

A GUIDE TO THE MFA DESIGN THESIS PROCESS

WHAT IS THE THESIS PROJECT? WHY DO I NEED TO DO IT?

The [Thesis Project](#) is a requirement of the MFA Design Program. It is meant to serve as a demonstration of your artistic, aesthetic, and methodological growth over the course of your MFA study. Please note that it is more of a Final Check Point at the end of your study than the ultimate PROJECT OF YOUR LIFETIME. This does not diminish its importance, but does describe that it is a significant benchmark, from which you will likely continue a trajectory of growth. To that end, the process can be stressful, however, it is important to put it into context, anticipate each step necessary to execute it, and manage time wisely to complete it.

WHO SHOULD BE ON MY COMMITTEE? WHO DO I IDENTIFY AS MY CHAIR?

Your Committee should be comprised of two or more faculty, who hold an MFA or greater. You may invite up to FIVE members to be a part of your Committee. You should identify a Chair that will advise you through your entire process, including the proposal process. Most select their discipline-specific mentors.

WHEN DO I IDENTIFY MY COMMITTEE?

You may do this at any time prior to your Thesis Defense. It is recommended that you do this the first long semester of your second year. Simply send a pleasant INQUIRY EMAIL to potential Committee members to ask if they would be willing to serve, following up with the appropriate paperwork. You are able to identify your Committee and Committee Chair at the beginning of your course of study.

WHAT PAPERWORK DO I FILL OUT TO MAKE MY COMMITTEE OFFICIAL?

You need to navigate to the SoTD Website, Graduate Student Information, and select the appropriate [Committee Identification Form/Thesis Contract](#). This will be filled out by YOU and signed by each of your Committee Members. Be sure to turn it into the Graduate Advisor. Also file a copy in the Design Student or Graduate Student Teams Portal. Should you be unsure of the Thesis Project content, please leave the fields blank, but do have each member sign the form before filling and turning in.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I WANT TO INVITE A STAFF MEMBER OR SOMEONE FROM OUTSIDE OF THE DEPARTMENT TO BE ON MY COMMITTEE?

Keep in mind that you may only ask those holding the degree that you are a candidate for. If you invite staff, you may need to follow-up with the Graduate Advisor to see if the individual qualifies as an official member of the Graduate Faculty (only if the Staff Member is one of TWO minimum members serving on your Committee).

WHAT IF I NEED TO MAKE A CHANGE TO MY THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP?

File a [Committee Member Change Request Form](#). Make sure that you make Committee Members aware of this change. If you do not feel comfortable doing this, simply follow-up with the Head of Design or Graduate Advisor.

WHEN DO I PROPOSE MY THESIS PROJECT?

You should think about plays or projects of interest in the summer between your first Spring and second Fall semester. Though most choose to do a realized production design as their Thesis Project, this is not MANDATORY. You may choose another research or creative project to fulfill your Thesis Requirement. You should reach out to your Thesis Chair for guidance on submitting your proposal. You will be asked to submit no more than three proposals pertaining to design-work within the season. Your proposals will also be reviewed by the Design Area faculty and passed along to the Season Selection Committee. Should you not submit a proposal or have your proposal selected, you will be asked to consider a non-stage-based project, self-produced work, or can apply to for a design assignment that will fulfill your Thesis requirement.

CAN I WORK WITH OTHERS ON MY THESIS PROJECT?

Absolutely! You may propose a project WITH MFA Students from all disciplines. In COLLABORATION CLASS, it may serve you well to identify a team with which you enjoy working. Proposing a project with a group is highly encouraged and will strengthen your proposal. For example, if you know a P&P student will be proposing a directing thesis, it may be a good opportunity to propose a collaboration with that student in which you identify proposals that excite you both.

WHAT ARE SOME CONSIDERATIONS I SHOULD MAKE WHEN BEGINNING THE PROPOSAL PROCESS?

