

Master of Fine Arts In Film and Media Production
Department of Radio Television Film
The University of Texas at Austin

Effective date of graduate student handbook publication: Aug 2023

MFA GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

Film & Media Production

Department of Radio-Television-Film
The University of Texas at Austin
2023 – 2024

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

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Program Overview

The MFA program in Film and Media Production at UT embodies the fiercely independent spirit for which Austin's filmmaking community is renowned. At RTF, we mentor talented student artists, spurring them to strengthen their craft, develop their unique voices, and master the art of cinematic storytelling. The program allows students to explore a curriculum focused on narrative and documentary filmmaking and the expanding field of digital arts. It provides a challenging environment where students produce work in traditional and alternative forms, and where creative and critical writing is an integral dimension of this process.

Our MFA program in Film and Media Production also provides students with a unique opportunity to enrich their education through a variety of other courses within the RTF Department and the larger university. The Department offers programs of study in screenwriting, communication technology and policy, ethnic and minority issues, history and criticism of media texts and institutions, international communications, gender and sexuality issues in media, and topics in mass communication theory and research.

Using This Handbook

This handbook is designed as a reference tool to help you understand the steps involved in obtaining your graduate degree as well as how to navigate University and RTF Department policies and procedures. 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](#) and the [graduate student wiki](#) 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 having to petition the Office of Graduate Studies for an extension.

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

1. Check your email often. Please get in the habit of using your UT email account. A condition of your employment at any point during your time in the program is that you will be required to use your UT email account.
2. If your postal address, email address, or telephone number changes, be sure to update them at UT Direct.

3. 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.

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, [Teresa Warner](#), 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, [Sarah Seulki Oh](#) currently holds this position for Media Production and Screenwriting, [Madhavi Mallapragada](#) and holds this position for Media Studies. 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.

Accommodations for Students With Disabilities

Accommodations for students with disabilities are provided through the [Services For Students With Disabilities department](#). If a student wishes to set up academic accommodations they will have to [register with SSD](#). After being approved for accommodations, students will need to request Accommodation Letters each semester to notify instructors of their accommodations and to discuss how the accommodations will be provided. Accommodations are always provided on an individualized basis depending on a student's unique experience.

Flexibility with Deadlines

The instructor and the student will need to discuss the specific flexibility that can be provided for deadlines throughout the semester. This accommodation may not apply to all assignments so students should discuss specific expectations with the instructor.

Extended Time

Students with disabilities may require additional time for taking tests and completing work in class. Unless efficiency or speed is the essential skill that is being assessed, students may be allowed additional time for all exams, in-class quizzes, in-class writing assignments and labs.

The University also provides [Housing and Dining accommodations](#).

More information can be found on the [SSD website](#)

Student Grievances

Graduate students have the right to seek redress of any grievance related to academic and non-academic issues that are relevant to the student's progress towards a graduate degree. If there is a grievance that cannot be resolved with a faculty member, the student should contact their Graduate Advisor, who shall make an attempt to resolve the issue informally. If these efforts are unsuccessful, the Graduate Advisor shall attempt to resolve the dispute with the help of the Associate Chair of Production and/or the Chair of the Department. However, if the student feels such efforts are not fruitful or appropriate, they may elect to file a formal grievance at any time,.

Grade disputes are handled according to departmental review policies by the department offering the course in question. The order of review for grade disputes is the course instructor, graduate advisor, department chair (or the director of the academic program if there is no department), and dean of the college or school offering the course. The decision of the college or school dean is final.

Non-academic grievances submitted to the Graduate School will be referred by the dean of the Graduate School to the appropriate University administrative office, normally the Office of the Dean of Students, the Office of Human Resources, or the college/school dean in which the incident being grieved occurred.

More information can be found [here](#).

II. REGISTRATION

Course Load

A 10-hour course load (3 classes) is conventional for most RTF MFA students in the fall and spring semesters (UT's "long session"). In their first semester of the program, production MFAs take 13 hours (4 classes).

A minimum 9-hour course load (3 classes) is required to maintain financial aid. **International students** are required to register for at least 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 10 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 and to prepare you for your work, we require that you meet with the appropriate Graduate Advisor prior to the registration period. Students who fail to meet with the graduate advisor during the pre-registration advising period risk not being considered for a teaching assistantship.

Registration

For detailed registration instructions, see the [Course Permission and Registration Guide for RTF Graduate Students](#).

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 about your plans for the coming term and the Advisor approves them, 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 a non-media studies graduate course within RTF, 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.

You must also receive instructor consent for any undergraduate course offered within Moody College, including within RTF. With proof of instructor consent, the Graduate Coordinator will submit a petition to the Moody undergraduate advising office to get you registered for the course. For an undergraduate class to count toward your program of work, it must be an upper-division course (i.e., junior/senior level).

- 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 procedures, speak to the Graduate Coordinator as soon as possible.

III. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Program of Study

The MFA degree requires successful completion of 60 course hours. Once you enter, you must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0. The 60 course hours consist of the following:

- 39 RTF production hours (11 required courses)
 - 3 RTF studies hours in RTF 385K History of Film
 - 9 Additional RTF hours (3 courses).
These may be production, studies, or writing courses.
 - 6 Minor/Supporting Work hours (2 courses).
 - 3 Master's Report hours (RTF 398R)
-

60 Total hours (18 classes)

Academic Plan of Study Detailed Description

YEAR 1:

The primary purpose of the first year production courses is to teach the fundamentals of documentary and narrative filmmaking while at the same time fostering collaboration among the cohort. These fundamental classes in Editing, Cinematography, Audio, Screenwriting, and Directing are meant to help the student develop their technical skills which will support their progress through the rest of the program.

Throughout the year, keep in mind that the 881 classes are the place to learn and master new skills, for experimentation and for making mistakes. Given the purpose of these courses, you should not have any expectation that what you produce during Year 1 will be suitable for submission to festivals. Projects may indeed exceed these expectations, but student ambitions will not be permitted to conflict with the courses' primary goals. For instance, an incoming student with significant cinematography experience will not be allowed to photograph all of his/her classmates' projects to the detriment of everyone else's camera and lighting skills. Individual and class projects require that students function in a variety of crew roles so that they learn them all.

RTF 380C (Fall): Screenwriting for Directors. Though focusing on the short script, 380C explores basic dramatic principles – story, character, and structure – which are applicable to all forms of narrative screenwriting. Students apply these narrative principles to the development of their own original short scripts, with an emphasis on the writing process: from the initial premise, through character exploration and outlining, to drafting and revision. At the end of the semester, students will leave class with short scripts ready to shoot in the spring RTF 881KB narrative production class.

RTF 390C (Fall): Introduction to Editing. RTF 390C provides a comprehensive

introduction to the principles and techniques of editing media in a variety of settings, with a strong emphasis on the cinematic tradition and its development. Both aesthetic and practical approaches will be addressed through a variety of exercises, and these along with readings, screenings, and group discussion will prepare students for the editing phases of their 881KA projects near the end of the semester.

RTF 881KA (Fall): Principles of Film and Television Documentary Production. This course focuses on directing and producing short documentaries. Using a combination of screenings, workshops, discussion and analysis, all in parallel with each student's semester-long documentary project, the course covers aspects of film structure that pertain to both documentary and narrative. Documentary projects, within a range of 10-15 minutes in length, will be completed and screened at semester's end.

RTF 388P (Fall): Cinematography. RTF 388P is experimental in nature, with an emphasis on sharpening visual awareness, through practice with a variety of lenses, lighting instruments, cameras, and formats. In order to encourage students to think cinematically in both documentary and dramatic work, a number of exercises will be assigned to help students achieve greater creative and personal expression.

RTF 385K (Spring): Film History. RTF 385K is a survey of international film history. The course will focus on the evolution of motion picture technology, the development of the medium as a business and as a mode of artistic expression, the primary artistic film movements, the growth of film genres, and the work of major filmmakers.

RTF 390E (Spring): Audio for Picture: Production and Post-Production. This class addresses audio for picture: from conception and pre-production design, through production recording, and on to post-production design and editing. It is an intensive, hands-on introduction to the basics of audio for picture. Listening and imagining are critical, as is learning to operate the machinery. The class will introduce analog and digital recording techniques for picture, as well as digital editing on a Pro Tools workstation. The course is integrated with the two other Spring semester courses, so that you can develop and apply your growing skills within your own projects and those of your cohort.

RTF 881KB (Spring): Principles of Film and Television Production. This course is an intensive workshop in narrative directing and film production. Its goal is to develop the ability and self-confidence to translate, from the page to the screen, the narrative and corresponding visual/aural structures of a scene or short film. The course explores the role of the director in narrative filmmaking and the director's storytelling and aesthetic responsibilities. Investigation of the director/actor relationship will be a priority, and casting, rehearsal technique, acting theory and process, and staging issues will be explored in depth. For the final project, each student will direct and edit an original short film, under seven minutes in length. In addition, each student will fill a number of crew positions on other students' projects. Readings, exercises, screenings and other assignments throughout the semester are designed to sharpen the directors' narrative and visual awareness. Students should plan to be in production on their final film

projects during Spring Break week.

Year-end Review. At the conclusion of Year 1, you will participate in a faculty review of your first-year work in order to monitor your progress and determine suitability for continuation in the MFA program. Attendance is required of full-time production area faculty, but these reviews are open to any interested faculty and any fellow students you wish to invite. The review will include: a discussion of your work from your first year, and faculty review of the narrative script or documentary treatment for the project you intend to shoot as your pre-thesis (qualifying) project in the Fall of your second year.

Your pre-thesis script or treatment must be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator at least one week prior to your review for distribution to the production and screenwriting faculty.

YEAR 2:

RTF 488M (Fall): Pre-thesis Production. In contrast to the 881KA/KB classes, the purpose of RTF 488M in the Fall of the second year is quite specific: production of your pre-thesis project. You must complete production prior to the end of the semester. You will receive an Incomplete should you fail to do so, and you will not be permitted to register for the Spring 488M class (Pre-thesis Post-production) until the Incomplete is cleared from your record. You are not required to write or produce this project, only to direct and edit. Your pre-thesis must be a complete, stand-alone project, and not an excerpt from a larger work.

