

Master of Fine Arts in Screenwriting
Department of Radio Television Film
The University of Texas at Austin

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MFA GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

Screenwriting

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

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Upon entering the program, students are introduced to the principles of writing for the screen -- for both features and television -- focusing on characterization, story development and narrative structure. Students will write full-length features, TV specs and pilots. In addition to their core writing workshops, students enroll in required courses in Film History and Development for Screenwriters. During their final semester, M.F.A. candidates work one-on-one with a senior faculty member on their thesis project, leaving the program with polished work suitable for submission to agents, producers, studios and other financing entities.

In addition to writing courses, students are encouraged to use their electives to broaden their critical knowledge and filmmaking experience via the department's film studies and production offerings. The department strongly encourages collaboration between its student screenwriters and filmmakers, which has resulted in award-winning films screening at major festivals worldwide. An internship in the film industry is required as part of the program of work, and past students have interned both in Los Angeles and with Austin-based production companies.

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 Graduate School, 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. 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.

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 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 to 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. Every effort should be made to resolve grievances informally between the student and the faculty member most directly involved or, such efforts failing, by the graduate adviser, the chair of the graduate studies committee of the student's degree program, and/or the chair of the department (or the director of the academic program if there is no department). When serious issues cannot be resolved informally, the graduate student will have recourse to the formal grievance procedure.

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

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

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

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

GRADUATE ADVISOR

In order to ensure that you are taking the courses necessary to fulfill the program's requirements and to prepare you for your work, we require that you meet with the appropriate Graduate Advisor prior to the registration period. You will be prompted via email to sign up for an advising session. 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 a required course in the RTF MFA screenwriting curriculum, 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-screenwriting 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 procedure, speak to the Graduate Coordinator as soon as possible.

III. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Program of Study

The M.F.A. degree requires successful completion of 42 course hours. Once you enter, you must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0. The 42 course hours consist of the following:

- 24 RTF screenwriting hours (8 courses)
 - 3 RTF studies hours in RTF 385K History of Film
 - 3 Additional RTF hours (1 course)
These may be production or studies courses.
 - 3 Internship hours
 - 6 Minor/Supporting Work hours (2 courses)
 - 3 Masters Report (RTF 398R)
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42 Total hours

Academic Plan of Study Detailed Description

Year 1 Fall	Year 1 Spring	Year 2 Fall	Year 2 Spring	Year 2 Summer
380J: First Year Screenwriting	380J: First Year Rewriting	380M: Advanced Screenwriting I	380M: Advanced Screenwriting II	384N: Internship
380N: TV Specs	380N: TV Pilots	380N: The Writers' Room	380N: Development for Screenwriters	RTF 398R Masters Report
Elective or Supporting Work	385K: History of Film	Elective or Supporting Work	Elective or Supporting Work	

YEAR 1:

The primary purpose of the first-year screenwriting program is to introduce students to the fundamentals of writing for both film and television.

RTF 380J FIRST-YEAR SCREENWRITING (Fall)

The gateway course for entering MFA Screenwriters, this class focuses on writing the feature-length screenplay, which means delving into the three primary elements of screenwriting: story, character and structure. Students discuss and evaluate each other's work on a weekly basis, developing their critical skills as screenwriters. By the end of the semester, each student will have a completed treatment, step-outline, and Act I of a feature-length screenplay. RTF Screenwriters will complete-and-revise their screenplay during the Spring, in the 380J companion course.

RTF 380N TV SPECS (Fall)

Introduction to the fundamentals of writing for television where students will develop and write both a one-hour and half-hour television 'spec' based on an existing series.

RTF 380J FIRST-YEAR REWRITING (Spring)

A continuation of the first-year screenwriting class taught in the Fall, this course will focus on the process of revision. As a part of developing an organized strategy for approaching their second drafts, students will also be introduced to the "sequences" method of screenplay structure. All students must have a completed feature-length screenplay ready on the first day of class.

RTF 380N PILOTS (Spring)

Each student will create a new original television show (30 or 60 minute, network or cable) from the ground up: researching the setting and historical moment, inventing the characters and relationships, and ultimately designing the conflicts necessary to propel a show through multiple seasons. Students will then distill all of this work into a single showpiece episode - a pilot - that demonstrates the artistic and commercial potential of the new show. We'll also be looking at a range of produced pilots (both aired and unaired) and discussing what makes the best of them work.

RTF 385K FILM HISTORY FOR MFAs (Spring)

This course is a survey of international film history for graduate students who have not taken previous work in the history and aesthetics of the motion picture. It is required of all RTF MFA students in production and screenwriting. The course will cover the development of the medium from Thomas Edison to Robert Rodriguez. The history of cinema will be looked at from various perspectives (as a technology, an industry, an entertainment medium, and a mode of personal and national expression) and particular attention will be given to the evolution of film's formal elements. Several assignments are designed to acquaint students with how research in film history is conducted.