The School cannot guarantee that any student's proposal will be accepted by Season Selection. You may be asked to design a show that you did not propose in order to fulfill your thesis requirement. Factors that are considered when evaluating proposals include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Does the proposal serve multiple student needs (such as creating a technical or design challenge that meets design area's pedagogical needs; thesis-level performance roles for graduate students; substantial roles for undergraduates; feasibility of the project as a student- or faculty-directed production)?
- Is the proposal producible within the available budget, time, space, and labor of the School and production staff? Will you need assistance in assessing this information? Can you offer specifics about scope and special needs of the production?
- Does the proposal amplify historically underserved or diverse voices?
- Does this production require a specific performing space? If so, please be prepared to justify that suggestion in your proposal.
- How does the work support your growth, reinforce your portfolio, or continue your growth as an artist?

WILL MY REALIZED SHOW BE GUARANTEED?

Nope. Ways to help forward your proposal include working with a group, making sure to be very specific and clear in proposing a show for Season Selection, and submitting more than one proposal. The Season Selection Committee reviews potential projects within the scope of the entire season. Options will help to provide a variety for considerations.

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT TO PROPOSE IF I AM INTERESTED IN A REALIZED PRODUCTION?

Speak to your discipline-specific advisor. They can help you to identify the types of work that would strengthen your proposal. You will have access to a comprehensive [SCRIPT LIBRARY](#).

WHEN WILL I KNOW WHAT MY THESIS PROJECT IS, IF DOING A REALIZED DESIGN?

You are usually informed of this assignment at the end of the second Spring semester.

WHEN WILL MY REALIZED PRODUCTION BE, IF I SELECT THAT OPTION?

This is usually slated during the third Fall semester or the beginning of the Spring semester.

WILL I BE ASSIGNED TO A PRODUCTION IN MY FINAL SEMESTER?

This may be the case for some students. It is usually discouraged to allot for enough time to complete all parts of the Project. In season planning, most Thesis projects are planned in the third Fall semester.

CAN I CHANGE MY THESIS PROJECT?

Yes. We recommend that this be decided NO LATER than the end of the second Fall semester. You will need to discuss this change with your Committee.

WHAT DO I DO IF I WANT TO SELF-PRODUCE?

You will visit with the Head of Design. Self-produced projects are typically held off-campus and receive minimal production support. Should this be an option of interest, you will be guided to several additional funding sources, which may require some grant writing, in order to help subsidize your project. Keep in mind that you will likely need to maintain your regular production assignments during the semester, however, a special case can be built for most types of Thesis Projects. We encourage you to ask, should you have a unique idea for your Thesis.

WHEN DO I REACH OUT TO MY COMMITTEE?

Beyond your initial communication with your Committee, you are encouraged to reach out to members at the beginning of your second Fall semester, providing them with dates and other information pertinent to your project. You should remain in most close contact with your Chair throughout the process. Some committees appreciate having access to your process documentation and being included in your design process. You are encouraged to ask your Committee about their preference. Keep in mind that your Committee is there to support you. Please be COURTEOUS in giving them ample time to respond to materials. TWO WEEKS notice are suggested, should materials need to be reviewed. If you are doing a Realized Production, do not forget to invite your Committee Members to a PERFORMANCE. You may reach out to Stage Management and the Box Office to see if arranging complimentary tickets for Committee Members is feasible for your production (this is not guaranteed).

WHEN DO I SCHEDULE MY DEFENSE?

You may have not even finished your Thesis Project yet, BUT PLEASE reach out to your Committee at the beginning of your third Spring semester to schedule a date. Also, check with the [Graduate School](#) to ensure that this is completed within their timeframe. Your Committee will likely consider a date designated as DEFENSE WEEK (usually the second and third week in March).

WHAT DO I NEED TO PREPARE FOR MY DEFENSE NOTICE?

You will create a notice, inviting the campus community to your Defense. Working with your Committee Chair, you will create a visual representation of your project, which will then be circulated to the department. This notice is typically sent out a week in advance of your Defense. This can be done by either your Chair or the Graduate Advisor. A handy [TEMPLATE](#) has been created for you to follow.

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS FOR THE WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION?

A link will be provided to a Suggested Paper Outline in your third year. You should begin journaling about your process IMMEDIATELY and CONSTANTLY, as this material will be vital for your paper.

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS FOR THE PRESENTATION?

More documentation is being created to outline a sample of this material. Stay tuned to the Design Student Portal for Details. During production for your Thesis Project, it is vital to continuously document your work. To save yourself time, please keep all materials housed in a safe, consistent folder. The Design Faculty recommends keeping a copy of documents, documentation, etc. in a folder within your Design Student Portal Teams "File" Tab. A link to this folder can be produced for Committee access to these materials.

