

PHD GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK
Department of Radio-Television-Film
The University of Texas at Austin
2020-2021

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Reminder: More information and campus resources can be found on the [RTF website](#) and [Graduate School](#) website.

I. General Information

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The RTF PhD program in Media Studies provides an advanced graduate education in [several areas](#): Digital media, history and criticism, identity and representation, media industries, and global media.

Scholarship and coursework in RTF's Media Studies Program examine the central role of media in culture, society, the arts, and politics, within historical as well as diverse local, regional, national, and global contexts. Both in the classroom as well as in their research, our world-class faculty and graduate students examine how film and media engage cultural practices, political participation, social interactions, and economic structures. We teach and research a wide range of legacy and emerging media forms, including but not limited to film, television, digital media, radio, mobile technologies, and interactive games. We explore these disparate areas as sites for the articulation and struggle over identity, with attention to issues of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, religion, and generation. We value multiple theoretical and methodological approaches through the interdisciplinary study of industry, policy, production, texts, and audiences. Our program espouses more inclusive media practices and trenchant social inquiry while aiming to foster informed citizen engagement with media and culture broadly defined.

Students can earn certificates in a range of [portfolio programs](#), including Arts and Cultural Management and Entrepreneurship, Museum Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and Mexican American & Latina/o Studies.

Students have a chance to build research and writing skills by working with faculty on a variety of projects and initiatives, including the [Velvet Light Trap](#) peer-reviewed film and media studies journal, the online [Flow](#) journal, the Center for Media Entertainment Industries, Latino Media Arts & Studies, and occasional conferences such as the Flow Conference. Many graduates from RTF's doctoral program are employed as professors at colleges and universities across the country and internationally; others have gone on to work in industry, higher education administration, and for non-profit organizations.

USING THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is designed as a reference tool to help you understand the steps involved in obtaining your graduate degree and the ways in which our department helps you navigate graduate school. The following pages provide important information about common administrative procedures in the RTF Department and the Office of Graduate Studies, degree requirements, and various resources available to you as a UT graduate student. This handbook is composed of information available from various official UT documents. In combining and streamlining this information, we have hopefully created a handbook that is easily navigated and useful. That said, it is not exhaustive, and, in many cases, you will be referred to sections of the [RTF Graduate Student Resource Center](#) on Canvas and the [RTF Graduate Student Wiki](#) that expand on this information.

STAYING INFORMED

This handbook is supplemented by announcements of upcoming deadlines forwarded to graduate student list-servs by the RTF Graduate Coordinator. The University of Texas is a large institution, and the only way it can get its business done is by imposing certain deadlines. Failing to observe them can mean paying additional fees or delaying your progress through the graduate program.

In order to ensure your successful and timely completion of the PhD program:

1. Get a UT email address (official UT email can only be sent to UT email addresses), and check your email often.
2. If your postal address, email address, or telephone number change, update them immediately through UT Direct.
3. Check your mail folder, located in CMA 6.156, regularly. If you are temporarily living outside of Austin, let the RTF Graduate coordinator and Graduate Advisor know of your mailing address.
4. Stay in contact and work closely with the RTF Graduate Office. If you have questions, do not hesitate to bring them to bring them to the Graduate Coordinator.
5. Figure out by your second semester which [faculty members](#) you hope to work with on your dissertation. Begin to get the advice of these faculty members with regard to helpful courses to take, your dissertation topic, etc.

THE RTF GRADUATE OFFICE

The RTF Graduate Office is composed of the Graduate Coordinator and two Graduate Advisors.

The Graduate Coordinator is an administrative position. The Graduate Coordinator, [Stacy Brodie](#), assists with questions concerning admissions, registration, degree progress and requirement checks, grade changes, fellowship and scholarship applications, travel grants, and committee changes. The Graduate Coordinator's office should be your first stop if you have any questions. The Graduate Advisor also is here as a resource for you.

The Graduate Advisors are faculty members who direct the Graduate Program within the department. Within the RTF Department, [Alisa Perren](#) currently holds this position for Media Studies, and **Miguel Alvarez** holds this position for Media Production and Screenwriting. These Advisors handle all formal documents and petitions for graduate students, and are available to advise students on their planned programs of study. Every semester, prior to registration, each student meets with their Graduate Advisor to review her/his program of work and plan their coursework for the following semester.

II. Registration

COURSE LOAD

A 9-hour course load (3 classes) is standard for most RTF PhD students in the fall and spring semesters (UT's "long session"). This is the required number of hours to be considered a full-time student, for financial aid and international student visas, and to be eligible for fellowships, scholarships, assistant instructorships, and teaching or graduate research assistantships. **International students** are required to register for 9 hours in both the fall and spring semesters.

The maximum course load for a graduate student is 15 semester hours (5 classes) in a fall or spring semester, or 12 hours in a 12-week summer session. A student who enrolls in a 9-week summer course may not register for more than 10 hours.

