

MA GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK
Department of Radio-Television-Film
The University of Texas at Austin
2015-2016

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

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The RTF MA program in Media Studies provides a strong graduate education in **several areas**: global media; media history and industries; media and identity; technology, law, and policy; and social and interactive media. It builds equally on humanities and social science traditions. Students can do **joint MAs** with other UT graduate programs, such as those in business, public affairs, and area studies; certificates are also available in a range of **portfolio programs**, including Arts and Cultural Management and Entrepreneurship, Museum Studies, and Women and Gender Studies.

Students have a chance to build research and writing skills by working with faculty on a variety of projects and initiatives including the Technology and Information Policy Institute (TIPI), the *Velvet Light Trap* peer-reviewed journal, and the biennial **Flow Conference** on Television and New Media. Students are also able to take select RTF courses in **media production and screenwriting** as well as participate in internships for credit. Many of our graduates go on to earn PhDs here or elsewhere, but some also go to work in higher education administration, non-profit organizations, or the media industries.

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 way 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 website** that expand on and elaborate the information contained here. Therefore, while you find this handbook a useful reference tool, it is not comprehensive.

STAYING INFORMED

This handbook is also supplemented by announcements of upcoming deadlines forwarded by email from 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, delaying your progress, and/or petitioning the Office of Graduate Studies for an extension.

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

1. Check your email often.

2. If your postal address, email address, or telephone number changes, be sure to update them at UT Direct.
3. Check your mailbox, located in CMA 6.156, regularly.
4. Stay in contact and work closely with the RTF Graduate Office. If you have questions, do not hesitate to bring them to the Graduate Coordinator.
5. Figure out early on which **faculty member(s)** you want to work with on your MA thesis or report, and begin to get their advice with regard to courses, thesis or report topics, other helpful faculty members, applying for PhD programs, 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 is currently **Char Burke**. She 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, and she may then direct you to the Graduate Advisor if necessary.

The Graduate Advisors are faculty members who direct the Graduate Program within the department. Within the RTF Department, **Kathy Fuller-Seeley** currently holds this position for Media Studies, and **Richard Lewis** holds this position for Media Production. 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 the appropriate Graduate Advisor to review her/his program of work and plan coursework for the following semester.

II. REGISTRATION

COURSE LOAD

A 9-hour course load (3 classes) is conventional for most RTF MA students in the fall and spring semesters (UT's "long session"). A 9-hour course load (3 classes) is required to maintain financial aid. **International students** are required to register for 9 hours in both the fall and spring semesters.

A student must be registered for 9 semester hours to be considered a full-time student. A student taking less than 9 hours is considered a part-time student. To be eligible for fellowships, scholarships, assistant instructorships, and teaching or graduate research

assistantships, students are required to be enrolled for at least 9 hours of course work for the fall or spring semester.

The maximum course load for a graduate student is 15 semester hours (5 classes) in a fall or spring semester, or 12 semester hours in a 12-week summer session. A student who enrolls in a 9-week summer session 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.

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 6) and to prepare you for your work, we require that you meet with the appropriate Graduate Advisor prior to the registration period.

In addition, because the RTF faculty is large and diverse, during his/her first year, each student is urged to look for a Faculty Mentor with whom s/he shares some research interests. While optional, a Faculty Mentor will be able to provide advice better tailored to your each 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 the Advisor and student meet and are satisfied with the student's plans for the term, the Graduate Coordinator will clear the student's advising bar.
- 2) Next, you are required to secure **enrollment consent** from the instructor of record for each course in RTF and in most other departments. Once you have obtained instructor consent, the Graduate Coordinator will clear you to register for that particular course. If you are taking a course outside the RTF Department, contact the Graduate Coordinator in the department offering the course of interest.
- 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 her/his 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, speak to the Graduate Coordinator as soon as possible.

III. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MA

PROGRAM OF STUDY

For many, the MA in the RTF Department is a scholarly degree incorporating coursework and research culminating in a thesis. Producing work that applies theory to original research and analysis is part of our degree expectations for most students. Yet some students see the MA as a primarily professional degree that equips them to work in media or other fields of work at a more advanced level. Such students more typically produce an applied research or creative project via a Master's Report.

Most MA students complete their degree in two years, during which time they finish the degree's 30-hour program of work (for those choosing the thesis option) or 33-hour program of work (for those choosing the report option). To make satisfactory progress in the program, students must maintain a grade point average (GPA) of 3.00 each semester. These hours are distributed as follows:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 3 hours | RTF 395 Theory and Literature (1 required course) |
| 12 or 18 hours | Electives in RTF courses (at three credits each = 12 hours/four courses for thesis option and 18 hours/6 courses for report option) |
| 3 hours | Research-content course (tools – e.g., 380/380G) (selected with Graduate Advisor) |
| 6 hours | Minor/supporting course work outside the RTF; courses must be conceptually related (2 courses – 3 credits each) |
| 6 hours | Thesis writing courses (RTF 698A & 698B) |

OR

- | | |
|---------|----------------------------------|
| 3 hours | Report writing course (RTF 398R) |
|---------|----------------------------------|

Course descriptions for the upcoming semester are [located here](#).

SAMPLE PLAN OF STUDY

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

MA SAMPLE PLAN OF STUDY		
YEAR 1	FALL	RTF 395 – Theory and Literature (required) Elective 1 Elective 2
	SPRING	Tools course Minor 1 Elective 3 **Select thesis/report advisor
	SUMMER	**Work on thesis/report (optional)
YEAR 2	FALL	Minor 2 Elective 4 (or Tools course) RTF 698A (thesis) or Elective 5 (for report) **Select second reader for thesis/report **Complete thesis/report proposal (must be approved by Supervisor and Second Reader)
	SPRING	Elective 6 (for report) RTF 698B (thesis) or RTF 398R (report) **Complete thesis/report

REQUIRED COURSES

All students must take RTF 395 (Theory and Literature) in their first fall semester. This is a 3-credit course. This course focuses on theory and literature foundational to both social sciences and humanities approaches to media studies. Students are required to take this course in their first semester in order to ensure that all incoming students possess an understanding of the diversity of approaches in the study of media, and to prepare them theoretically to complete other coursework successfully and to write a thesis.

PROFESSIONAL SEMINARS

Typically the first Monday of each month, the RTF Colloquium takes place. 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 day during both fall and spring semester, 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 COURSES

The RTF Department expects MA 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. The Department requires each MA student to complete at least 3 hours (one course) in "tools" courses in their first year; depending on their research project and comfort with their research skills, students may wish to take additional "tools" courses beyond the one required.

Every Spring, the Department offers RTF 380, which provides students with an overview of how to think about research and surveys various research methods. This course prepares students to develop the research proposal for an MA thesis or report.

Other tools or research courses also available in RTF as well as other departments may include language courses, statistics courses, qualitative research courses, quantitative research and analysis courses, courses in specific methods of textual analysis (e.g., semiotics), organizational analysis courses, economic analysis courses, ethnographic methods, and library science research courses (e.g., archiving), among 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.**

Additional RTF courses beyond RTF 380 (e.g., Ethnography; Historiography; Media Industries, etc.) may count toward the “Tools” requirement. Be sure to check with the Graduate Advisor for more information regarding what tools courses might be counted.

In order to ensure that you complete this requirement, you are strongly encouraged to take tools course(s) in the first year of your program of study. We have discovered that this makes it much easier for you to complete a thesis/report in a timely fashion.

MINOR/ SUPPORTING WORK

MA students must complete six course hours 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. These courses need not be entirely in one department, but 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 other faculty members who have interests close to your own, as they are most likely to know about related, useful courses in other departments.

THESIS/REPORT PROCESS

At the end of the first year of study, the student should select a thesis/report advisor. The main advisor should be based in the RTF Department. The second reader can be from outside the RTF Department, if desired.