DO I SUBMIT DRAFTS OF MATERIALS TO MY COMMITTEE?

Yes. Please do this, allotting two weeks AT THE VERY LEAST for each round of revisions. You should have your FINAL MATERIALS confirmed and ready to go no later than a week before your defense. We recommend that you complete your materials progressively. Should you fail to submit materials in a timely fashion, your Committee may refuse to review them, which could jeopardize the outcome of your Defense.

WHO CAN I INVITE TO MY DEFENSE?

The notice for your defense will circulate to the entire campus community. You are encouraged to forward it directly to those you would like to be in attendance. In addition to members of the TTU SoTD community, you are welcome to invite family members, members of the campus and Lubbock community. Please ensure that you are scheduling a space that will house those that you intend to invite. Additionally, you are also welcomed to invite individuals remotely. You will be responsible for setting up any necessary simulcasting equipment.

HOW DO I SCHEDULE A ROOM FOR THE DEFENSE?

You will visit this link to submit a [ROOM REQUEST](#). If you have special needs for your Defense, please consult the Production Manager. Additionally, if you have materials that you would like to display outside of your Defense time, you may visit with the Box Office to explore adding digital materials to the Lobby Television. You may also reach out to the School Director, should you like to create a physical Lobby display.

DO I NEED TO BRING FOOD? GIFTS?

It is unnecessary and discouraged to bring gifts for your Committee. We also highly discourage bringing food to campus, as it is currently not allowed due to Covid-19 safety guidelines. We do, however, recommend that you write thank you notes to each of your Committee Members, as it mimics professional best practice.

HOW LONG WILL MY DEFENSE NEED TO BE SCHEDULED FOR?

Plan to schedule your Defense for one hour. It is wise to make sure that you are available for an additional half an hour following your Defense for the feedback portion. Guests will be encouraged to leave for this section of the day's events.

WHAT DO I WEAR TO MY DEFENSE?

We encourage you to think of this as a job interview. For a handy guide to [Professional Dress](#), please click the hyperlinked text.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THERE IS AN EMERGENCY AND I NEED TO RESECHEDULE OR MISS MY DEFENSE?

Please communicate this ASAP with your Committee Chair, Committee, and Graduate Advisor. Ideally, you will have scheduled your Defense well in advance of the Graduate School deadline.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT MY DEFENSE?

Here is a brief outline of the traditional order of events at an MFA Thesis Defense:

- Remarks by the Chair and Introduction of the Committee Members
- Delineation of the Events for the Audience
- You will speak about your project for 15 minutes
- Questions from your Committee
- Questions from the Gallery
- Committee Deliberation (you will be excused during this portion of your defense)
- Committee Feedback
- Conferral of Committee Decision

DO I NEED TO FILL OUT ANY PAPERWORK FOR THE DEFENSE?

After your have completed your Defense, you will encourage your Committee Chair to fill out this [FORM](#), which will be submitted to the Graduate Advisor. Most often your Committee Chair will be aware that this form is to be filled out at the end of the Committee Deliberation, however, a friendly reminder might be helpful.

WHAT CAN I DO WITH MY THESIS ONCE IT IS COMPLETE?

In some Schools, the Thesis is archived in the Library, through a process outlined by the Graduate School. This will not be the case for your Thesis Documents. The Design Area asks that you archive a copy in your Design Student Portal “Files” tab. This should be done prior to your final MFA Review appointment, so that it is available for faculty review. Many students use their MFA Thesis as part of their job application materials. It is recommended that you consider placing a copy of your documents and materials on your personal website for access. Be sure that you have credited all images and sources in your documents (including research images) to ensure that you are not violating any copyrights. It is important to note also that your work is protected via [Texas Tech University Intellectual Property Guidelines](#). Some students choose to upload their Thesis to profiles associated with professional industry organizations. You may also consider presenting your work at a research poster session (i.e. those through USITT). Visit with the Head of Design to explore the options as to how to make your Thesis Project presentation a useful part of your post-academic journey at TTU.

WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

Please reach out to the Head of Design, Committee Chair, or Graduate Advisor. We understand that this can be a confusing process and are here to help!