A course load of more than 9 hours must have the approval of the Graduate Advisor and will be permitted only under exceptional circumstances.

A student taking less than 9 hours is considered a part-time student. The RTF Graduate Office must approve part-time status.

GRADUATE ADVISOR

In order to ensure that you are taking the courses necessary to fulfill the program's requirements (see page 7) and to prepare you for your work, you're required to meet with the Media Studies Graduate Advisor prior to the registration period.

In addition, because the RTF faculty is large and diverse, each student is urged to look for a Faculty Mentor in their first year with whom they share some research interests. While optional, a Faculty Mentor may be able to provide advice better tailored to a student's particular interests.

REGISTRATION

The RTF graduate registration procedure involves three steps:

- 1) Prior to registration, you will be asked to schedule an **advising session** with the Graduate Advisor. Once you meet with the Advisor and are satisfied with your plans for the term, the Graduate Coordinator will clear your advising bar.
- 2) Next, for any course that is not an RTF media studies seminar, you are required to secure **enrollment consent** from the instructor of the course. Typically this involves asking the instructor in an email if they will allow you to take their course. If you obtain instructor consent for an RTF course, the Graduate Coordinator will clear you to register for the course. If the course is outside the RTF Department, contact the Graduate Coordinator in the department offering the course of interest after you have obtained instructor consent.

3) After being advised by the Graduate Advisor and cleared for registration by the Graduate Coordinator, the student is cleared to **register** for courses. Registration can be blocked if the student owes the University money or has some other type of bar on their record.

Registration times are available here: <https://utdirect.utexas.edu/registrar/ris.WBX>. To register, add/drop classes, and make optional fee selections during your scheduled access times, go to: <https://utdirect.utexas.edu/registration/chooseSemester.WBX>.

All registration changes after the 4th class day must be made through the RTF Graduate Office.

If you are having any problems registering in accordance with the above procedure, please speak to the Graduate Coordinator as soon as possible.

III. Program Requirements for the PhD

PROGRAM OF STUDY

The PhD in Radio-Television-Film is a scholarly degree incorporating coursework, comprehensive exams, and research culminating in a dissertation. Our degree expectations include producing original work that is worthy of publication and presenting at conferences.

The Program of Study and credit hour details are as follows:

- 6 hours RTF 395 – Theory and Literature in Media Studies (2 semesters)
- 12 hours Twelve hours of graduate-level electives in RTF (4 courses) OR nine hours of graduate-level electives in RTF (3 courses) plus RTF 398T (Supervised Teaching, 1 course)
- 9 hours Research-content courses (tools) or a foreign language (3 courses, including RTF 380) – (the Advisor can tell you which courses qualify)
- 9 hours Minor/supporting coursework outside the RTF department; courses must be conceptually related (3 courses). Up to two RTF production/screenwriting courses may count toward minor requirements if they conform to students' research interests and are approved by the Graduate Advisor.

Upon completion of coursework, the doctoral student takes the written comprehensive examinations (see below).

6 hours* Dissertation coursework (RTF 399R/W, 699R/W, 999R/W)

42 hours

- The total number of dissertation hours varies (6 hours minimum).

REQUIRED COURSES

All students must take RTF 395 in their first year of study. This is two semesters focused on a broad foundation in Media Studies Theory and Literature, particularly from a humanities-based perspective. Both courses are required in order to ensure that all incoming students possess an understanding of the diversity of theoretical approaches to the study of media. These courses should provide you with the foundations in theory necessary to complete your coursework and dissertation successfully.

All PhD students are strongly encouraged to take RTF 380 (Research Theory and Design). This course is offered each spring semester.

Students planning to teach as Assistant Instructors are required to first take RTF 398T (Supervised Teaching). Students who will serve as TAs are also encouraged to take this

course if they have no prior teaching experience or training. It is recommended that students enroll in RTF 398T during their first semester in the program.

SAMPLE PLAN OF STUDY

The following Sample Plan of Study should give you an indication of what satisfactory progress through the PhD program looks like for most students. The courses and requirements indicated above and in the right column of the chart below are explained in the following sections.

PhD SAMPLE PLAN OF STUDY		
YEAR 1	FALL	RTF 395 – Semester 1 Tools Course 1 RTF 398T – Supervised Teaching
	SPRING	RTF 395 – Semester 2 Minor Course 1 Elective
	SUMMER	Elective (Optional)
YEAR 2	FALL	Tools Course 2 Minor Course 2 Elective
	SPRING	Minor Course 3 RTF 380 or Tools Course 3 Elective
	SUMMER	Comprehensive Exams
YEAR 3	FALL	Comprehensive Exams (if not taken by end of Year 2 summer) Apply for Candidacy
	SPRING & SUMMER	Prepare and Defend Dissertation Proposal Research and Write Dissertation
YEAR 4	FALL & SPRING	Research and Write Dissertation

Please note that, in most cases, students must complete their comprehensive examinations before they can be appointed to serve as AIs.