Pre-thesis fiction projects shall be under 12 minutes in length, and documentary projects shall not exceed 30 minutes. Please note that departmental planning for equipment and facilities usage is based on these running times.

Selection of your crew is entirely up to you with one exception: all major positions (everything but areas of extreme specialization such as special effects) must be filled by currently enrolled UT-Austin students. In rare cases, exceptions may be made for recent UT grads or in cases where shooting is taking place a significant distance from Austin. However, these exceptions must be cleared ahead of time with your instructor.

Scheduling your shoot will take place on a first come/first signed-up basis, assuming that all pre-production paperwork (including the script/treatment) is in order. Fiction projects are allowed seven days for principal photography, with one equipment check-out. This seven-day period is inclusive of check-out and check-in days—e.g., check-out on a Wednesday and check-in on the following Tuesday—and there will be no exceptions. For documentary projects, the number of shooting days that you are allowed should be negotiated with your instructor. Pick-up days may be petitioned during the Spring 488M class as part of the post-production process, but note that spring check-outs will truly be for pick-ups only, and not for extra production days simply because the footage did not turn out as hoped. Poor planning/coverage on your part during the Fall Semester is not a justification for such pick-ups. Students do not have access to production equipment in the Spring except in connection with such 488M instructor-approved pick-ups.

Locations used in your shooting must be cleared ahead of time with signed location releases. Any shoots taking place outside of Travis County must be cleared in advance with your 488M instructor, the equipment check-out manager, and the production area head.

Equipment check-out requests will not be approved until your instructor signs off on your script or documentary treatment. The remainder of the required paperwork must be submitted at least one week prior to your scheduled check-out, or your check-out will be canceled. Required pre- production paperwork includes:

NARRATIVE:

Lined script

Script breakdown sheets (by scene)

Shot list

Shot plot (map) or storyboards

Budget

Cast and crew list + releases

Schedule

Safety plan (if required). Note that a safety plan is required if ANY scenes feature stunts, pyrotechnics, and/or driving shots where the camera is on or in a moving car. Your safety plan must be approved at least a week ahead of your checkout by your 488M instructor and the College of Communication's Assistant Director of Production Services.

DOCUMENTARY:

Treatment

Shot list

Budget

Crew list + releases

Schedule

Safety plan (if required). Note that a safety plan is required if ANY scenes feature stunts, pyrotechnics, and/or driving shots where the camera is on or in a moving car. Your safety plan must be approved at least a week ahead of your checkout by your 488M instructor and the College of Communication's Assistant Director of Production Services.

Production equipment is allocated in accordance with the Fall Equipment Allocation, which changes from year to year as technology and departmental resources evolve. The Equipment Allocation is available on the RTF website. Please note that until August 1 thesis students will have priority with respect to reserving Cameras, Sound, Lenses and HMIs for fall semester or winter break shoots. Thesis students will not have this priority after August 1

RTF 388T (Spring): Producing Film and Television. RTF 388T will be taught as the Producing Short Films class. Though the principles and steps involved to produce a short film is not different than producing a feature film, it is also a unique discipline of its own. How do you tell an interesting and compelling story in a short film? How do you translate a minimum budget into maximum quality on screen? How do you navigate the film festival circuit? This class will focus on the fundamental aspects of development, pre-production, production, and distribution of producing a short film.

RTF 488M (Spring): Pre-thesis Post-Production. Again, the purpose of this class is quite specific: completion of ALL of the post-production processes of your Pre-thesis piece, including scheduling, editing, music composition if required, sound design and mixing, visual effects work and final onlining. Note that you will not receive a grade for this class until your pre-thesis is completely onlined and mixed. If your film is not finished by the end of the Spring semester, you will receive an Incomplete for the course, you will not be permitted to register for the Thesis Production class the following Fall, and you will be required to register for 388S in subsequent semesters until you complete your Pre-thesis in order to continue in the program. Failure to complete your pre-thesis film in a timely manner will also impact future TA assignments.

YEAR 3:

RTF 488M (Fall): Thesis Production. This is the thesis pre-production and production class. You are not required to write, shoot, produce or edit your thesis project—only to direct. There are no restrictions with regard to form or genre. Completed fiction theses shall be no longer than 30 minutes in length, and completed documentary theses shall not exceed 60 minutes in length.

Selection of your crew is entirely up to you. You can work with non-UT crew for your thesis films. Note that some student film competitions (including the Student Emmys and Student Academy Awards) require that students fill all crew roles. In addition, please note that graduate student editing suite access rules have no provision for use of our post-production facilities by anyone who is not a registered student, under any circumstances.

Scheduling your shoot will be on a first come/first signed-up basis, assuming that all pre-production paperwork (including your script/treatment) is in order. Fiction projects are allowed up to 12 days for principal photography, with a maximum of two check-outs. Check-out and check-in days for thesis shoots do not count toward your 12 shooting day total. Note: You may not shoot for more than six consecutive days without giving your crew a full day of rest.

For documentary projects, the number of shooting days you are allowed should be negotiated with your Thesis Committee supervisor. Pick-up days may be petitioned from the Production Area Head, with a specific proposal and shooting plan that has been approved by your entire Thesis Committee. However, please note that poor planning/coverage on your part, as with the pre-thesis project, is not a justification for such pick-ups, and that neither your committee nor the Production Area Head can grant extra access to equipment outside of exceptional cases.

