

# 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 you greater leeway to engage in comprehensive research, creative work, and creative critique.

## *Honors Admissions Overview*

- 1. Required GPA:** The minimum required GPA for pursuing honors is 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 a student’s GPA does not reflect their capability to carry out a thesis project.
- 2. Research vs. Production Thesis:** Students may pursue a written thesis consisting of historical and/or theoretical analysis based on substantial research, typically between 70-100 pages. Or they may pursue a production thesis, consisting of a creative project that is supplemented with a 20 page research paper. Note: in order to be eligible to pursue a production thesis in CAMS, students must have taken at least one 300 level course before the end of their junior year.
- 3. Thesis Advisor:** Normally, a student will select as their thesis advisor a professor with whom they already have studied, one who knows their work and can advise the project they propose. *Students 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. In some cases, two faculty members may co-advise a thesis, but this requires approval of both the faculty members and the CAMS honors committee. Visiting faculty are not expected to serve as thesis advisors.
- 4. Thesis Proposals:** This is a two-stage process, involving 1) a topic proposal due to the departmental committee by *the last day of classes* of the student’s junior year, and 2) a project proposal due no later than the first day of the fall semester of the student’s

senior year.

- a. For the topic proposal, students must first identify a member of the CAMS (or affiliated) faculty who has agreed to serve as their thesis advisor. In consultation with the advisor, they will then develop a concrete and viable proposal that includes a brief description of their proposed topic, a bibliography of texts related to their topic, and timeline for research to be completed over the summer in preparation for the more comprehensive project proposal. Topic proposals for written theses should be 3-5 pages, including bibliography and timeline. Topic proposals for production theses should be roughly 5 pages, including bibliography and timeline; additionally, it should include a list of resources to be used (e.g. Book Lab, Dark Room, Lighting Studio).

**Please note that the deadline for the topic proposal is firm.** The honors committee will notify students of their topic proposal status by the end of the spring exam period.

- b. By the first day of classes in the fall semester of senior year, students are required to submit a project proposal based on work conducted over the summer. The project proposal consists of three parts: first, a 500 word abstract describing your project and work carried out over the summer; second, an annotated bibliography containing no fewer than ten entries; and third, a detailed timeline for carrying out thesis work. Project proposals for written theses should be roughly 5 pages, including bibliography and timeline.

**Note that the deadline for project proposals is firm.** The honors committee will notify students of their project proposal status by the beginning of the second week of classes.

**NOTE:** It is important to have a clear sense of your general area of study at the topic proposal stage. Project proposals that deviate substantially from the topic proposal—either by switching from research to production, or completely changing topics, are not likely to be accepted. The topic proposal can and should be exploratory, but you should have a broad but legible sense of your interests, the type of honors work you want to pursue, and the fields/traditions you will be working in. Those projects that demonstrate continuity between the topic and project proposals tend to be the most successful.

5. **Departmental Approval:** Both the topic proposal and the project proposal must be approved by the CAMS honors 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.
  - a. For the topic proposal, the honors committee will notify students by *the end of the Spring exam period of the student's junior year.*
  - b. For the project proposal, the committee will notify students *no later than the*

*beginning of the second week of Fall classes.* Accepted students will then be eligible to register for honors course credit.

***Note: Students applying for the Levitt Scholars Program should submit the final version of the project proposal and request approval by May 15 of junior year.***

## ***Proposals***

Students should submit both their topic and project proposals to the CAMS honors committee which consists of the two official CAMS faculty, Codruța Morari and Nicholas Gutierrez, as well as the production faculty members advising a production thesis. It may also include other faculty members who participate regularly and actively in the CAMS program.

CAMS students can choose to do either a research thesis or a production thesis. The proposals should be written accordingly:

### **For Students Pursuing a Research Thesis:**

The **topic 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), a provisional argument justifying why such a project should be undertaken, and information about the proposed methodology (for example, close analysis of specific films, aesthetic, socio-historical, or economic analysis, media archaeology, etc.). It must also include a timeline outlining a clear plan for summer research, and a working bibliography consisting of no fewer than five entries. Length: 5 pages, including timeline and bibliography. Topic proposals are due by the last day of Spring classes of the student's junior year.

The **project proposal** should include a 500 word abstract that concisely describes your area of research and any objects you will be analyzing, sources you will use, and the argument you intend to make. It should also include an annotated bibliography containing no fewer than ten entries with succinct descriptions of their contributions to the field and their relevance to your project. And it should include a detailed timeline for researching, drafting, and revising the chapters of your thesis over the fall and spring semesters of your senior year. Project proposals are due on the first day of Fall classes of senior year.