DEPARTMENT COLLOQUIA AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

Typically the RTF Colloquium takes place on the first and third Thursday of each month. The Colloquium takes the form of a lecture series in which faculty across UT, advanced doctoral students, and visiting scholars present their research. This lecture series is designed to expose students to the diversity of media studies scholarship, provide models for research presentations, and enable graduate students to prepare for job talks.

One afternoon during both the fall and spring semesters, the department offers a Professional Development day. This day's events are designed to aid students in developing the skills necessary to succeed in graduate school, as professional academics, and in alternative academic (alt-ac) careers. Topics covered include preparing for comprehensive examinations, writing theses and reports, applying for academic jobs, and preparing for dissertation defenses.

RESEARCH TOOLS

The RTF Department expects doctoral students to be capable researchers and to take courses that help them attain the skills necessary to do the work in which they are interested. In some academic traditions, this capability often has meant proficiency in a foreign language. We have extended this range of proficiency to include familiarity with other tools necessary for conducting research. The department requires that each student complete 3 tools courses (9 hours).

Doctoral students are strongly encouraged to take RTF 380 (Research Theory and Design). There are several other research method-focused courses in the department and in other departments that can count as tools courses as well.

These research tools courses are various, in keeping with the breadth of interests represented by faculty in our department. They may include language courses (if the language is useful to their proposed dissertation area), statistics courses, qualitative research and theory courses, quantitative research and analysis courses, courses in specific methods of textual analysis (e.g., semiotics, psychoanalysis), organizational analysis courses, economic analysis courses, ethnographic methods, library science research courses (e.g., archiving), and others. It is acceptable for the tools courses to represent a mixture of methods and analyses. **The emphasis in tools courses is on methods, or how to do the research or analysis, rather than on any specific theoretical or issue content.**

Courses that involve an intensive investigation of one tool or method are acceptable as are those that are comparative in nature. All tools courses taken by a student should not focus on the same method, however. The student's faculty advisors as well as faculty members on the student's proposed comprehensive exam/dissertation committees can make helpful recommendations on which tools courses would be most useful for a given student.

The series of tools courses must be specifically related to the student's intended area of academic specialization and may be found inside or outside the Department. Departments such as anthropology, education, information sciences, marketing, sociology, history,

English, music, and journalism often offer courses specifically related to research methodologies. Tools courses taken outside of the department do *not* also count for the Minor/Supporting Work requirement.

In order to ensure that you complete this requirement in a timely fashion, you are strongly encouraged to begin taking your tools courses early in your Program of Study.

MINOR/SUPPORTING WORK

Doctoral students must complete nine hours (3 courses) in a supporting (minor) work area. The goal of the supporting work is to acquire knowledge in another area that can support your primary research.

At least one minor course must be taken outside the RTF Department. Although minor courses need not be entirely in one department, they should represent one conceptually integrated area. The Graduate Advisor's advice on designing this supporting work can be very helpful. You should also consult faculty members who have interests close to your own, as they are most likely to know about related, useful courses in other departments.

If conceptually related to a student's field of study, and with approval from the Graduate Advisor, a student may enroll in up to two RTF screenwriting and/or production courses to count toward their minor, if the instructor of these courses agree to it.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

Upon completion of coursework, the doctoral student takes written PhD comprehensive examinations. These examinations are usually completed in three 8-hour days (typically a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) over the period of one week. These exams must occur by the end of the third year of the PhD work, though students are encouraged to take the exams earlier. Three faculty members compose the student's exam committee, each writing questions that test the student's understanding in one of three domains of knowledge on which the student has chosen to focus. Most RTF students choose RTF faculty members for this role. No more than one faculty member can be from outside the RTF department. **Within two to three weeks of completing the written exams, the student meets with their exam committee members for an oral exam review.**

Most students take their comprehensive exams shortly after they have finished their coursework. These exams must be completed before a student can be appointed as an Assistant Instructor. The RTF Graduate Office is willing to hear requests for earlier completion of the exams if the student has finished almost all required coursework, including that necessary to proceed successfully their dissertation.

The student typically begins the exam preparation process during the last semester of coursework by asking three faculty members to help her/him define the exam areas and create a reading list for each area. We recommend that one or two of the areas be defined broadly enough that they cover major areas of media studies scholarship related to the dissertation project (e.g., film studies, television studies, digital media studies,

historiography, gender studies, ethnic/race studies, global media, research methods). We discourage students from defining all of the exam areas too narrowly around topics related specifically to the intended dissertation project. We recommend that you think of your exams as preparing you for both research and teaching in several different domains of knowledge, which in turn will help you prepare for your dissertation and for your overall career.

