

HANDBOOK

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

MASTER OF FINE ARTS DEGREE

UNT | MEDIA ARTS

2026-2027

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Program Objectives and Requirements

OneDrive File of MFA Documents and Links

Degree in Media Arts Educational Objectives
The primary educational objective of the terminal Master of Fine Arts degree in Documentary Production and Studies is the academic, aesthetic, and technical training of production professionals. The Master of Fine Arts degree is the primary terminal degree for production faculty at college and university programs in the United States. The Media Arts MFA Program emphasizes a documentary production and studies curriculum.

Degree Requirements

The MFA degree requires the completion of sixty (60) hours of graduate course work in three years. During your time as an MFA candidate, you will complete a minimum of three short documentary films. Each of these films counts towards the partial completion of your degree. This includes the successful completion of a Thesis paper and a short documentary Thesis film that ranges in running time from 20 to 30 minutes.

The following table summarizes the semester credit hour requirements for the MFA program.

Minimum Semester Credit Hours Required

Type of Requirement	**Semester Credit Hours**
Required courses	33
2 prescribed elective courses	6
4 “free” elective courses	12
Thesis	9
Total SCH	**60**

The Thesis Production
The Thesis will be a creative non-fiction film production and production book for which nine credits hours will be awarded. **Please note that no more than 9 Thesis credit hours are counted towards the degree.** For example, if you need a further semester of study to complete your Thesis, you must enroll in a minimum of three credit hours continuously until you complete and pass your defense.

A written production book will accompany the work and will include the historical/theoretical context for the production. The Thesis is the capstone experience for each MFA candidate. It must illustrate the student's ability to successfully execute a professional non-fiction work of high quality and demonstrate knowledge of production techniques and theoretical perspectives.

The MFA Degree plan
Upon completing 30 hours in the MFA program or after the completion of the candidates third full semester, students consult with the MFA Director on their Degree Plan. This plan will then be submitted by the MFA Director to the Graduate School Dean. Once filed, any changes to the degree plan must be approved by the MFA Director and resubmitted to the Graduate school for approval.

MFA 3-year Curriculum

MFA Course Plan (example)
Required Courses and Degree Plan to achieve 60 Credit Hours. (r)=required course

1st Fall Semester

(r)MRTS 5340. History of the Documentary. 3 hours. An overview of the history of the documentary from 1895 to the present in the context of historical and political events of the time. Examines the evolution of style and form and the impact of production technology on the process.

(r)MRTS 5650. Graduate Audio Production. 3 hours. Basic concepts, theories and methodologies of audio production, particularly in regard to documentary production applications. Topics covered included studio recording, audio field recording and post-production. Prerequisite: MRTS 5770 or permission of the instructor.

(r)MRTS 5100 Introduction to Graduate Studies in Media Arts. 3 hours. Key theories and foundational methodological approaches from the arts, humanities, and social sciences that have contributed to the disciplinary tradition of Media Arts.

(r)MRTS 5804 MFA Colloquium 1 hour. (Students must enroll for a total of six semesters for 6 credits total). The MFA Colloquium will consist of regular meetings of all students in the program for the purpose of viewing their work in progress and for guest

lectures by professionals in the field. The forum will also be used for discussion of program requirements and procedures.

1st Spring Semester

(r)MRTS 5770. Documentary Production. 3 hours. The production of a documentary project from idea through final cut, culminating in a public screening.

(r)MRTS 5830 Documentary Cinematography. 3 hours. Concentrated study of the theory and craft of photographing the moving image as it applies to documentary filmmaking. Through a combination of hands-on exercises, screenings, discussion, critique, and lecture, students are introduced to the current technologies and aesthetics of documentary cinematography. Areas covered include: lighting for film and high definition cameras, camera and lighting peripherals, camera movements, ethics and legalities of documentary cinematography and film language.

(r)MRTS 5804 MFA Colloquium 1 hour.

Elective 1. 3 hours. Elective requirements are 6 non-production MRTS credits, 12 other elective credits, in or out-of-department courses

2nd Fall Semester

(r)MRTS 5790. Advanced Documentary I. 3 hours. Designed to further develop skills in videography, lighting, and location sound recording in combination with the production of a documentary project. Prerequisite: MRTS 5760, MRTS 5770.