The student should try to have the key essentials of a proposal for their thesis/report prepared by end the end of the first school year, especially if they wish to work on their project over the summer, which is recommended.

During the early part of their third semester, the student should select a second reader, who, with the advisor, composes the student’s thesis/report committee. The student should complete her/his proposal and have it approved by both the advisor and second reader no later than the end of their third semester. **In order to register for the spring semester of the second year, the student must present an approved proposal to the Graduate Office along with the appropriate form.** This form requires a signature from your thesis/report advisor, your second reader, and the Graduate Advisor.

A thesis proposal should be at least 10 pages in length. It should cover your primary object(s) of study, the main questions or issues you are pursuing, a review of relevant literature, how you plan to do the research, how you plan to analyze it, and an outline of proposed chapters. Students wanting to complete a MA report that is not theoretical

should consult with their report advisor and/or the Graduate Advisor for assistance in preparation of the report proposal.

If you are planning to interview people for your project, you need to have human subjects ([IRB](#)) approval from the Office of Sponsored Projects as well. If you are considering doing any ethnographic work for your thesis or report, even if you consider yourself a humanities student, we strongly recommend that you take a methods course in that area (which could count as your one required tools course or be taken as an additional course applied toward your elective requirements).

Once the candidate's proposal is approved, the thesis/report is written under the direction of the advisor. Thesis and report preparation are time-consuming processes. Candidates should allow ample time not only for their research, analysis, and writing, but also for review by their committee members and for the rewriting that will follow. During the writing phase, it is expected that candidates will write, revise, and rewrite **at least two drafts** before arriving at the final draft of their thesis/report.

Some thesis/report advisors may require as much as 4 weeks to review a full, semi-final draft. You should have a complete first draft to your thesis/report advisor at least 6 weeks before the thesis/report must be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies. (Some advisors will require an even earlier deadline.) This schedule will ensure that the advisor has time to give you feedback, you have time to revise your thesis/report, and the second reader has at least 2-3 weeks to read and comment on it. If you give your committee less time than this, they are **not** required or even encouraged to cut corners on time to help you graduate on time. Consult with your advisor and second reader early on to see what their deadlines are, since this can vary between faculty members.

After the advisor and second reader have read and commented on at least one draft of the report/thesis, the candidate makes any final revisions required by the committee and formats the thesis/report according to the standards required by the Office of Graduate Studies. The committee member who requested revisions (the supervisor or reader) must approve changes. Once final approval is secured, the student schedules a format check with the Office of Graduate Studies. Once the formatting is approved, the student may deposit the thesis/report with the Office of Graduate Studies. It is customary for committee members to receive copies of the final thesis/report.

Upon successful completion of courses and the thesis/report, the student is granted the MA degree.

The student must apply to graduate with the Office of Graduate Studies during the first 12 days of the term in which they expects to file their thesis/report. This requires submission of an online application.

Suggested timelines for both the [thesis](#) and [report](#) are available on the department's website.

IV. PROGRAM OPTIONS

RTF 388 – INDEPENDENT STUDIES & PROJECTS

The RTF 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](#) (available online or from the RTF Graduate Office). 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.

Unless you specifically petition the grad office, the number of 388s a thesis student may take is *limited to one*. Most faculty members favor 388s only for one specific in-depth set of readings or project in the student's career.

APPLYING UNDERGRADUATE COURSES TOWARD DEGREE

A graduate student is allowed to apply 9 hours of undergraduate, upper-division course work toward his/her graduate degree. No more than 6 of these hours may be taken in either the major or the minor. (For example, the hours may be applied as follows: 6 hours in the minor, 3 hours in RTF or 3 hours in the minor, 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

Students may enroll in certain [production and screenwriting](#) courses for credit. A limited number of seats may be available and instructors must provide permission.