The student should talk with each faculty member on the exam committee about the individual faculty member's expectations for the list of readings (number of readings, for instance, and certainly the selections). Faculty may be able to provide sample reading lists or exams that they have given in the past. The student and the faculty member should agree to the list of readings at least two months prior to the date of the first exam. **These lists should be shared with the other two faculty committee members as soon as they are finalized.** It may be in the students' interest to arrange a meeting with all three of their comprehensive examiners to discuss how the lists may work together.

Annual student progress meetings, which all doctoral students are required to schedule at the conclusion of each school year, can provide a useful time to speak with all of the committee members together regarding these exams.

Once the student has determined a schedule for the written examinations and subsequent oral review with their exam committee, they [must notify the RTF Graduate Office](#) of their intention to complete the exams. The exact timing of the examinations, both start and finish time, must be arranged in advance with the Graduate Coordinator. Usually the written exams are administered through email, though other arrangements can be made if necessary. This notification must include: 1) the dates for each exam, 2) the faculty members on the committee, and 3) the length of time permitted for each exam (agreed upon with individual faculty members), along with any other special requirements. Students should submit this documentation in writing to the RTF Graduate Coordinator, **copying each faculty member participating in the examination process**, at least two weeks prior to the first scheduled examination. The Graduate Coordinator will place this notification in the student's file and solicit exam questions from each faculty member listed in the student's notification. Faculty submit each examination question through email to the Graduate Coordinator at least one week prior to the first examination date, and it is filed by the Graduate Coordinator. The presumption is that exams are "open book"; students may have their books and notes with them as they write and thus may take their exams in any location of their choosing.

Once the student's answer has been submitted to the Graduate Coordinator, they then forward that answer to the individual faculty member supervising that portion of the exam and to the other two faculty members.

Within two weeks (10 working days) after receiving the student's answer, each faculty member on the exam committee is expected to [submit to the Graduate Coordinator](#) an assessment of their part of the examination. Examiners may grade in terms of the following categories: High Pass, Pass, Low Pass, or Fail. **The student is notified of these grades after the oral exam review (see below).**

The student should organize a follow-up comprehensive exam review meeting with the three faculty members and the student. This meeting should occur between 10 and 15 working days after the completion of the last exam. The purpose of the conversation is to draw out the implications of the student's answers and to help move the student quickly into writing a dissertation proposal. The review meeting should be scheduled for about 90 minutes in length. The final assessment (i.e., High Pass, Pass, etc.) of the comprehensive exams will be determined at the end of the review meeting by the three faculty members. **Individual faculty members may change their original grade for their portion of the written exam based on the student's performance during the oral review.** One member of the committee should report the outcome of the review meeting to the Graduate Coordinator, who will notify the student of the results **of the oral review and the written exams.** Faculty may forward any further specific comments directly to the student, separate from this official notification.

If the student fails one or more of the written exams or the review, they may retake the failed portion(s) once, with the original committee member(s).

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE & CANDIDACY

Upon successful completion of the Comprehensive Examinations, the student applies for doctoral candidacy and selects a dissertation committee chair (or two co-chairs) and committee members. This committee must be comprised of at least four faculty members. (Most people have a single chair, but some have two who share the responsibility, in order to pull different areas of strength together.) One person on the student's committee must be from outside the RTF Department.

In order to file for candidacy, the student must complete the [Candidacy Approval and Checklist](#) available online. This form requires the electronic signatures from the dissertation chair(s) and the Graduate Advisor (who also signs as the Graduate Studies Committee Chair). A synopsis of your dissertation proposal is also required. After departmental approval, the online form will be routed to the Graduate School for final approval.

Upon approval of the Program of Work form (generated automatically by the candidacy application process) by the Graduate School, the student is formally admitted to candidacy for the PhD. Only at this point is the student able to register for dissertation credits. Once admitted to candidacy, a student must register **continuously** for all long semesters (fall and spring) until successful completion of the dissertation and graduation.

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL & ORAL DEFENSE

After being admitted to doctoral candidacy, students prepare a Dissertation Proposal. The proposal is expected to be at least 30 pages in length and should include your primary object(s) of study, the main questions or issues you are pursuing in your research, the theories you are using, how you plan to do the research (i.e., your methods), how you plan to analyze it, and chapter outlines. You might also consult other members of your committee on specific aspects of your proposal related to their areas of expertise.

To be eligible for funding in your fifth year, you must, at minimum, successfully defend your dissertation proposal by the end of spring semester (last day of classes) of your fourth year.

If you are planning to interview or interact with people as part of your research, you need to obtain [human subjects \(IRB\) approval](#) from the Office of Sponsored Projects at this stage. Be sure to consult with your dissertation chair or the Graduate Advisor regarding this matter.