Elective 2. 3 hours. Elective requirements are 6 non-production MRTS credits, 12 other elective credits, in or out-of-department courses

Elective 3. 3 hours. Elective requirements are 6 non-production MRTS credits, 12 other elective credits, in or out-of-department courses

(r)MRTS 5804 MFA Colloquium 1 hour.

2nd Spring Semester

(r)MRTS 5791. Advanced Documentary II. 3 hours. Advanced training in documentary production with emphasis on postproduction techniques, including editing, post-production sound, and distribution through lectures, discussions, lab workshops, and screenings. Prerequisite: MRTS 5790.

(r)MRTS 5950. Thesis I. 3 hours. The design of documentary productions of all types, in both film and video. Topics include the selection of subjects, research techniques, proposal writing, location scouting, funding and budgeting. Case histories are examined and excerpts from a variety of documentary productions are screened.

Elective 4. 3 hours. Elective requirements are 6 non-production MRTS credits, 12 other elective credits, in or out-of-department courses

(r)MRTS 5804. MFA Colloquium. 1 hour.

3rd Fall Semester

(r)MRTS 5950 Thesis II. 3 hours. To be scheduled only with consent of the MFA Director. No credit assigned until Thesis has been completed and filed with the Graduate School Dean. Continuous enrollment required once work on thesis has begun. Prerequisite(s): MRTS MFA status and consent of MFA Director. **Only 9 hours credit may count toward degree.**

(r)MRTS 5804 MFA Colloquium 1 hour.

(r)MRTS 5180. Internship in MRTS. 3 hours. Supervised off-campus work experience in a placement that relates to student's career objective. Students may enroll in fewer hours in consultation with the MFA Director if the number of hours will be fewer than 150 total during the semester. **Note: internships can be taken any semester, it is just shown here as 3rd Fall for example curriculum purposes.**

Elective 5. 3 hours. Elective requirements are 6 non-production MRTS credits, 12 other elective credits, in or out-of-department courses

3rd Spring Semester

(r)MRTS Thesis III. 3 hours. To be scheduled only with consent of the MFA Director. No credit assigned until thesis has been completed and filed with the Graduate School Dean. Continuous enrollment is required once work on Thesis has begun until successful completion of the Thesis Oral Exam. Prerequisite(s): MRTS MFA status and consent of MFA Director.

Elective 6. 3 hours. Elective requirements are 6 non-production MRTS credits, 12 other elective credits, in or out-of-department courses

(r)MRTS 5804 MFA Colloquium 1 hour.

Table of the 3-year sequence

Year	Semester	Course	Description	Credits
1st Year	Fall	5100	Intro to Grad Studies	3
		5340	History of Doc	3
		5650	Grad Audio	3
1st Year	Spring	5770	Doc Production (1st year film)	3
		5830	Doc Cinematography	3
		5XXX	Elective OR MRTS non-production course	3
2nd Year	Fall	5790	Advanced Doc Workshop I (production of 2nd year film)	3
		5XXX	Elective OR MRTS non-production course	3
		5XXX	Elective OR MRTS non-production course	3
2nd Year	Spring	5760	Thesis I (prospectus and pre-production thesis film)	3
		5791	Advanced Doc Workshop 2 (post of 2nd year film)	3
		5XXX	Elective OR MRTS non-production course	3
3rd Year	Fall	5950	Thesis II (production thesis film)	3
		5XXX	Elective OR MRTS non-production course	3
		5XXX	Elective OR MRTS non-production course	3
3rd Year	Spring	5950	Thesis	3
		5XXX	Elective OR MRTS non-production course	3
Required	Every Semester	5804	Colloquium	6
Required	Various	5180 Internship	3-credits (150 hours)	3

MRTS Electives
18 credits of electives are part of your 60 total credits for the MFA degree. Of those, 6 credits must be taken of **non-production Media Arts classes**. The department has many History/Criticism and Industry Studies courses that could fulfill this requirement. Topics vary by semester but may include courses such as Cinema Verité, Global Media, Gender and Gaming, Media Franchising, etc. Additional MRTS electives can be taken as long as the 6 non-production credits are fulfilled.

Electives outside Media Arts
Up to 12 credits of graduate level electives may be taken outside the department. For example, students have taken courses in The College of Science, The College of Visual Arts, and other departments in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences such as Anthropology, English, and Journalism. See the MFA Director for more information.