Locations used in your shooting must be cleared ahead of time with signed location releases. Any shoots taking place outside of Travis County must be cleared in advance with your Thesis Committee and the equipment check-out manager.

Equipment check-out requests will not be approved until your Committee signs off on your script or documentary treatment. Pre-production paperwork includes:

NARRATIVE:

Lined script

Script breakdown sheets (by scene)

Shot list

Shot plot (map) or storyboards

Budget

Cast and crew list + releases

Schedule

Safety plan (if required). Note that a safety plan is required if ANY scenes feature stunts, pyrotechnics, and/or driving shots where the camera is on or in a moving car. Your safety plan must be approved at least a week ahead of your checkout by your 488M instructor and the College of Communication's Assistant Director of Production Services.

DOCUMENTARY:

Treatment

Shot list

Budget

Crew list + releases

Schedule

Safety plan (if required). Note that a safety plan is required if ANY scenes feature stunts, pyrotechnics, and/or driving shots where the camera is on or in a moving car. Your safety plan must be approved at least a week ahead of your checkout by your 488M instructor and the College of Communication's Assistant Director of Production Services.

Production equipment is allocated in accordance with the Fall Equipment Allocation, which changes from year to year as technology and departmental resources evolve. The Equipment Allocation is available on the RTF website. Please note that until September 30 thesis students will have priority with respect to reserving Cameras, Sound, Lenses and HMIs for fall semester or winter break shoots. Thesis students will not have this priority after September 30.

RTF 488M (Spring): Practicum in Film and Video Production, Thesis Post-Production. This class is an independent study under the supervision of your Thesis Committee Chair. You will meet with your thesis committee on a regular basis throughout the semester.

RTF 398R (Master's Report): In this course, you will write a thesis report about the experience of making your thesis film. If you do not complete your thesis by the spring of your 3rd year, you must enroll in RTF 398R every semester afterward if you need to access university equipment or facilities to finish your thesis, AND during the semester you intend to graduate. Access includes any equipment checkout and/or use of post facilities, including color-correction and sound mix. [An exception to this requirement can be made over the summer only IF you do not intend to graduate over the summer.

In this case, you would register for RTF 196 to access equipment and facilities.]

Your thesis report must be signed by every member of your thesis committee, and should include, at minimum:

1. a description of the project and your production process (3 – 5 double-spaced pages)
2. a working link to the film
3. appendices, including your final script and final budget as well as, at minimum, the other production paperwork you prepared to get cleared for equipment check-out.

Please note that the Master's Report class **MUST** be taken in your final semester, the one in which you intend to graduate. You may take the Master's Report multiple times, but only once for credit that counts toward your degree, and it **MUST** be taken in the semester in which you graduate. If RTF 398R is not successfully completed in a given semester, the thesis supervisor will assign the student "CR" denoting that the report is "in progress;" however this grade of "CR" will not count towards the student's program of work. The student will have to register for the class again. Note that a student does not need to be "in residence" in order to take RTF 398R.

Please also note that the Graduate School has very specific requirements for formatting and submission of thesis reports, and you should familiarize yourself with those requirements via the Grad School's website:

<https://gradschool.utexas.edu/academics/theses-and-dissertations/digital-submission-requirement>

After Completion of All Coursework

If you complete your required coursework but still haven't completed your thesis, you need to keep the following in mind:

The university requires graduate students to be "continually enrolled" until you graduate. This is defined as enrolled in a minimum of three hours (one course) during the fall or spring semesters. No minimum enrollment is required during the summer, unless you intend to graduate over the summer.

On occasion, we are able to offer employment as teaching assistants to students beyond their third year in the program. The university requires that teaching assistants be fully enrolled, which means a minimum of nine hours (3 courses) during the fall and spring semesters. No student should count on employment past year 3 of the program. If you need to access university equipment or facilities to finish your thesis, you will need to enroll in RTF 398R every semester in which such access is required, **AND** during the semester you intend to graduate. Access includes any equipment checkout and/or use of post facilities, including color-correction and sound mix. [An exception to this requirement can be made over the summer only **IF** you do not intend to graduate over the summer. In this case, you would register for RTF 196 to access equipment and facilities.]

Required Courses

The following courses are required for completion of your MFA degree in Film and Media Production:

| | |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| RTF 881KA | Principles of Film and TV Production: Directing Documentary |
| RTF 881KB | Principles of Film and TV Production |
| RTF 488M | Pre-Thesis Production |
| RTF 488M | Pre-Thesis Post-Production |
| RTF 488M | Thesis Production |
| RTF 488M | Thesis Post-Production (Independent Study) * |
| RTF 388P | Cinematography |
| RTF 390C | Intro to Editing for Grad |
| RTF 380C | Screenwriting for Directors |
| RTF 390E | Audio for Picture: Production & Post-Production |
| RTF 388T | Producing Film and Television (Producing Short Films) |
| RTF 385K | Film History |
| RTF 398R | Thesis Report |

*You will sign up for this final 488M as an independent study with your Thesis Committee Chair. Or, with your Thesis Committee Chair's approval, you may take this required independent study in a subsequent semester.