You will need to take an [online tutorial on copyright](#) as well. This is required whether or not you expect to quote anyone or use any images.

Writing the dissertation proposal is often difficult, even if the student is able to use portions of her/his comprehensive exam answers to complete it. You should expect to write several drafts before your chair deems it worthy of review by the rest of the committee. When you and your chair are satisfied with the proposal, you should schedule a proposal defense with the full committee. Please allow the rest of the committee at least three weeks to read the proposal.

[The student defends his or her proposal](#) before the full committee, which must approve the dissertation proposal. In the proposal defense (or conversation, as some faculty prefer to call it), the student may present a short summary of the proposal and then the committee talks with the student about their plans. If any committee members find that further work is needed on the proposal, the student must complete those revisions prior to beginning work on their dissertation. Once the candidate's proposal is approved, a [Dissertation Proposal Defense form](#) signed by the committee is submitted.

The dissertation is written under the direction of the dissertation advisor. Completing a dissertation is a time-consuming process. Candidates should allow ample time not only for research and writing, but also for review by committee members and for the rewriting that will follow. During the writing phase, it is not unusual for a candidate to write, revise, and rewrite several drafts before arriving at the final, defensible draft of the dissertation.

DISSERTATION SUBMISSION & ORAL EXAMINATION

The student [must apply to graduate with the Graduate School during the semester in which they expect to file their dissertation](#). This requires that an online application be submitted.

Upon completing the dissertation, the student takes the PhD Oral Examination to defend the dissertation. **The completed dissertation must be presented to the entire Dissertation Committee at least four weeks prior to the oral defense.** The student's chair should notify the RTF Graduate Office when the student is ready for this oral examination, and the student [must file a form](#) notifying the Graduate School in advance of the desired date for the oral defense (at least two weeks in advance). Signatures of all committee members and the Graduate Advisor are required. The last signature on this form should be the Graduate Advisor's. Please see Graduate School Instructions and Checklist for more details.

When the dissertation is completed, the student defends the project during an oral examination of approximately two hours before her/his dissertation committee chair and members. The [Oral Examination](#) requires at a minimum that the student and supervisor be in the room, and (N-1) of all other members of the committee must participate at the same time in some way (in person or electronically). Oral examinations are open to the public and may be attended by any interested parties.

Following the oral examination, committee members provide a determination of the outcome: Pass, pass with revisions, re-take examination, or do not pass. Students should be aware that most dissertations require some revisions even if they pass the oral examination. Time should be allocated by the student for the revision process following their scheduled defense date and before the planned deposit date. In the case where students must re-take the examination or do not pass, the committee will weigh in regarding next steps. The committee's determination is reported in an official form to the Graduate School. If an individual committee member wishes to do so, they may weigh in directly to the Graduate School with their own form, which attests to their evaluation of the student's oral defense.

Once final approval is secured from the dissertation chair, the student schedules a format check with the Graduate School. Once the formatting is approved, the student may deposit the dissertation with the Graduate School. The student is then granted the PhD.

IV. Program Options

RTF 388 – INDEPENDENT STUDIES & PROJECTS

The 388 course, “Research Problems in Special Fields,” is our department’s independent study course. A student wishing to do an independent study must negotiate the topic and format with the professor he or she wants to work with, and [complete the 388 form](#). This form requires a summary of the project and the supervising professor’s signature. This form must be deposited with the RTF Graduate Office when registering.

There is no limit on the number of 388s a doctoral student may take. However, most faculty members favor 388s only for specific times in the student’s career, usually at advanced points in the second or third year.

APPLYING UNDERGRADUATE COURSES TOWARDS DEGREE

A graduate student is allowed to apply 9 hours of undergraduate, upper-division coursework toward their graduate degree. No more than 6 of these hours may be taken in either RTF or the minor. (For example, the hours may be applied as follows: 6 hours in the minor, 3 hours in RTF and 3 hours in the minor, or 6 hours in RTF.) At UT, upper-division course numbers begin at the 320 level. **Introductory language courses**, such as Spanish 506 or French 506, are lower-division courses and **cannot be counted toward a graduate degree**.

PRODUCTION/SCREENWRITING COURSES & INTERNSHIPS

As noted above, on rare occasions studies students are allowed to enroll in certain production and screenwriting courses for credit. A limited number of seats may be available and instructors must provide permission. **Please note that first priority for seats in production and screenwriting courses go to students in the MFA Screenwriting, MFA in Film & Media Production, and the Michener Center for Writers programs.**

In addition, students can participate in an internship for graduate course credit by [enrolling in RTF 384N](#). To receive academic credit for your RTF internship, you must complete 160 and 180 work hours with the host organization. During the Fall and Spring semesters, this generally means at least 10-15 hours per week for 10-15 weeks. During the Summer, this generally means at least 15-25 hours per week for 6-10 weeks. The internship host organization or supervisor must be a professional company or individual with considerable experience and currently active within some aspect of the film, video, television, audio, interactive, telecommunications, or radio industries. As an intern, you must be engaged in activities that provide meaningful professional experiences within one of these industry sectors.

