

## INFORMATION FOR FAMS THESIS STUDENTS

### I. GENERAL TIMELINE FOR FAMS THESES:

#### Summer – Conducting preliminary research and shooting

- Independent reading, viewing, annotating, shooting conducted after consultation with advisor

#### Fall Semester – Moving from planning to writing/production

- Week 1 (Early September):
  - Submit revised thesis proposal and syllabus for first 6 weeks
- Weeks 2-6 (Mid September – Mid October):
  - Submit annotated bibliography each week (continue through February)
- Weeks 7-11 (Mid October – Mid November):
  - Submit syllabus for weeks 7-12 by the end of week 7
  - CRITICAL: Begin writing first chapter; submit 5 polished pages each week
  - CREATIVE: Begin shooting; capture, log, and back up material; submit Fall shooting schedule by the end of October
- Week 12 (End of Thanksgiving Break):
  - CRITICAL: Submit first draft of first chapter
  - CREATIVE: Shoot/design as much as possible
- Weeks 13-14 (Early – Mid December):
  - Submit syllabus for interterm; begin work on complementary component of thesis
  - CREATIVE: Submit Interterm shooting schedule by end of week 14

#### Interterm – Continuing writing and shooting

- CRITICAL: Begin writing second chapter; submit 5 pages each week; work on creative component
- CREATIVE: Complete principal shooting; log and begin assembling footage; work on critical component

#### Spring Semester – Post-production, writing, creative design, and revising

- Week 1 (Late January):
  - Submit syllabus for Spring semester
  - CRITICAL: Submit first draft of second chapter
  - CREATIVE: Submit first 5 pages of critical component
- Weeks 2-5 (February):
  - CRITICAL: Write third chapter; submit 5 pages each week; produce creative component
  - CREATIVE: Submit first draft of critical component and assembly edits (raw footage [without sound/image corrections] in rough sequence on timeline); begin discussing and assembling the structure of your project; begin trimming footage
- Week 6 (Early March):
  - CRITICAL: Submit first draft of third chapter and rough cut of creative component
  - CREATIVE: Submit rough cut and first draft of critical component
- Week 7 (Last Week Before Spring Break):
  - CRITICAL: Submit first draft of introduction (7-10 pages) and conclusion (2-5 pages)
  - CREATIVE: Complete test screenings/site visits; refine structure; if necessary, pick up last shots
- Weeks 8-9 (Mid to Late March):
  - Complete final edits to written component (revisions, proof-reading, formatting, bibliography)
  - Complete final edits to creative component (picture lock, color correction, sound mixing)

**\*\*All FAMS theses DUE on the first Monday in April**

## II. PREPARATION AND ADVISING:

### The Summer Before Your Senior Year

Students are not *required* to work on their thesis projects over the summer, but we highly encourage students to do so. During the summer, students are expected to do their own research without assistance from their advisor. Summer is also a time when faculty do their research, so advisors will likely not be available to you until school resumes in the Fall semester. If you choose to begin work during the summer months, try to do the following:

- **Begin research.** “Research” can take many forms depending on your project. Generally, research means reading around your chosen subject, but also visiting locations, speaking with people, watching movies related to your thesis, and sketching out a rough plan or script. You should ideally meet with your advisor before summer break to get reading and viewing recommendations.
- **Annotations:** Get into the habit of creating an annotation for each text you read or view over the summer. Each annotation should address the following:
  - 1) What is the author’s argument (if film: what is this work about?)
  - 2) List or transcribe some important passages or scenes
  - 3) What does this have to do with my thesis?
- **Shooting:** If you’re working on a primarily creative or integrated project, shoot some footage if you can. Again, this could qualify as “test” or “research” footage that might not make it into the final project, but your project stands a much better chance of being successful if you can begin developing the visual element early. Remember that as a thesis student, you do have access to checkout equipment for the summer, although the cage will not be staffed between June and August, so please make sure to think about what you would need and arrange this with Prof. Levine and the cage staff as soon as possible.

