

UC IRVINE DRAMA: MFA THESIS IN DESIGN

(last revised 4/27/10)

The Master of Fine Arts design thesis is intended to demonstrate the candidate's expertise and readiness to enter the professional design world. The thesis may take a variety of forms, including a written dissertation, a website or other digital instrument, or a top tier portfolio. The form of the thesis must be approved by the chair of the thesis committee who, with the designer, determines what will be of most value to that student. The finished product is to be of the highest standards of the chosen media, representing the candidate's best work.

WRITTEN DISSERTATIONS

A written thesis dissertation is a detailed treatise focusing on the learning gained through the design, production, and critique of a major production. The writing is a carefully organized monograph that addresses the designer's choices, the effectiveness of those choices, and the lessons gained through an analysis of the results. An outline of the written document must be approved by the thesis committee chair early in the process, and the writing itself should conform to the spirit of the Drama Writing Guidelines (found under "Policies" on the Drama website). The length of written dissertations may vary. Frequently they run about twenty pages of text, plus visuals as appropriate.

DIGITAL MEDIA THESIS

A digital thesis uses computer-generated media, the designer's original artwork, and sufficient text to address the issues listed above. Because the nature of these projects may vary, a specific proposal must be approved by the thesis committee chair prior to the start of the project. The proposal should be one or two pages long, detailing the aesthetics and navigation system of the project. A flow-chart or storyboards must also be included. A digital thesis is judged not only on its content, but also on the dynamics and appropriateness of its style, its ease of navigation, and its full use of the chosen media.

PAPER PROJECTS

Students in a given area may be asked to conceive a non-produced design as a thesis project. In such cases the scope of the design assignment is intended to exceed that currently possible in our standard production process. The choice of material is determined by the candidate and the thesis committee chair, and the elements produced could include models, renderings, drafting and/or working drawings, etc., as determined by the area head. The candidate works independently on the project throughout the third year, as this work is expected to demonstrate the candidate's readiness to enter the self-sufficient world of a design professional. In lieu of a narrative document, candidates who complete this form of thesis defend their work before their thesis committee in an oral session at the end of the third year.

ADVANCED PORTFOLIO

A professional portfolio thesis emphasizes skills suitable for employment interviews. The thesis chair assesses portfolio requirements such as adding or re-doing projects to address specific needs. The committee reviews the portfolio as "drafts" for critique and suggests subsequent changes. The final presentation to the committee demonstrates the candidate's readiness to enter the entertainment field.

OTHER OPTIONS

On rare occasions a student may wish to conduct an alternate research project as a thesis. Requests for approval of such projects must be made in writing to the head of that student's design discipline by the beginning of the student's third year, and must indicate the intended method of final documentation.

PROCEDURES

A thesis committee is comprised of three full-time faculty members. At least one must come from the student's immediate design area, including the person who will serve as the thesis committee chair and be the primary content mentor for the thesis, and at least one must come from outside the Design Program. Exceptions to these committee rules must be approved by the thesis chair. It is the student's responsibility to verify each committee member's willingness to serve.

The thesis will undergo a series of drafts before the faculty committee accepts it. The student must allow ample time for revisions and is responsible for all due dates set by the university. A six-week period between the first submittal and final approval is common, although the time necessary for final approval will depend on the quality of the work submitted, and no time frame for completion can be guaranteed. Draft copies, including the first one, should be submitted with spelling and grammar carefully checked, as poorly edited drafts are not acceptable. The student is responsible for delivering all revisions to his or her committee members by e-mail. Text portions of a digital media thesis must be submitted as an email attachment (PDF or Word.doc, as committee members prefer) during each stage of the approval process, and visual elements should be submitted after the text has been reviewed at least once by the thesis committee.

The university will retain the signature sheet and abstract of the student's thesis only. All committee members and professors in the student's discipline are entitled to receive a final bound or digital copy of the thesis. The Head of Design and the committee chair will each receive a final copy, which will be archived by the committee chair. The student is advised to ascertain the number of final copies desired by members of the committee or other faculty in that discipline.

The student is responsible for combining the information in this document with the other thesis guidelines, deadlines, and details regarding library archiving and advancement to candidacy that are available from the Head of Design and the Office of Student Affairs.