Please be aware that both production courses and internships can be **time intensive**. Be sure to plan your course load for the semester accordingly, or consider these as summer activities.

CREDIT/NO CREDIT

Students may take up to 9 hours of coursework on a Credit/No Credit basis rather than for a letter grade. Obtaining a grade of C or above constitutes a “Credit” unless otherwise stated by the instructor in the course syllabus. All required courses must be taken for a letter grade.

Graduate students have approximately 2 months from the start of the semester to change a course to or from Credit/No Credit. (See the [Registrar’s Course Schedule](#) for firm deadlines.)

ADDS/DROPS

Adding or dropping a course must occur at the times and dates printed in the [Registrar’s Course Schedule](#). The student should consult the specific requirements of the department in which a course is being added or dropped in order to determine what procedure to follow. In the case of RTF courses, adds and drops must be approved at minimum through the RTF Graduate Office.

During the **1st through the 12th day of class**, adds/drops are submitted to the RTF Graduate Coordinator and approval is required from the Graduate Advisor. Any add/drop involving Credit/No Credit should be made at this time.

From the **13th class day through the 4th week of class**, adds/drops require approval by the instructor, the Graduate Advisor, and the Dean of the Graduate School. At this point in the semester, only those changes with compelling circumstances will be considered. Graduate students have until the last class day to drop a class.

Note that summer sessions have different deadlines.

CHANGE OF GRADE

If a student receives an incorrect grade, he or she should contact the instructor, who must complete a change-of-grade form (available online).

INCOMPLETES

The Department and the Graduate School strongly discourage students from delaying completion of the work required by specific courses. When students take an “incomplete” (which appears as an “X” on transcripts), they jeopardize their ability to obtain fellowships and university appointments. Having more than one “X” from the previous long-term session renders the student ineligible for a TA-ship, for example.

Fall incompletes must be cleared by the end of the spring semester. Spring and summer incompletes must be cleared by the end of the fall semester. Check the academic calendar for specific dates (and see the [Key Dates for Grads](#) link.)

Any “X” that remains on a transcript for more than one semester will not be changed to a grade; in other words, the “X” stays on your record as an “I” (permanent incomplete). An incomplete may remain on your record for longer than one semester ONLY if you are not enrolled at the University; however, you must resolve the incomplete by the end of the semester when you re-enroll.

If you enroll in a course that you later decide not to complete, we urge you to consider withdrawing from that course (Q drop for “quit”) in order to clear your academic record. The instructor reports the “Q” grade.

WITHDRAWAL

Dropping an entire course load constitutes withdrawal from the University. A student must contact the Graduate Advisor before contacting the Dean of Graduate Studies about withdrawing.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE & READMISSION

If a student is not enrolled in school for one long session, he/she must re-apply to the Graduate School and to the RTF Department for re-admission. When the student expects to take a leave, he or she should request a Leave of Absence from the Graduate Advisor and complete the Authorization for Leave of Absence form. Doctoral students who have advanced to candidacy complete the Petition for Leave of Absence form.

The RTF Graduate Advisor approves the Leave of Absence by signing the form. The student then submits the signed form to the Graduate School, after making a copy for their records. In other words, if you want to take a semester off, you should notify the RTF Graduate Office well in advance so that we know what you are doing and so that you can complete the appropriate paperwork to be re-admitted.

TIME LIMITS

At the time of a PhD student’s admission to candidacy, no course on the student’s program of study may be older than six years.

After a PhD student has been admitted to candidacy, he or she normally has 3 years in which to complete the dissertation. The progress of each doctoral student is reviewed by the dissertation supervisor and the RTF Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) at the end of the student’s second year of candidacy and annually thereafter.

If the candidate is making good progress on the dissertation, the GSC will recommend an extension of candidacy to the Office of Graduate Studies. Students are expected to provide progress reports to their committee during the spring annual progress meetings with their committee members. If the candidate is not viewed as “making good progress” on the dissertation, the GSC may either recommend an extension of candidacy with specific deadlines to motivate progress or the termination of the student’s candidacy. The RTF Graduate Office will notify candidates in writing as to the outcome of such reviews.

Upon completion of the spring of their ninth year in the program, students will receive a notice from the GSC indicating they have until the deposit date for the subsequent fall semester to file their dissertation. **If a student's dissertation is not completed by the fall of their tenth year, they will be terminated from the program.** Petitions/exceptions are only for extreme, extenuating circumstances.