### **For Students Preparing a Production Thesis:**

A production thesis **topic proposal** should include a 750 word description addressing three central concerns:

- (1) It must clearly describe the intellectual preparation a student intends to do over the summer as an underpinning for the project, which includes relevant research on the

existing literature related to your project's general theme, movements, time periods, and media. For instance, a project on digital film should succinctly describe how the thesis will fit within existing discourses on the development and adoption of digital film in one or more specific film industries, with a clear sense of how the thesis will be situated with and against the history and debates around the technology. To take another example, a project involving a written screenplay should include a discussion of the genre(s) in which the student plans to write, from both a historical and formal perspective. This will serve as preparation for the 20 page written component of the production thesis.

(2) 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 work, and what new skills will you need to learn? How do you propose to acquire those new skills? Topic proposals must also include a bibliography and timeline outlining a clear plan for summer research. Topic proposals are due on the last day of Spring classes of junior year.

(3) In addition to the 750 word description, abstract, and timeline (totalling roughly 5 pages), the topic proposal should include a list of resources the student intends to use in the course of their project, along with conditional approval from relevant faculty and/or staff. For instance, students planning to use the Book Lab should consult with and request permission from Professor Katherine Ruffin; students intending to use the dark room should consult with and request permission from Professor Kathya Landeros, and so on.

A production thesis **project proposal** should include a 250 word abstract that concisely describes your area of research, the objects you will be analyzing, sources you will use, and the argument you tend to make in the 20 page written component of your thesis. It must also include a concise 500 word description of the production work you choose to pursue. Additionally, project proposals should include an annotated bibliography consisting of no fewer than ten sources, and a detailed timeline for the completion of your project over the fall and spring semesters of your senior year. Project proposals are due on the first day of classes of senior year.

**NOTE:** For both written and production thesis proposals, 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, the first chapter of a written thesis, or the completed and revised first act of a screenplay).

## *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 mid-thesis review. You should plan to have *weekly or bi-weekly meetings with your advisor* throughout the semester, and at each of those meetings, you should be able to demonstrate continued progress on your project.

**December Mid-Thesis Review (Reading Period, Fall Semester):** The honors committee will meet with each thesis student and their advisor(s) in December to assess progress on the thesis. If the student is in good standing and demonstrates sustained progress on their project, they will be granted credit (and a grade) for CAMS 360, and will be enrolled in CAMS 370. If the honors committee finds that a 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 in conjunction with the honors committee. Reviews should occur during the December reading period. In preparation for the review, and 7-10 days before meeting, the student must submit the following materials:

- In the case of a research thesis, the student is required to have completed a draft of one chapter, and have a detailed outline for the remaining chapters.
- In the case of a production thesis, the student should have enough 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 a film, and accompanying sketches in the case of installations.

Committee approval may include stipulations that require work to be done over winter break. This could mean providing a revised timeline for work to be completed during the spring semester, portions of chapter drafts, and so on. In the case that a student receives approval conditional upon completing work over the break, students will be required to submit that work no later than the first day of classes of the spring semester. Note that this deadline is firm, and students who fail to meet it will not be allowed to continue.

**Spring Semester:** The completed thesis is due before the end of classes, usually around the middle of April (but make sure to check with the Registrar's office in the year you will submit your thesis). In conjunction with their advisor, students should determine their defense committee well in advance of the spring semester reading period. The project must attain a standard of excellence appropriate for honors at Wellesley.

***NOTE: The deadline for thesis submissions is firm***—You must submit your thesis to the Registrar's office, your advisor, and each of the honors committee members.

## ***Credit and Registration Procedures***

The honors committee must submit names of students standing for honors 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 receive a letter grade for CAMS 360, which will appear on their transcript and count towards the degree.

## ***Thesis Submission Requirements***

Research thesis submissions take 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.

For a production thesis, you should submit the final object(s) as determined by your advisor. For film/video projects, you should upload a final cut to Google Drive that can be accessed by your thesis committee. That 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 submission. For installation or other ephemeral work, the supplementary documentation is of special importance. For photography, scanned or digitized documentation of the work in its different forms/stages and final iteration should be made available on Google Drive.

Students pursuing a production thesis must also submit their 20 page essay that describes 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.

**Revisions:** It is not uncommon for examiners to request minor revisions to your thesis. If minor revisions are required, the Registrar's Office will inform you about the deadline and

submission process. Note that you are expected to submit 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).

## *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.

## *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.

**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.**

## *Schedule*

### **Junior Year**

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<b>February-April</b>	Find a faculty advisor; conduct preliminary research on your topic of interest.
<b>Last day of Classes, Spring Semester</b>	Topic proposal due
<b>End of Spring Exam Period</b>	Notification of topic proposal application decisions

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

### **Summer**

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<b>June-July</b>	Conduct research as outlined in topic proposal.
<b>August</b>	Draft and finalize project proposal

### **Senior Year**

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<b>1<sup>st</sup> Day of Fall Term</b>	Project proposal due, including timeline
<b>Second Week of Fall Classes</b>	Notification of project proposal application decisions
<b>Fall Semester Reading Period</b>	Mid-thesis review
<b>Spring Semester Reading Period</b>	Thesis defense/oral examination

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