### First Fall Meeting

Ideally, you should come to your first meeting with your advisor in Fall having wrestled with some ideas. You will submit a revised thesis proposal to your advisor before this first meeting. The point is to revisit your thesis proposal in light of your summer research. Describe your project in more complex terms, and show what has altered based on your thinking/reading over the summer. If you are working on a creative thesis, try to identify the central question driving your thesis film (should not be a question with a yes/no answer, should be a “how,” “what,” or “why” question), and try to articulate how the shape of your planned film responds to this question.

Before this meeting, you will also submit your own syllabus of readings and films, and a shooting schedule (if primarily creative) *or* writing plan (if primarily critical), *or* both (if fully integrated) for the first six weeks of the semester. Once you complete these six weeks, you’ll reassess where you are and draw up a syllabus for the next six weeks. And so on.

### Weekly Meetings

During Fall & Spring you will meet weekly with your advisor (sometimes bi-weekly) for an hour (time TBA). Often, you will have work due at these meetings (eg: a syllabus draft, shooting schedule, annotations, rushes, or rough cut). This work should be submitted **24-48 hours before each meeting**.

When you meet with your advisor, together you will discuss/watch what you’ve handed in, and your advisor may give you written comments. Your advisor’s role will be to provide structure and conceptual orientation, to give you pointers when appropriate, and to be a sounding board. But the initiative and research for your thesis

has to come from you.

### **Additional Consultations**

In addition to your weekly meetings with your primary advisor, you will meet with a faculty member who specializes in the complementary practice (for instance, if you are primarily working with a Critical Studies advisor, you will also meet with a Filmmaker, and vice versa).

Required consultative meetings will be scheduled as follows:

- Mid-October (once you have a clear plan in place);
- Early-December (once you've made a plan for your complementary creative or critical practice);
- Mid-February (to review what you've accomplished in your complementary practice, and prepare for completion)

### **III. FORMS AND COMPONENTS:**

#### **Integrating Critical and Creative Processes**

Your thesis project should ideally integrate creativity and criticality. That is, your creative process should emerge from having critically engaged literature and films related to your topic, and your critical process should emerge in part from the production of creative work. This merging of creative and critical processes can take ANY ONE of three forms:

- A. Primarily Critical with Complementary Creative Component
- B. Primarily Creative With Complementary Critical Component
- C. Balanced Integration of Critical and Creative Components

Below, you will find some guidelines for each thesis form. These are by no means the only options for a student thesis. Your project will be one that you shape in consultation with your primary and secondary advisor.

#### **A) Primarily Critical Thesis**

The critical thesis is primarily a research-oriented written project. The critical portion of the thesis may be a series of interlinked chapters (with intro and conclusion) that examine a body of works, historical or cultural movement, or genre (with textual analysis, theoretical framework, and historical contextualization or primary historical research). The creative component may be a curated program of screenings that represent a cycle of media texts the critical work defines, or it could be a short film that further explores the topic or issues raised in the critical work in some form.

A typical critical component is about 60 pages in length, with 2-3 Chapters of 15-20 pages each + an Introduction (7-10 pages), and Conclusion (2-5 pages). Another possibility is 15 page Introduction + Two 15-20 page chapters, and a 5-7 page conclusion.

If the creative component is a film, it should be no longer than 7 minutes. The duration and scope of a different form of creative component (eg: a plan for an installation or curated program) should be of comparable ambition to this length of film, and should be decided in consultation with your advisor.

#### **B) Primarily Creative Thesis**

The creative thesis is primarily an audiovisual project, installation, or screenplay (for whatever form you choose, you must have completed prior coursework in that form).

A typical thesis film is at maximum 20-25 minutes. (Quality is more important than quantity. This is *not* a feature film.) The duration and scope of a different form of creative component (eg: an installation or screenplay) should be of comparable ambition to this length of film, and should be decided in consultation with your advisor.

The complementary critical component of the thesis should be around 15 pages. The point of this component is to critically analyze your creative project in relation to critical texts and other films that have informed your own. Someone reading this component should not feel that it has no relation to your film; it should demonstrate how your creative process has emerged from grappling with the critical issues you deal with in this component.