Electives outside UNT
UNT graduate students have the opportunity to cross-register for courses at Texas Woman's University and East Texas A&M University through the Federation of North Texas Area Universities. See the MFA Director for more information.

Internships
Your MFA includes a 3-credit internship requirement. Internship details:

1. Internships can be taken any semester.
2. MFA Internship Coordinator must approve the internship being proposed.
3. Your internship should be designed to give you additional training and education in areas that you believe will directly, positively impact your future success in the field.
4. It is the student's responsibility to request from the Internship organization letter (can be provided as an email attachment), on company/organization letterhead, describing the responsibilities and activities the student Intern will experience. This letter should also include the key contact person the student will be working with, their email and other contact information. This will give both the student and the MFA Internship Coordinator a baseline of expectation for the overall Internship experience, including its rigor, deadlines, and appropriateness to career goals. This letter is provided to the MFA Internship Coordinator and the UNT Career Center (see below).
5. The MFA student then registers with the UNT Career Center. This is critical because the UNT Career Center is the university unit that generates the electronic evaluations at the end of the term.
6. Note that the UNT policy on Internship requirements states that 150 hours of work during the semester equals 3 university credit hours. Students have the

option to do the internship for variable credit over multiple semesters after consultation with the MFA Internship Coordinator.
7. Create a shared document with the MFA Internship Coordinator so that they can have regular updates on your Internship progress during the semester with hours worked on a weekly basis.
8. At the end of the term, the student must write a 3-page paper, with an overview of the experience, how it will help you in your professional career, and detailing if you would you recommend this particular internship to another student.
9. You will receive an electronic evaluation form to fill out from the UNT Career Center the week before final exams.
10. The Internship organization receives an evaluation to discuss your work in the Internship. The employer fills it in, submits it to the UNT Career Center, and a copy is provided to the MFA Internship Coordinator.
11. The MFA Internship Coordinator will submit the grade after reviewing all materials.

Transfer Credits
The Department of Media Arts follows the policies and guidelines of the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies. Subject to the approval of the Graduate School Dean and the Media Arts department, a student who holds a bachelor's degree and has been admitted to the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies and the Media Arts MFA program at UNT, may apply up to 12 semester hours of graduate credit toward the degree.

MFA Thesis Requirements and Guidelines

Master's Thesis Defined
A Master's Thesis is defined as a work of original research, which synthesizes concepts, methodologies, and skills developed within the context of the MFA Degree program. In the department of Media Arts, the Thesis must be submitted in the form of an original non-fiction media production. The written section of the thesis must follow Toulouse Graduate School guidelines in terms of style manual use, citations, etc.

Thesis Chair
Your Thesis Chair or Major Professor must be a member of the MRTS Graduate Faculty and will assist you in direct preparation of your Thesis. They will chair your Graduate Thesis Committee. "Thesis Chair" and "Major Professor" are interchangeable academic titles and refer to the same person, but this document will use Thesis Chair to be clear.

It is your responsibility, after you have consulted with the MFA Director, to get the consent of an eligible faculty member to serve as your Thesis Chair and to determine in advance that the faculty member will be on campus during critical phases of your program (e.g., completion and defense of your thesis.)

You CANNOT enroll in thesis hours without approval from your Thesis Chair.

Graduate Thesis Committee
This Committee will be made up of a Thesis Chair and at least two other graduate faculty members, one of whom should be from another department or university. The latter should provide expertise in an area relevant to your Thesis topic. In the past we have had outside committee members from Anthropology, Music, History, English, Information Science, Education, Art, and other areas. The committee designation form can be found in MFA Files for Students. All members of the committee sign the form and then it is submitted to the MFA Director.

Modifications to Graduate Thesis Committee
Students should be aware that the replacement of Committee members should take place only in exceptional circumstances and always in consultation with the Major Professor. In the event of a change of Thesis topic that necessitates a change of Thesis Chair, the student should consult with the MFA Director. In the event of a faculty member leaving campus, the student should consult with the MFA Director about an appropriate replacement. Once a Thesis Chair has been approved, and a Degree Plan has been filed with the Graduate School Dean, any changes to the Thesis Committee must be approved by the MFA Director, depending upon your degree.

