It is not uncommon for examiners to request minor revisions to your thesis. Only minor revisions are allowable: if revisions are required, the Registrar’s Office will inform you about the deadline and submission process. Note that you are expected to get a revised thesis to the Registrar and your examining committee.

The final revised copy of your thesis (a bundle, in the case of a production thesis) is deposited electronically 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.