Required Sequence

The eleven required production classes (881KA, Editing, Screenwriting, 881KB, Audio, Cinematography, and Producing, along with the three 488M classes and the 488M independent study) and the History of Film class must be taken in sequence during the specific semesters outlined above. Waivers out of these classes based on prior professional or academic work are not permitted. Otherwise, you are free to fulfill your other degree requirements as you see fit, after consultation with the MFA Graduate Advisor and the production faculty. Note that temporary grades of "Incomplete" are not allowed to be given in required first year production courses or in the Spring 488M of year two. For additional information on incompletes, please see the relevant information in "Section IV: Grading."

Minor/Supporting Work

You are required to take 6 hours (two courses) either outside the RTF Department, or any RTF courses that fall outside your major area of study (film and media production). Please note, however, that required courses (History of Film and Screenwriting for Directors) cannot be counted toward the Supporting Work requirement. You will determine which classes will fulfill this requirement in consultation with the MFA Graduate Advisor.

Thesis Committee Selection

Throughout Year 1 and the first semester of Year 2, you should consider which faculty members you wish to invite to serve on your thesis committee. The thesis committee consists of three faculty members who serve as counselors with regard to your creative efforts and as jurors of your work:

The committee supervisor must be a tenured or tenure-track member of the RTF production faculty, meaning the supervisor must have the rank of Assistant Professor or higher.

Your second committee member can be a member of the production faculty, the studies faculty, or the faculty of another department.

The Production Area Head and Graduate Advisor will assign a third faculty member to your committee, from within the Production Area. This is done in order to spread the thesis advising workload fairly among faculty and because second year MFA students will not have had a chance to take a class from all production faculty.

You are allowed to add additional faculty members to your thesis committee as you see fit although committees with more than three members are atypical. Please know that all committee members must sign off on your thesis report.

The names of your thesis committee supervisor and your second committee member should be reported to the Graduate Coordinator's office no later than Spring Break of your second year. Any proposed committee member who is not a UT Assistant Professor, Associate Professor or Professor must be approved for committee service by the RTF Graduate Studies Committee.

Year-End Review

At the conclusion of Year 2, you will meet with your newly-formed thesis committee. Attendance at these reviews is required of your thesis committee members, but the reviews are also open to any interested faculty and any fellow students you may wish to invite. To monitor your progress and determine suitability for continuation in the MFA program, this review will 1) assess your second-year creative and academic achievements, and 2) review the dramatic script or documentary treatment that you intend to shoot as your thesis the following Fall. Your script must be submitted to your review committee at least one week prior to your review.

Thesis Committee Supervision

Beginning in the Fall of Year 3, students should meet with their Thesis Committee Supervisors at least once-per-month, and with their entire Thesis Committees once-per-semester. The purpose of this schedule is to facilitate regular, productive interaction between students and their committees.

At the conclusion of Year 3, if you are not scheduled to graduate in May you will participate in a faculty review of your progress toward the completion of your thesis. Attendance at these reviews is required of your Thesis Committee members, but the reviews are also open to any interested faculty and any fellow students you wish to invite.

Note that under no circumstances will an MFA degree be awarded without:

1. your completed thesis production having been screened in a group meeting with all of your thesis committee members present and giving approval to the production. Note that completion of the thesis project is defined as an onlined, mixed, color-corrected master with all final VFX. Anything less will not be considered complete;
2. your thesis committee chair reporting to the MFA Graduate Advisor that ALL thesis committee members have read your completed Thesis script and Masters Report and that these documents have their approval;
3. your completed Master's Report having been signed by all of your thesis committee members

Upon completion of your Thesis work, a copy of your film should be submitted to the RTF Department's Media Librarian.

IV. PROGRAM OPTIONS

Craft Specialization

Upon the successful completion of Year 2, you have the option of petitioning the production faculty to allow you to substitute craft specialization on a negotiated number of undergraduate thesis or graduate film or video projects in lieu of directing your own third year thesis project. Note that this negotiation will be based on the scope and ambition of each project and your precise role and degree of involvement. Your committee, along with the Production Area Head and the Graduate Advisor, will determine an appropriate plan of work to equal the challenge of directing a Thesis film. Areas of craft specialization include editing, cinematography, producing, and audio. You would still be required to take the Year 3 488M classes and either complete RTF 398R, with your thesis report topic being your area of craft specialization, or take an additional RTF Elective or Supporting Work class if you choose the Coursework-Only option. Please do not underestimate the difficulty of finding an appropriate set of suitable projects on which you can work, since any delay in such a project could delay your own progress in the program.

Students who elect this option will have equipment privileges according to their areas of specialization. For example, students who specialize in cinematography will be able to check out camera, lighting and grip equipment for up to twelve days (the same number of days they would be permitted to check out equipment were they directing their own narrative thesis film), but they will not be permitted to check out audio equipment or use school editing facilities.

Undergraduate courses

Of the total of 60 course hours, 9 hours may be from upper-division undergraduate classes (e.g., RTF 320 – RTF 379). No more than 6 hours in the major are permitted.

