

THE MA THESIS PROPOSAL AND THESIS: CINEMA STUDIES

PROCEDURES AND FORMAT

1. Two courses support the MA Thesis: Cine 897 and Cine 898. In the typical scheme, 897 is taken in the Fall of the second year and 898 in the spring of the second year. In 897 you prepare a Thesis Proposal and in 898 you submit a completed Thesis.

The thesis is typically a written research paper of no more than 35 pp maximum on a topic that you research and develop with faculty guidance.

Ideally, you will begin to plan your thesis in 700 and perhaps in 610 (Senior Seminar—devoted to research projects) during the first year, before enrolling in 897, so that you can submit a Proposal for approval well before the end of the fall term in second year and then proceed to complete research and begin the writing phase before or during the December-January break.

If you do not complete the thesis by the University's deadline for submissions in 898 in spring of the second year, the course is carried over as a form of incomplete (SP—Satisfactory Progress). When you finally submit the approved thesis, you then submit a Request for Grade Change form to have the "incomplete" (SP) removed and a grade of "pass" recorded. The University's deadline for the submission of the thesis is published in the Bulletin along with other deadlines and is also available in the Graduate Division Office and on-line under the Graduate Division.

The published deadline is for the submission of the Thesis after it has been completely polished, properly formatted, and your Thesis committee has signed off, signifying their approval. You must allow time for this process to occur. A booklet is available in the Library, "Guidelines for the Preparation and Submission of Theses and Written Creative Work," that covers the details of this process. The details are not onerous but they must be followed scrupulously.

2. Cine 897.

The overall goal of Cine 897 is to help you find a good thesis and to organize a solid essay on it. It gives you an opportunity to do research, explore a topic, reflect on issues and structure an essay in a more leisurely manner than is possible for a term paper in a single course. Used properly, 897 will make the actual task of writing the thesis essay that much easier.

The actual Proposal follows the same basic format as the Mock Thesis Proposal done in Cine 700. Please read the Bulletin discussion of the Thesis for additional information. The normal thesis will be the length of a research term paper, not to exceed 35 pages in length. The main parts of the Proposal are: A) Statement of Thesis, B) Outline, C) Bibliography, D) Time Schedule.

A. Statement of Thesis (topic, perspective, significance, research tools)

In this 3-5 page section you should identify the subject or topic you propose to address. You should establish some clear delimitation to it that will allow

you to complete a manageable thesis: American genre film is a valid thesis area, but not a valid subject. It is too broad. The Aliens trilogy as science-fiction is better delimited. A specific aspect of the trilogy, such as the representation of women would be better still and a distinct thesis or idea about the representation of women ideal.

This section should also address the significance of the topic: Why is it important; what can we learn from studying it?

To the extent it is possible, you should also indicate what your perspective (thesis, argument, or point of view) will be: what will you say about Robert Altman's use of sound; Derek Jarman's exploration of desire; the implications of road movies where characters never reach their original destination; the representation of young women in American and Iranian cinema; JFK and Bamboozled in terms of their representation of history; the evolution of George Romero's Dead trilogy; strategies for representing the Other in ethnographic films, or about selected films by three Algerian-French film directors. (These are all recent MA thesis topics.)

Finally, you should give an indication of the research work that will be required (interviews, archival research, reading, viewing, etc.). Normally this ties in with indicating what approach you plan to take: psychoanalytic, phenomenological, genre study, Marxist, cultural studies, feminist, post-structural, etc. You are not obliged to adopt a specific methodology and adhere to it. You are encouraged to treat methods, theories and approaches eclectically, as concepts and tools that can assist you in the pursuit of you own specific topic and thesis or argument. Simply indicate the type of research you anticipate needing to do—the names of books and authors, the range of concepts that may make use of, travel needs you may have, individuals you may want to interview, etc. Library research and film viewing is the most common form of research and in many cases will be entirely sufficient.

B. Outline.

In 2-4 pages you should produce a considered outline of the thesis. Given that you are writing an essay, or polished term paper, this will usually amount to two or three divisions with at least two or three levels of sub-division to each division. A general division such as "I. Style in JFK," for example, might be followed by sub-divisions such as "A. Editing: The Tradition of Collage," and "B. Blurring Fact and Speculation: The Historical Record and Its Reconstruction." Each sub-division might then be further divided into two or more parts. (This structure is typical but not mandatory.)

Each division will cover a major aspect of the topic, but more important than the specific divisions is that the entire thesis pursue a specific topic and examine several aspects of it in depth. Close analysis of specific scenes, for example, could take several pages and might alternate with more general observations or a holistic or comparative nature. Finding a form or structure that suits yours purposes is an important part of the planning. There is no one template. This is something that your instructor in Cine 700 and your faculty advisor in 897 can help you formulate.

The outline should provide sufficient detail to identify the main parts or divisions of the thesis. It should convey a clear sense of how each part is itself well-delimited and contributory to the overall thesis or argument.

There is no one style of outline presentation that is mandatory. Use an outline format that fits your own needs, but be sure it is understandable to others. Don't be cryptic. In almost all cases it is better to use full sentences or longer annotations rather than simply words or phrases since the latter seldom convey your intentions clearly.