CHANGES IN DOCTORAL COMMITTEES

It is UT policy that except for faculty members who have left the University, dissertation committee members should not be replaced or withdrawn from a committee without their explicit consent. A request for a committee change should state that the individuals involved have all agreed to the change and stipulate the reason(s) for the change. The Graduate Office will provide a Change of Committee Form to the student to complete and for the committee chair to sign. The Graduate Office will complete the reason for the change, obtain the Graduate Advisor's signature, and forward the completed form to the Graduate School.

V. Assistantships, Fellowships & Financial Aid

FUNDING & SUPPORT

Students admitted to the RTF PhD program with funding are guaranteed financial support at 50% time (20 hours a week) for their first four years at UT Austin. Financial support consists of a salary, in-state tuition rate, tuition assistance, and medical insurance. Support includes Teaching Assistant (TA), Assistant Instructor (AI), Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) assignments, and other assignments through UT-based funding sources, whether departmental or non-departmental. Salary and benefits vary depending on whether you are employed as a TA, AI, or GRA.

Salary rates and tuition assistance change annually.

If a student wishes to secure a grant or other funding from outside of UT or by being absent from the campus during those four years, they do so with the understanding that they forfeit departmental funding support for that semester or year. Funding will not roll over to future years past the fourth year.

After four years of RTF support, some students may be supported if funding is available, they are making sufficient progress in the program, and their skills fit the work required. Fifth-year funding is not guaranteed. In order to be eligible for fifth year funding students must, at minimum, *successfully defend their dissertation proposal by the end of spring semester of their fourth year*. Continuation of funding support during the fifth year will be determined on a semester-by-semester basis and will depend on the doctoral candidate making adequate progress towards dissertation completion.

Students are encouraged to look at the resources available to Graduate Students via [Texas Career Engagement](#). In addition to providing access to employment listings on and off campus, this unit provides career advising, professional development workshops, and other services.

TEACHING ASSISTANTS & ASSISTANT INSTRUCTORS

The Department is committed to providing graduate students with teaching experience and mentorships helpful to their professional development. Faculty members attempt to give full consideration to all graduate applications for Teaching Assistant (TA) and Assistant Instructor (AI) positions. We make every effort to match applicants with positions appropriate to their skills, interests, and progress in the program.

TAs within the RTF Department are typically employed 10 hours per week (25% time) for two courses or 20 hours per week (50% time) for one course to serve with a professor in various capacities related to teaching. During a given semester, a limited number of PhD students are appointed as AIs with responsibility for teaching various courses in our department. These appointments are normally for 20 hours per week (50%).

Reappointment as a TA or an AI is determined by departmental needs as well as by evaluation of the student's academic progress (e.g., maintain GPA of 3.00) and prior TA/AI performance. The professor assigned to teach the course in which a TA assists, or those who help monitor the performance of an AI, **evaluates the teaching student's effectiveness each semester**. In addition, student instructors will [meet at least once with their supervising faculty](#) to discuss their teaching strengths and weaknesses. The Chair and Graduate Advisor are always available to discuss instructional matters. Teaching Assistants and Assistant Instructors are provided with office/desk space for conducting their course-related work.

Following successful performance as an AI in an RTF lower-division course (306, 307, 308, 317), advanced doctoral students can apply to teach an introductory topics course of their own design to non-majors (RTF 301N). Pending funding availability, proposals for course topics for RTF 301Ns will be solicited from students each semester and chosen on a competitive basis. To be considered to teach an RTF 301N course, students must be making sufficient progress toward their degree. They will be required to select a faculty mentor to supervise their course development and teaching.

TA/AI APPOINTMENT CRITERIA

PhD students in good standing in the program (i.e., those who are admitted without conditions, currently enrolled for at least 9 hours, maintain a GPA of 3.0 or better, and have an academic record free of incompletes) are eligible for appointments as TAs and AIs. AIs must have completed several other requirements (see below).

Incompletes may bar a student from eligibility for a TA or AI appointment. It is preferable that an applicant has no incompletes. Only one incomplete may be carried from the previous semester. For summer and fall appointments, previous fall incompletes must be cleared by the last class day of the spring semester; for spring appointments, incompletes from summer or the previous spring must be cleared by the last class day of the fall semester.

All non-U.S. citizens without experience as an AI or TA at UT must take and pass an English proficiency exam if they have not done so prior to becoming a graduate student. They must also attend a teaching orientation prior to being appointed. The exam is offered in August, November, January, and April. Contact the RTF Graduate Office about the exam to ensure compliance with this requirement. INS regulations limit International Students on J-1 or F-1 Visas to appointments of no more than 20 hours.

To be eligible for an AI appointment, a student must:

- Hold a Master's degree, or have completed 30 graduate hours of coursework;
- Be enrolled for at least 9 hours during the long session and 3 hours during any summer session;
- Have one semester of service as a teaching assistant at UT or have at least one year of teaching experience in an accredited college or school;

- Have completed RTF 398T: Supervised Teaching (offered in the fall semester) or its equivalent with a grade of B (see below);
- Be in good academic standing (maintain GPA of 3.00) and **making satisfactory progress toward a graduate degree** (finish important milestones in good time).