When registering for undergraduate courses, keep in mind that undergraduates receive first priority. You will not be allowed to register for undergraduate courses until after the 5th day of class. If you are interested in an undergraduate course, you should contact the course instructor and the Undergraduate Advisor.

Credit/No Credit

Students may take 12 hours (4 courses) of the required 60 for Credit/No Credit. However, History of Film and the required production classes may not be taken credit/no credit. Some courses may be restricted to letter-grade basis only. It is the student's responsibility to check the grading status of courses prior to registration.

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.)

Independent study courses

You will take the 488M independent study course in the spring of your third year or in a subsequent semester. In addition, one other independent study (RTF 388) may count toward your degree.

To register for an independent study with a faculty member, first contact that faculty member and discuss the parameters for the study. The scope and requirements of any independent study should be as rigorous as those of organized courses. Independent studies should not be taken in lieu of a similar organized course that is regularly offered (e.g., RTF regularly offers screenwriting courses, so you should not register for an independent study to write a screenplay.) A written proposal that outlines assignment deadlines and tentative meeting schedule must be approved by the faculty member. Once the faculty member agrees, download the [Independent Study form](#) from the Graduate Wiki page and have them sign it. This signed form must be emailed to the Graduate Coordinator and Graduate Advisor before a student is given permission to register for RTF 388.

Internships

Only one 3-credit internship class can count toward your degree. [Download the Internship form from the Wiki page.](#)

Add/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 a 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.*

Grade Changes

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

If course requirements remain unfulfilled at the conclusion of a semester, instructors have the discretion to award a temporary grade of “Incomplete.” However, many instructors will not award an incomplete under any circumstances, and students should never assume that this is an option. Additional rules with regard to grades of Incomplete:

- You may only carry one incomplete at a time
- Incompletes may not be awarded in the required first year production courses
- Incompletes may not be awarded in the 2nd year Spring 488M course
- An incomplete in the 2nd year Fall 488M course must be resolved by the beginning of the next semester (the mid-January start of the Spring semester) in order to be allowed into the 2nd year Spring 488M course
- In courses other than the exceptions noted above, an incomplete taken for a fall course must be cleared by the end of the following spring semester. An incomplete taken for either a spring or summer course must be cleared by the end of the following 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.**
- 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.
- 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 they currently hold a temporary incomplete (X), that request must be made by the instructor of record to the Graduate School 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 Graduate School. 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 Graduate School 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 Graduate School, 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.

The RTF Department and the Graduate School 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.**

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 and Readmission

Students desiring a leave of absence must petition the Graduate Advisor for MFA programs. During Years 1 and 2, leaves will be granted for serious personal emergencies only. This is an extremely rare occurrence. If you are granted a leave, your readmission to the program is guaranteed, but because our MFA classes max at 12 students, your return may be delayed until there is an opening available. Leaves for professional opportunities will only be granted after the successful completion of Year 2 of the program.

If a student is not enrolled in school for one long session, they 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 of absence, they should 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 an MFA student's application to graduate, no course on the student's program of study may be older than six years.

Changes in Thesis Committees

Students can make changes to their Thesis Committee by petitioning to add, drop, or switch members of their committee. Students will need the approval of the Graduate Advisor, and in the case of dropping/switching committee members, also the approval of the faculty member affected.

V. PROGRAM INFO

Academic Standing

Students must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0. A student who receives a grade lower than a C (including a grade of C-) in a required class will be required to take the class again, and achieve a grade of C or better prior to graduation. Note carefully that, in the case of the six core, 4-credit hour production classes (881KA, 881KB and the four 488Ms), this effectively means that a student who receives a grade lower than a C in one of these courses will be held back a full year, since these courses must be taken in a specific order, as detailed above. If a student receives a grade lower than a C in one of the other five required RTF production classes (Cinematography, Editing, Screenwriting, Audio, Producing) or History of Film, the student will be required to take the class again, and achieve a grade of C or higher, during the next long semester (Fall or Spring) in which the course is offered. However, a student who receives a grade lower than a C in Cinematography, Editing, Screenwriting, Audio, Producing or History of Film will nonetheless be permitted to take the next class in the sequence of the 4 credit-hour production classes.

Moody Innovation Fellowship

Moody Innovation Fellowship is available for Pre-Thesis and Thesis project during the second and third year of the program. Each Pre-Thesis project shall receive \$1000. Typically, each Thesis Project receives approximately \$7000. The exact amount is determined each year by the College. Your Graduate Advisor will be in contact each year to disseminate info on applying forward receiving the Fellowship. Note that continued funding of Moody Innovation Fellowships by Moody College is expected but not guaranteed.

To be eligible for the Moody Innovation Fellowship in the second year of the program, a student must earn a "B" or better in each of the first year production courses (881KA and 881KB). To be considered for a Moody Innovation Fund Award in the third year of the program, a student must earn a "B" or better in each of the second year 488M classes. You must also be in good academic standing as defined by the Graduate School and RTF and have thesis committee approval.