Consider the JFK example above.

The division devoted to collage techniques in JFK, for example, might be annotated as "Collage mixes different media in a single work. It has been prevalent in art work since the beginning of the 20th century. It often stresses the constructed nature of the work itself and its use of found objects or materials. Stone adapts this tradition to show how the history and interpretation of assassination of Kennedy has itself been formed from diverse, often conflicting source materials."

A sub-division to this topic might be on color vs. black and white and it could annotated as follows: "His use of black and white footage, e.g., sometimes recreates events relatively faithfully (the path of the motorcade) but then also incorporates elements that are more speculative (activity on the grassy knoll). Black and white also creates a visual picture of the paramilitary training camp that Jack Lemmon recounts seeing. Without comment these reenactments often embed key characters in a presumed reality; Danny Ferry, e.g., is at the training camp even though Jack Lemmon's character is not particularly aware of him as a figure."

Such annotation should reflect your own thinking to date and help your advisor provide feedback for further elaboration.

C. Filmography/Bibliography.

This should be a list of work you have already read or seen together with additional work you anticipate using in the preparation of the thesis. It should be at least two page long. It MUST follow the correct form for bibliographic and filmographic entries as found in any of the standard reference works. There are multiple formats, all of them are considered correct if they are followed consistently and rigorously. The "Guidelines" booklet, e.g., cites Kate Turabian's A MANUAL FOR WRITERS, as an acceptable reference source on format but Turabian, like other reference sources, provides several different, alternative systems. Choose and follow one precisely.

D. Time Schedule.

As you develop your thesis also develop a concrete plan for completing it. You should submit a Schedule that indicates how you will complete the thesis by the deadline, allowing time for feedback and revision. An outline of what you hope to accomplish on a month by month basis between the end of fall term in the second year and the deadline for submission of the thesis is normally sufficient. Making use of the summer between first and second year is encouraged.

These materials constitute the Proposal; successful submission and Defense of the Proposal constitutes authorization to proceed to 898 and the Thesis proper.

897 is normally taken with the faculty member who will be your Thesis supervisor (the Chair of your Thesis committee, which must consist of at least two faculty from Cinema but can number as many as five faculty from anywhere in the University or beyond.) The instructor of 897, however, can be any faculty member who agrees to work with you. It is your responsibility to secure at least one other faculty member to serve as the rest of your committee.

You submit these Proposal materials to your 897 instructor but simultaneously you must put a Thesis Committee in place. At a minimum this means finding one other faculty member, who, on the basis of your Proposal, or preliminary representations of it, will agree to serve on your thesis committee.

Before the conclusion of 897 you must schedule your Defense of the Proposal with your Thesis Committee. This is a one hour session in which you and your committee discuss your Proposal in detail and agree on a plan of action. A successful defense qualifies you to take 898; lack of success results in a grade of Incomplete which must be removed by a second Defense of the Proposal or a new Proposal and Defense before advancing to 898.

3. Cine 898.

This course is supervised by the Chair of your Thesis Committee. Each member of the Committee must sign the Signature Page of your thesis before you can submit it, however. In this sense your entire committee is involved in your completion of 898.

Be aware that you must plan backwards from the final due date for submitting the approved thesis to ensure that you have enough time to meet the deadline. For example, you may want to submit a draft of the essay or part of the essay while still enrolled in 897 to get some feedback and be sure that the thesis is on track. If this does not happen in 897 it should happen very early in the semester you intend to graduate. It will usually take a few weeks for your faculty to provide feedback. Revision (rewriting) is almost always necessary to some extent.

Near the end of this process, you will want to submit a draft of the entire essay. Depending on how polished this draft is, how much consultation has occurred with your supervisor, and how adequate your mastery of the topic is, feedback may range from minor revision to substantive changes.

The final version of the thesis essay must be carefully checked for grammar and spelling; all bibliographic entries must be complete and correctly formatted. This final draft must be presented to the committee members for final review while there are still at least a couple of weeks left before the deadline. Ideally, only minor, if any, corrections remain after this stage. The final, fully corrected thesis is then ready for submission. Please consult the semester calendar in the Schedule of Classes or contact the Graduate Division for your specific Thesis due date.

The last step before making the final submission is to obtain the signatures of your committee members. These signatures validate your efforts and authorize granting the M.A. degree.

4. These procedures may seem "fussy," especially when they are all condensed onto a single Guideline. When they take place in real life over the course of several months they are far less onerous. Cine 700 reviews them in detail. The main challenge is to conceive a topic of genuine interest to you, to delimit it enough so that you can produce a manageable thesis, to move through the draft phases with reasonable dispatch, and to complete the fine tuning expeditiously.

You have two courses and a full academic year to write one essay of no more than 35 pages. This is entirely possible. The greatest risks are inertia, often caused by over-preparing, momentum, not knowing how or when to stop and distractions, often related to opportunities to serve as a Teaching Assistant and become involved in other aspects of the Department. This must be kept in balance. The Department's objective is to help you complete the MA program in a timely, rewarding fashion, not to add unnecessary hurdles, create difficulties and discourage progress. If you encounter problems, do not hesitate to consult with your thesis supervisor or other faculty members.

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