Please note that faculty have the right to resign from the Thesis committee if the student has not completed their work within one calendar year from the date of approval.

Thesis Enrollment
9 credit hours of MRTS 5950 (thesis credits) are required for graduation; they cannot be taken concurrently. Once you have enrolled in MRTS 5950 you are required to be enrolled continuously until you have successfully completed the Thesis film, submitted the final draft of the written Thesis, and successfully defended your oral defense. You will not be awarded any credit **(for a maximum of 9 credit hours)** for this course until your thesis has been completed and filed with the Graduate School Dean.

There is an exemption available once you complete your six credits hours **if you are close to completing your project**. After you complete your nine credit thesis hours, you may apply for a special exemption with the Graduate School, along with your Major Professor, and enroll in one credit of Special Problems. This will allow you time to complete the final work on your Thesis project without having to enroll again in Thesis hours. **However, if you do not complete your Thesis during the exemption window, you will need to again enroll in three credit hours continuously until you pass your defense.**

Thesis Procedures and Guidelines

As noted above, the MFA Thesis is comprised of two distinct, but related parts; an original documentary production and a scholarly written document about the production and related academic approaches. In Media Arts, we have an expansive definition of documentary. You may pursue more traditional approaches and styles. Depending on subject matter you may incorporate other techniques such as animation, illustration, re-enactments, VR, and other approaches. You will work directly with your Thesis Chair and other committee members to refine your ideas before production commences.

Thesis and prospectus details can be found in MFA Files for Students.

Prospectus. Students start preparing for the prospectus after the completion of their third semester. It is strongly recommended to defend the prospectus in the second semester of the second year or after 30 hours of completion towards the degree. The prospectus meeting is held for two reasons. First, it is a help session. It allows your Graduate Thesis Committee to meet with you as a group to discuss specific aspects of your prospectus that may need further clarification. Second, at the meeting, the Committee will decide whether to allow you to continue with the selected Thesis topic. If so, the committee may have recommendations to give you concerning handling of the topic. Your Thesis Chair will chair the prospectus meeting.

Thesis. After your prospectus has been approved, you'll write and/or produce your Thesis under the supervision of your Thesis Chair.

Final Thesis Defense. Your Thesis Committee will convene a formal, oral examination as the culminating event in your Thesis process. It is your responsibility, in consultation with your Thesis Chair, to arrange a time and date which will be convenient for all of the members of your committee for the examination. During the defense, in addition to answering questions about your Thesis, you should make notes of changes suggested by your Committee members. After the defense is completed, you will be excused from

the room while the Committee decides whether or not to accept your Thesis. You will then be recalled and informed of the Committee's decision and any conditions attached to it. If your Committee has voted to accept your Thesis, they will then sign the appropriate pages or forms.

The Committee may require revisions prior to approving the Thesis and it is your responsibility to make the required changes in a timely manner. In some cases, the revisions will only be submitted to your Thesis Chair and in some cases the entire Committee may require approval of the changes. The Committee will decide if it is necessary to hold a second examination meeting or not. Therefore, scheduling a Thesis defense close to the Graduate School submission deadline may result in a delay of graduation. Refer to Toulouse's graduation information for application and thesis submission deadlines.

Timeline. In accordance with the Graduate School Guidelines, you are expected to complete your Thesis within one calendar year.

The order of events for the Prospectus and Thesis is as follows:

1. Approach MRTS graduate faculty member to be your Thesis chair. Have a backup faculty in mind in case your first choice is unavailable.
    a. Consult with Thesis chair about your project, timeline and other committee members.
2. Request 2 other committee members join your committee, having each sign the committee designation form (in MFA Files for Students).
    a. Committee members must have a terminal degree that makes them appropriate for the project. Any members outside of UNT must receive approval from the MFA Director to participate.
    b. You may have up to 4 committee members, but two with terminal degrees plus your thesis chair are required.
    c. Share the expectations for committee members information in MFA Files for Students with those who agree to serve on your committee.
    d. Be up front about your timeline and when you will require assistance from them on completing your document, film or both.
3. Work with your Thesis chair to prepare your prospectus and set up a time to defend. The prospectus must be given to all committee members at **least 2 weeks before the defense** unless a different timeline is agreed upon by all involved.
4. Successfully defending your prospectus makes you an official candidate for the MFA degree, and allows access to department resources for your Thesis project.