Employment by the Department

Employment in the Department, as Teaching Assistants or in other positions, offers MFA students excellent opportunities to hone their technical and teaching skills. However, the Department does not guarantee employment to any MFA student. It is very unusual for first-year students to receive offers of employment. Similarly, the Department does not generally hire students after their third year in the program. A number of factors, including academic progress and performance in previous positions, will determine whether the Department offers positions during a student's second and third years in the program. ***Students who have more than one Incomplete from previous semesters or fail to meet with the graduate advisor during the pre-registration advising period are not eligible for teaching assistantship.***

The Department expects all students to demonstrate standard workplace professionalism during their employment here. For example, employees are expected to

notify their faculty supervisor of anticipated absences*, arrange for substitutes as appropriate, and fulfill their required duties during work time instead of working on their own projects, and work until all final projects and screening masters are delivered at the end of the semester. Employees who fail to meet the appropriate standards may be removed from their TA-ships and will not be reappointed in subsequent semesters.

First-time teaching assistants must participate in relevant training during August prior to the start of their appointment. Teaching assistants must have and use a university e-mail address.

* Please note that employees who fail to attend the first class meeting and the first lab (if applicable) each semester shall forfeit their employment. Employees may not arrange for substitutes at the first class meeting or first lab.

Use of Equipment

Students are not allowed to checkout equipment for any non-course related productions.

If a piece of equipment that has been reserved becomes unavailable **5 days** prior to a shoot, it will be replaced with an equivalent replacement even if this requires renting equipment at the cost of the College. All other non-UT equipment costs are the responsibility of the student. **** Abuse of this policy will lead to disciplinary action.

Any 35mm or 16mm camera (and accessories) are available for all MFA productions (KB, Pre-Thesis, Thesis) as well as UG Thesis, Intro and Advanced Cinematography, and Music Video Production on a first-come, first-serve basis.

A limited number of MFA Thesis Production Checkouts will be available during the May and December breaks due to the need for equipment inventory and repair needs.

You must examine and test all requested University equipment prior to signing for and removing it from University grounds. While the RTF technical staff does its best to maintain department equipment and keep it in working order, neither the RTF Department nor the University can be held liable for faulty equipment or the harm it may do to film or other media. At the beginning of every semester, it is the responsibility of each MFA student to obtain, read, and sign the Equipment Check-out Rules document, which details all Department policies and penalties for abuse of these policies. Please bear in mind that you are not the only person in need of equipment and that the equipment is depended upon by other students, undergraduate and graduate, whose projects are every bit as important to them as yours is to you. RTF Department equipment should be given the same care and watched over with the same diligence that you would exercise if you owned or had rented the equipment from a commercial rental house.

You are required to purchase equipment insurance for the use of UT equipment. There is a nominal insurance premium that is required for every production class in which you are enrolled before equipment check-out will be permitted (e.g., two production classes taken during one semester requires two insurance payments). Note that in the event of damage, loss, or theft of RTF equipment, this policy still leaves a substantial deductible that must be paid.

In single-person projects (including Pre-thesis and Thesis projects), equipment damage or loss is to be paid for by the director. In the case of group projects, each member of the group is equally responsible for the damages, and costs will be divided accordingly. It is up to the individual members of the group to decide exactly where responsibility lies and whether certain members of the group should be reimbursed by a particular member or members deemed more culpable.

Equipment damage must be paid within seven calendar days of official notification by the Equipment Check-out area or by the last class day of the semester, whichever comes first. If payment is not made by these deadlines, your student record will be barred and you will no longer be eligible to check out equipment, register for classes, or receive your degree until the damages are paid.

Costs of Production

Student production costs are borne by the student. You are urged – as in the professional world -- to take a hard look at your resources and means, and plan accordingly.

Awards

All awards, award monies and/or proceeds of any sale of student projects belong to the student. The only exceptions to this policy lie in the case of sponsored projects. Those considering such projects should make sure these issues are resolved in writing prior to taking them on.

Your Responsibilities

While the faculty acknowledges the often all-consuming nature of filmmaking, the work that you do on your own projects (or on your fellow students' projects) should never be used as an excuse to ignore or skip your other classroom obligations or your obligations as a Teaching Assistant. It is your responsibility to make arrangements to cover your other obligations when they come into conflict with your production work.

Original Work

It is expected that the films you make in this program will be new projects. That is, you will not receive academic credit or departmental support for finishing a film that you started prior to matriculation in the MFA program in Film and Media Production.

Copyright

Copyright to student works is retained by the student.

Promotion of student work / License for Use Authorization

In order to promote you and your film, you must authorize us to do so via this form:

[Video License for Use Authorization](https://powerforms.docusign.net/91e96d6c-8e03-4cba-a8f9-c5e17edcda35?env=na1&acct=d40a37d5-d708-44dd-9ea7-aab378b81326&accountId=d40a37d5-)

<https://powerforms.docusign.net/91e96d6c-8e03-4cba-a8f9-c5e17edcda35?env=na1&acct=d40a37d5-d708-44dd-9ea7-aab378b81326&accountId=d40a37d5-> (Links to an external site.)