YEAR 2:

The primary purpose of the second-year screenwriting courses is to expand upon the fundamentals of screenwriting, and to prepare students creatively and professionally for careers as screenwriters after graduation.

RTF 380N WRITERS ROOM WORKSHOP (Fall)

The class will develop and write an entire season of an original Television series. At the

end of the semester, the entire show will be sent out for consideration by every major network and the students will get full writing credit for their episodes.

RTF 380M ADVANCED SCREENWRITING I (Fall)

The goals of this course are as follows: That you complete a feature script or television pilot suitable for submission to agents, production companies and/or contests. That you leave this course a better writer than when you entered. That you help your fellow classmates achieve the above two goals and vice-versa.

RTF 380M ADVANCED SCREENWRITING II (Spring)

In this advanced screenwriting workshop, students write either a feature-length screenplay or an original television pilot (30 or 60 minute). With instructor's permission, students may also write TV specs and revise previous work. Students will continue their exploration of the craft of screenwriting, while finishing polished, professional work that can serve as a calling-card.

RTF 380N DEVELOPMENT FOR SCREENWRITERS (Spring)

The focus of this course is to help students gain an understanding of the screenwriter's role in the film industry and set themselves up for a career as a professional screenwriter. This is an advanced course where students will learn how to create a screenwriter's resume and portfolio, build a network, advocate for themselves, discuss the options of screenplay competitions and fellowships, secure representation and how to be a good client, practice general and staffing meetings, prepare pitches and treatments for writing assignments, develop networking skills for festivals, conferences, and other industry events, and learn how to conduct themselves in a writers room and in production company/studio notes meetings.

RTF 384N INTERNSHIP (Summer)

We require students to complete the *RTF 384N Internship Request to Enroll* form before we authorize registering for the course. Typically, internships are done the summer after the 2nd year, but can be fulfilled anytime over the two-year program. Internships may be done anywhere (ie: NYC, Austin, LA, etc.) as long as it's industry-related and it is up to students to seek out their own internships. The purpose of the internship is to help bridge the gap between leaving the program and entering the industry as an opportunity not only for training but for connections. Your conduct in workshops and demonstrated work effort will also impact instructor's decisions when asked for recommendations for interns from our program by industry professionals.

RTF 398R MASTERS REPORT (Summer)

This course essentially functions as an independent study course where you write your thesis script with your thesis supervisor after completion of your coursework.

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 writing process (3 – 5 double-spaced pages)

2. appendices, including at minimum, the final draft of your script. Other materials may include prior drafts of your script, treatments, and outlines

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.

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.

Required Courses

The following courses are required for completion of your MFA degree in Screenwriting:

RTF 380J	First Year Screenwriting
RTF 380J	First Year Rewriting
RTF 380N	TV Specs
RTF 380N	TV Pilots
RTF 380M	Advanced Screenwriting I
RTF 380N	Development for Screenwriters
RTF 380M	Advanced Screenwriting II
RTF 380N	The Writer's Room
RTF 385K	Film History
RTF 388D	Masters Report

Required Sequence

The required screenwriting classes and the History of Film class must be taken in sequence during specific semesters as 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. 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) outside of your area of RTF specialization (screenwriting). In other words, RTF production or media studies courses would fulfill this requirement, as would most courses outside of RTF. Please note, however, that **required** courses such as History of Film that are outside your area of specialization cannot be counted toward the Supporting Work requirement. You will determine which classes will fulfill this requirement in consultation with the MFA Graduate Adviser.

Thesis Committee Selection

Students must choose their thesis committees by Spring Break of their 2nd year, and names of committee members must be reported to the Graduate Coordinator's office. Students are responsible for coordinating all due dates and deadlines with their committees. A committee of two faculty members is standard: a supervisor and reader. The supervisor must be a member of the RTF screenwriting or production faculty, with the rank of Assistant Professor or higher, while the reader may come from any rank, including lecturer. All members of the committee are required to read and critique the thesis project and may sign off only when the thesis is completed.

Common Questions:

Who can I ask? Your thesis committee supervisor must be from the tenured and tenure-track RTF writing faculty. The second member of your committee, sometimes referred to as your “reader,” can be any GSC member. Translated, this means anyone who regularly teaches grad students, so it can be a tenured/tenure-track faculty member OR a lecturer who teaches grad students.

Am I imposing on faculty? NO. For tenured/tenure-track faculty, serving on student thesis committees is part of the job. It is an expected duty of tenured/tenure-track faculty, so there is no need to be shy about asking. HOWEVER, please know that thesis committee work is not expected of lecturers. We have great lecturers and most enjoy working with grad students on their thesis scripts, so feel free to ask them to be your reader. Keep in mind though that their serving on thesis committees is going above and beyond what is expected of them and that they are free to decline your request.

Can a tenured/tenure track faculty member say “no” to my request? Yes. This would be unusual but for a variety of reasons (usually because the faculty member is already overbooked with thesis committees, or will be on extended leave and thus unable to help you), faculty sometimes have to decline a student’s invitation to serve on a thesis committee.