Normally, AI appointments in the RTF department are offered **only to those students who have advanced to doctoral candidacy** (i.e., successfully passed comprehensive examinations), have previous college teaching experience, and/or have strong professional experience. AIs have major responsibility for a course, and are expected to work with the faculty member(s) assigned to supervise them with the specific course.

ASSISTANT INSTRUCTOR TRACKS

Only certain courses in the RTF department are taught by AIs. The State of Texas has rules that preclude the teaching of upper-division courses by graduate students. As such, students typically are AIs in lower-division courses, including RTF 306 (Introduction to World Cinema History for Non-Majors), 307 (Media and Society), 308 (Development of Film and Media), and 317 (Narrative Strategies and Media Design). As noted above, some advanced doctoral students may also teach an RTF 301N (Topics for Non-Majors). Students typically enter the AI track for a specific course as TAs in that course under the faculty member who supervises the class. In most cases, students serve as AIs for the assigned course for two consecutive semesters.

Students interested in teaching a specific lower-division course are encouraged to consult with the Graduate Advisor early in their time in the program. In order to obtain an AI appointment, students must have completed their comprehensive exams. Please be aware that department necessities can sometimes intervene in terms of teaching assignments or the funding available for AI positions.

RTF 398T – SUPERVISED TEACHING

A teaching methods course entitled “Supervised Teaching” (RTF 398T) is offered in RTF every fall semester. Students planning to apply for or interested in holding positions as AIs are encouraged to take this class early in their course of study because it is required for the AI appointment. The course can be taken for a letter grade only; any graduate student taking the course must attain a “B” average before receiving credit for the course.

Students are exempt from the 398T requirement only if they have had at least one year of teaching experience at an accredited college or school. The Graduate School requires certification of previous teaching experience if a student requires an exemption from 398T. Transcripts, letters from former teaching supervisors or department chairs, student evaluations, and copies of syllabi are the sorts of evidence the University generally requires when asked to grant such an exemption. Because 398T has proven to be a valuable aid for our students, the RTF faculty urges students to take 398T whether or not they have had previous teaching experience.

TRAVEL AWARDS

If the RTF Department is given funds for graduate student travel to conferences, the money will be distributed in equal amounts on a first-come, first-served basis to each student who fills out the Travel Request Form. This money is awarded in equal increments until the end of the academic year, at which time any remaining funds will be released to any students who may still seek funding. The requests should include the reason for the travel, the student's presentation title, and the name, date, and location of the conference.

FELLOWSHIPS & FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid resources are very limited at UT, although the RTF Department does what it can to try and find people jobs and sources of financial support. We encourage all graduate students to seek out additional vehicles for supporting themselves during their time in the program. During their first four years in the program, approval from the Graduate Advisor is required to accept any non-RTF funding.

Each year, the RTF Department is given an opportunity to nominate students for various fellowships. The Graduate School and the Moody College of Communication provide a number of fellowships to graduate students. The nominees are usually advanced PhD or MFA students. The RTF Graduate Advisor prepares the nominations in consultation with the Graduate Studies Committee. The most commonly awarded fellowships yearly are the Continuing Fellowships (university-wide competition) and the Jones Fellowships (awarded within the College). Deadlines to apply typically take place in late November or early December.

Doctoral students are expected to be in candidacy and have defended their dissertation prospectuses to be eligible, and MFA students should have begun planning their thesis film.

The Graduate School awards fellowships competitively and the Moody College awards on the basis of academic merit as represented by performance in coursework, faculty recommendations, conference presentations, publication record/creative accomplishments, and service to the department (e.g., as a TA or AI). Financial need is considered in cases when academic merit is equal among all candidates.

Students are encouraged to work with their Faculty Advisor and the RTF Graduate Advisor in determining timing to apply as well as which fellowships and other funding opportunities are a good fit.

VI. Graduate Student Organization (GSO)

The [RTF Graduate Student Organization](#) advocates for the interests of graduate students in the department and in the Moody College of Communication. The goals of the GSO are to serve as a representative body for addressing major issues and concerns of all RTF graduate students (MA, MFA, PhD); to promote professional development of its membership; and to promote cohesion between the media studies graduate student body and the graduate production student body through social events, academic forums, and symposia.

A representative from the RTF graduate student body also serves each year on the [Moody College Graduate Communication Council](#). In addition, one RTF graduate student typically serves on UT-Austin's [Graduate Student Assembly](#).

***As a final reminder, please remember that the [RTF Graduate Student wiki](#) and [RTF Graduate Student Resource Center](#) on Canvas provide **link to forms** and lists key deadlines. Be sure to look there for more information.**