Important: you still retain all rights to your film. Without this authorization, however, your film will not be eligible to screen at public screenings on campus, nor on the department website. To allow for a festival run, please note that you must select the option for a 2-year embargo if you want to prevent us from posting the film online during this time. At any point after signing this agreement, you can also request a suspension to extend the embargo:

To help us promote your film please send us details about your film and any film festival screenings and or awards:

<https://airtable.com/shrb01AUndMbN8ivq>

UT Trademarks and Landmarks

You may not film identifiable UT landmarks, signage, logos, and uniforms without prior permission. Examples of UT Landmarks include the Tower and the Stadium. Email trademarks@utexas.edu to request approval and include the following in your request: Course title, course number, and name of the class instructor. Stills or links to clips of the landmarks, signage, logos or uniforms you propose to film. Information about future plans for the film (e.g., possible submission to film festivals).

It normally takes 3-5 days to receive a reply. If approval is not granted, please see RTF Office Manager in the RTF office or call them at 512-471-4071 to discuss other options.

Note regarding “in-class” exercises and non-screened class assignments: Most areas around campus are OK to film. Incidental shots of campus landmarks may be OK so long as they are used for educational purposes only, i.e., class assignments, and are not publicly screened.

Applicability

This edition of the Handbook applies to the class of MFA production students entering in the Fall of 2022.

Petitions and Waivers

With regard to the above policies, rules and regulations, the faculty recognizes that extenuating circumstances may, on occasion, prevent adherence to our prescribed plan of study. With that in mind, the faculty reserves the right to waive or modify any of the aforementioned policies or rules if it deems that a particular situation warrants such an action. No student, however, should formulate an academic plan based on anticipation of such a waiver, and any student who does so does so at his/her own risk. Petitions for a waiver of departmental policy must be submitted in writing, or via e-mail, to the

Graduate Advisor for the Department's MFA programs.

Production Approval Policy

Prior to locking production dates, the student will need to first check the MFA Thesis Production Calendar for open days and then submit proposed shoot dates to their thesis committee. The thesis committee supervisor will then check with the production area head to approve proposed dates. The calendar will include "No support" dates as well as 48 hour buffer between shoots.

All productions must be approved by your Thesis Committee Supervisor before Checkout Reservations are made and principal of photography.

All MFA narrative (KA, Pre-thesis and Thesis) and documentary films must have their scripts and proposals reviewed by the RTF Set Safety Coordinator prior to approval for equipment checkout.

All classes have a set equipment allocation. If a student wishes to request an item not allocated to their class, they must receive approval from their instructor (all non-Thesis projects) or their Thesis Supervisor (Thesis projects). The approval must come via the Equipment Request form on the RTF Wiki page. The signed form should be submitted to the RTF Production Area Head and Graduate Advisor, who will discuss the request with Equipment Checkout before granting approval.

Due to insurance and customs concerns, equipment is limited on international shoots to only that which can be carried on a plane. For that reason, the Alexa, Varicam, and other "high-end" cameras are not allowed. Other cameras may be requested, but may not be available due to other requests or class equipment assignment. All students traveling internationally must first get clearance from Texas Global.

Filming on campus is not covered by UT's General Liability Insurance Policy. For that reason, we strongly advise securing outside production insurance for any production that requires filming in a studio on campus.

Post Production Requirements

All MFA Films are required to be close captioned for all End of the Semester Screenings.

The official UT Radio-Television-Film department logo ("logo") is required to be included in end credits of a film project made as a deliverable (that is intended for public screening) for an enrolled UT Radio-Television-Film course. We will provide a link to download the logo file; students can choose either RGB (color) or Knockout (white). Filmmakers must follow the specifications and usage guidelines that will be provided with the logo file. The logo cannot be altered, shared, or used for ANY purpose other than listed here without express written permission from UT Trademarks.

All MFA students and Undergraduate Thesis students who are screening films at the end of the semester should complete the following forms to best of their abilities by two weeks before the final screening date:

1. ***RTF Student Film Directory Form***
[Student Film Directory form](#)

We use this information for:

- promoting the screening/project to the public and press;
 - sharing films with faculty and students;
 - working with festivals, competitions, and screening programs;
 - introducing student work to potential employers or industry connections;
- and
- maintaining an archive of student work.

If any questions, email ewakeman@austin.utexas.edu.

2. ***“License for Use” Agreement***

After students complete the Student Film Directory form, they will receive an email from Docusign with a request to e-sign a “License for Use” agreement. This document should be signed immediately. Note: This agreement is not signing away ownership rights but rather granting UT permission to screen and share the film. **Without this authorization, the film will not be eligible to screen at public screenings on campus, nor on the department website.**

If after the public theatrical end-of-semester screening, students would prefer—for the protection of, say, a festival run—that we wait 2 years to share the film on any public sites, etc., they should check the box requesting a 2-year embargo. Note that filmmakers can also request an extension of the embargo at any time.

If any questions, email ewakeman@austin.utexas.edu.

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](#).

Please remember that the RTF Grad Student Wiki provides **links to [important forms](#)** and lists key deadlines. Be sure to start there when looking for more information.

Certification

I have read the 2023-24 Edition of the Handbook of the Master of Fine Arts Program in Film and Media Production and have reviewed carefully:

- the Film and Media Production program plan of study,
- its associated policies on grading and teaching assistantships,
- the descriptions and requirements of relevant RTF courses, and
- the policies, rules and regulations of the RTF Department, and I agree to abide by them.

Student Signature

Date

Student Printed Name