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

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 6 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 12th day of class, adds/drops are submitted to the RTF Graduate Coordinator and approval is required from the RTF Graduate Advisor. Any add/drop involving a 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 RTF 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 course.

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. Faculty may obtain these forms from the RTF Graduate Office. University regulations prohibit graduate students from carrying the form to the instructor.

INCOMPLETES

The RTF Department and the Office of Graduate Studies strongly discourage students from delaying completion of the work required to successfully pass their courses. **When students have more than one "temporary incomplete" (which appears as an "X" on transcripts), they jeopardize their successful progress toward the degree.**

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 is responsible for reporting the “Q” grade.

An incomplete taken for a fall course must be cleared by the end of the spring semester. An incomplete taken for either a spring or summer course must be cleared by the end of the fall semester. Check the academic calendar for specific dates (and [Key Dates for Grads link](#)). **The student is responsible for ensuring that her/his instructor has submitted the appropriate paperwork for the grade change.**

Any “X” that remains on a transcript for more than one semester is converted to an “I” (permanent incomplete). A temporary 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.

In the case that a student needs more time to complete work in a course for which s/he currently holds a temporary incomplete (X), that request must be made by the instructor of record to the Office of Graduate Studies and should be submitted well before the deadline to file a grade change form on the incomplete (which is the last day of grade reporting for the long-semester after the incomplete was originally recorded).

The formal request for an extension of an incomplete is the responsibility of the instructor of record and is decided by the Office of Graduate Studies. Students making such requests should leave plenty of time for a discussion of their request with the instructor, and for the instructor to consider that request and to file a request for the extension, and for the Office of Graduate Studies to review the instructor's request. Students should bear in mind closures of the University due to holidays.

Last-minute requests or requests for extensions made after the deadline for the grade change are likely to receive a negative response from the Office of Graduate Studies, particularly if the student is not in good academic standing, not making satisfactory academic progress, and/or has already had two or more semesters to complete their work in the course.

WITHDRAWAL

Dropping an entire course load constitutes withdrawal from the University. A student must contact the RTF 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 Office of Graduate Studies 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 RTF Graduate Advisor and complete the Authorization 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 Office of Graduate Studies, after making a copy for his/her 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 MA student's application to graduate, no course on the student's program of study may be older than six years.

CHANGES IN THESIS/REPORT COMMITTEES

Thesis/report 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. The student requesting such a change should contact the RTF Graduate Coordinator.

V. ASSISTANTSHIPS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND FINANCIAL AID

FUNDING & SUPPORT

Students admitted to the RTF MA program in Media Studies are not guaranteed funding. Therefore, we encourage MA students to look elsewhere on campus for employment, such as the libraries, college or department media centers, athletic tutoring, and the Undergraduate Writing Center. Salary and benefits vary depending on whether you are employed 50% time (20 hours/week), 25% time (10 hours/week), or at an hourly rate. Salary rates change annually.

In rare instances, an MA student is supported by the RTF Department if funding is available and her/his skills fit the position needed. Such funding is provided as compensation for employment as a Teaching Assistant (TA) or Research Assistant (RA). Consult the Funding Section of the PhD student handbook online for definitions of those positions.

FELLOWSHIPS & FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid resources are very limited at UT, although the RTF Department does what it can to try to 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. The RTF Graduate Office maintains a file of fellowship, scholarship, and research grant programs that we encourage you to explore.

Each year, the RTF Department is given an opportunity to nominate students for various fellowships. The Office of Graduate Studies and the College of Communication provide a number of fellowships to graduate students. The nominees are usually PhD or advanced MFA students, however.

Other fellowships and financial aid information will be circulated by the Graduate Advisor via email. Also, the RTF Graduate Office maintains [a webpage](#) with many helpful links. Students are encouraged to work with their Faculty Advisor and the RTF Graduate Advisor in determining the fellowships and other funding opportunities for which you might be eligible.

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.

Please remember that the RTF website provides [links to important forms](#) and lists key deadlines. Be sure to look there for more information.