What’s the functional difference between a supervisor and a reader? Your thesis supervisor will work with you over the course of the summer (or whatever semester

you're graduating) and supervise your rewrite of your thesis script. How often your supervisor reads and responds to your pages will be determined by you and your supervisor. A reader will typically only read and respond to your script twice — once at the start of your rewrite process and then at the conclusion.

Can I have more than two faculty on my committee? Yes, but all members of your committee are required to sign off on your final script draft and Masters Report.

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 screenwriting area faculty, but these reviews are open to any interested faculty and any fellow students you wish to invite.

The review will include:

- A. a discussion of your work from your first year, and
- B. faculty review of the first ten pages of your Feature, Spec and Pilot written during the first year.

Your pages must be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator at least one week prior to your review for distribution to the screenwriting faculty.

The Thesis Project

The thesis script will be a substantial rewrite of an original work -- either a feature or television pilot -- completed or developed during your two years in the MFA screenwriting program. TV specs may be considered with the approval of the thesis committee.

Thesis Committee Supervision

At the end of Year 2 spring semester students will meet with their entire thesis committee to discuss a plan for the thesis project. They will get notes from Committee members and set a schedule.

There will be at least two check ins with the Supervisor. A draft will be submitted to the Supervisor prior to submitting to the Supervisor and Reader for final approval.

It's important to give the committee members *at least* a week to read the final thesis script prior to signing off.

Note that under no circumstances will an M.F.A. degree be awarded without:

1. your completed thesis script having been read and signed off on by all of your thesis committee members.
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 script should be submitted to the RTF Department's Media Librarian.

IV. PROGRAM OPTIONS

UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

Of the total of 42 course hours, 6 hours may be from upper-division undergraduate classes (e.g., RTF 320 – RTF 379).

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 within any Moody department, you should contact the course instructor for approval and then the Graduate Coordinator to initiate the proper petitions forms.

CREDIT / NO CREDIT

Students may take a maximum 9 hours on a Credit/No Credit basis rather than for a letter grade. Courses taken on a Credit/No Credit basis are not computed in the GPA. However, History of Film, and the seven required screenwriting courses may not be taken on a Credit/No Credit basis. 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

The RTF 388 course, "Research Problems in Special Fields" is our department's independent study course. You may take ONE RTF 388 that counts 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.) Once the faculty member agrees, complete [the RTF 388 Course Permission Form](#). This form requires a summary of the project and the supervising professor's signature. This 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 course can count toward your degree. In order to register for RTF 384N, submit a [Request to Enroll Form](#) to the Graduate Coordinator.

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 Screenwriting courses
- 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.

- 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 & READMISSION

Students desiring a leave of absence must petition the Graduate Adviser for MFA programs. During Year 1 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 7 students, your return may be delayed until there is an opening available.

MFA students taking a leave of absence may not be prioritized to TA during their first semester upon return.

If a student is not enrolled in school for one long session, they must re-apply to the Graduate School 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](#) prior to first class day.

The RTF Graduate Advisor approves the Leave of Absence by signing the form. The student then submits the signed form to the Graduate School, after making a copy for 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 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

Changes can be made if there are reasonable circumstances (I.E faculty member has to go on leave). Thesis 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. PROGRAM INFO

CONDUCT IN WORKSHOPS

We expect our screenwriters to be respectful to each other and to instructors both in and out of the classroom. We are training our students not only to be professionals when it comes to your writing, but also how to be collaborative and work well with others. Giving and receiving notes can be challenging and we encourage everyone to “give as you would like to receive” when it comes to notes. If you have an issue with a fellow student, please speak with the instructor or Screenwriting Area Head. Inappropriate and disrespectful behavior won’t be tolerated in the workshops and it will also reflect on whether or not we as a faculty feel you are capable of being a Teaching Assistant.

IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

This is an in-residence program and Zooming into class is up to the instructor and only acceptable for limited days and must be approved by the instructor prior to class.

GRADING

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 core required screenwriting classes, 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.

EMPLOYMENT BY THE DEPARTMENT

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

Eligible MFA Screenwriters will be offered Teaching Assistant positions for the undergraduate course – **RTF 333: Introduction to Screenwriting** in the fall and spring of their second year. Duties include overseeing a weekly three-hour workshop with up to twelve students where they lead discussions, lecture, maintain a grade book, give

professional notes and helping the instructor with other class duties.

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. 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 each semester shall forfeit the offer of employment. Employees may not arrange for substitutes at the first class meeting.

FELLOWSHIPS

All incoming students are awarded a \$5000 fellowship for their first year. Students making good academic progress are awarded \$5000 for their second year in the program. Since students receive fellowships, they also become eligible to pay the Texas resident tuition rate.

ORIGINAL WORK

It is expected that the screenplays and teleplays you write in this program will be new projects.

APPLICABILITY

This edition of the Handbook applies to the class of M.F.A. 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 Adviser for the Department's M.F.A. programs

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 Screenwriting and have reviewed carefully:

- the Screenwriting 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