This critical component can take a number of different forms. The only rule is that it *should not* be an “artist statement,” or an autobiographical account of how you made your film. Here are some possible models for the form of your written component:

1. A critical analysis of your film’s process or form in relation to critical works
2. A critical examination of the main concept(s) you’re using, through an exploration of their theoretical lineage (eg: theories of lineage, epistolary films)
3. A treatise on the historical and cultural context of your film’s topic or form
4. A critical analysis of a contemporary or historical event, issue, or debate with which your film grapples

### **C) Balanced Thesis**

A balanced project will shape critical and creative components equally (in effort, most certainly, and also in design). This particular kind of project — while ideal for the major — demands careful development with your advisor, but here are some basic models for this approach. For one, the very form of the project (as a digital object, website, or immersive space, for instance) might demonstrate the “creative” element of the thesis, whereas its content represents the critical component. As another possibility, you may develop an extensive curated program, series, or site-specific installation that includes historical and archival research, a theoretical and conceptual framework, and carefully constructed program notes.

The duration, length, and scope of the integrated elements of such a thesis should be designed as a median between those of a primarily critical thesis (60 pages) and a primarily creative thesis (a 20-25 minute film), in consultation with your advisor. You should by no means do both in equal length!

## **IV. FUNDING FOR YOUR THESIS:**

### **Research Grants**

For information about applying research grants towards your thesis projects, visit the Alpha Delta Phi and David P. Patchel Funds website, linked below. Please note that grants do not normally exceed \$1,200 per semester per applicant. In special cases—for example, for projects necessitating expensive international travel—larger grants may be given. Applications will be reviewed only twice during the academic year. The deadlines for these review periods are listed on the website.

- [https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/dean\\_faculty/studentfunds/alpha\\_delta\\_application](https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/dean_faculty/studentfunds/alpha_delta_application)

**NB: If you are seeking research funding, you will need to share your application materials with your advisors ahead of time so that we can write a letter of support for you to send in with your application.**

## V. RESEARCH GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTERS:

### Choosing Your Objects of Analysis

Remember, an object of analysis is not the same as a “topic,” such as “black girlhoods” or “children’s literature”—an object is what grounds your analysis of your topic: it can be a novel, a film, a television show, an artwork, etc. When choosing your objects, ask yourself what type of argument you’re constructing, and what role that object will play in your argument.

Here are some approaches you could choose from:

- Does your chapter’s argument identify an overarching tendency through readings of 1-3 objects that will serve as examples?
- Is your argument organized around one central object, with references to 1-2 subsidiary objects that will serve as supplemental examples or counter-examples?
- Does your argument identify two contrasting tendencies, exemplified by two objects to which you will devote equal weight?

Your thesis paragraph should make clear what type of argument you are making, and what role your objects will play.

### Choosing Your Theoretical Texts

A theoretical text is a scholarly piece of writing (eg: an article, essay, or academic book) whose ideas you will draw on to make an argument about your object. When choosing your theoretical texts, ask yourself what role the text will play in your argument:

- Is there an author(s) you feel an affinity with, and whose ideas or concepts you will build on? Conversely, are there others who represent a position that you disagree with? These 2-3 authors are your main conceptual interlocutors, and you should use your argument about your objects to put them in conversation with each other. These authors, or their ideas, should appear in some form in your thesis paragraph.
- Are there authors whose ideas are not so central to your argument, but who nonetheless provide important context (historical, technological, cultural, political)? These remaining authors are your supplemental references. They may not appear in your thesis paragraph, but they will make an appearance elsewhere in your paper.

### Pre-Writing (Clock begins 4 weeks before you begin writing each chapter)

- Week 1: Chapter Topic and Annotated List of 1-3 Objects of Analysis
- Week 2: Identify and begin Annotating Theoretical Texts (2-3 Main Conceptual Interlocutors & 5-7 Supplemental References)
- Week 3: Thesis Paragraph & Annotated Bibliography of Theoretical Texts (Should be Organized in Two Categories: Main Conceptual Interlocutors & Supplemental References)
- Week 4: Revised Thesis Paragraph and 1-Page Outline of Argument