5. Confer with your Thesis chair and committee members about the readiness of your film and document to be defended. Set up a defense date with your Thesis chair, to which the department faculty will be invited to attend.
    a. You may invite guests to your thesis defense.
6. Once your thesis is successfully defended, you are eligible to "walk the stage" for graduation at the next ceremony if you choose. Be sure to check graduation application and thesis submission deadlines to make sure you get everything into Toulouse on time to graduate.
    a. Graduation ceremonies are held in December and May, but you may graduate at any time during the year without the ceremony.

Guidelines for the MFA Thesis Prospectus

The prospectus is made available to all committee members and the Graduate Director in advance of the Prospectus Defense meeting, which takes place at the end of the student's second year. The MFA Thesis Prospectus should be approximately 20 to 40 pages long. A list of the sections to be included in the MFA Prospectus can be found in MFA Files for Students.

Your thesis chair will work with you to determine if the prospectus is ready for defense. **The prospectus must be provided to committee members at least 2 weeks in advance of prospectus defense.**

Guidelines for the MFA Thesis Film and Document

The Thesis process includes a film and a document; that's where production and studies come together to show us everything you've learned on your MFA journey. The Thesis film is a documentary short, running 20-30 minutes in length. The film must be at the picture lock stage of completion to be defended. The Thesis document follows the prospectus, augmenting the materials to encompass the entire thesis film process, from pre-production through post. Your thesis chair will work with you to determine if the **film and the document** are ready for defense. Information on Toulouse's deadlines for thesis submissions. A list of sections to be included in the thesis document can be found in MFA Files for Students.

Additional Information

Maintaining Good Academic Standing

Graduate students in the Department of Media Arts at UNT are expected to meet high standards of academic performance. The MFA is a terminal degree (the highest degree in the field) in Documentary

Production and Studies, with both creative and scholarly requirements. The department of Media Arts Graduate Curriculum Committee (an elected committee made up of graduate faculty in the department) may recommend dismissal of an MFA student from the program if the student receives two course grades of "C" or below. If the departmental Graduate Curriculum Committee recommends such dismissal of a student under this policy, the student may provide a written appeal to the departmental graduate committee (addressed to the current committee co-chairs) for consideration. This appeal should plainly address the situation at hand, and clearly and specifically outline the student's plan for academic improvement and success if allowed to remain in the program. After review of the appeal letter, the decision to reinstate an MFA student is solely at the discretion of the departmental graduate curriculum committee. If a student who is reinstated receives a third grade of "C" or below, the student will be dismissed from the program without further recourse within the department. After the student receives the first grade of “C” or below, a notice letter/email will be sent to the student from the MFA Director, reminding the student of the department’s policy and consequences if a second “C” or below is received.

Progress Review

All Master of Fine Arts candidates’ academic progress will be reviewed by the graduate committee after the first and second years of the program

Assistantships
All MFA students in good academic standing are eligible to apply for assistantships offered through the Department of Media Arts. Positions are determined on a semester-to-semester basis and are not guaranteed. Students seeking an assistantship must apply every year. Offers take into consideration many variables which may include funding availability, departmental needs, student status, and prior performance.

Travel funding
The Department of Media Arts has limited funding available to support graduate students who are invited to present at a conference or who wish to request research-related travel expenses. Students who are presenting at a conference must apply to the MFA Director and provide proof of acceptance and expenses. Research-related travel requests must be submitted with a justification of trip and the expenses. Funding decisions are made at the discretion of the Media Arts Department and are subject to availability. Links to other grad grant info are in MFA Files for Students.

Scholarships
The Department of Media Arts offers several scholarships for continuing graduate students. The College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences also has funding opportunities for continuing graduate students in the form of travel grants and financial support. The announcements for applications are made annually at the start of the Fall and Spring semesters, and financial awards are applied to the following Fall.

Grad Server Information
As an MFA student, you have access to server space for your projects. It is highly recommended that you **back up to at least two location** whenever you are working with media. The MRTS server can be one location, but also plan to back up to an external hard drive, cloud drive, or both. Instructions for accessing the server are available in the OneDrive File of MFA Documents and Links.