Goals of the MFA Thesis in Directing

The MFA in Directing final thesis takes place in the student’s third year and should reflect the synthesis and application of the student’s coursework and creative collaboration skills, including production experience, over the three years of the degree.

While the specific play and production needs will vary, this thesis project should function as a stepping stone towards the student’s future career in theatre.

MFA Thesis Criteria

• In the third year each M.F.A. directing candidate must direct a fully produced play in our theatrical season. The director chooses a thesis committee that provides guidance and also serves as the evaluator of the thesis work. In addition, a written record of the project, an oral defense of the production, and a formal written thesis are required. The permanent record of the thesis project will follow a format prescribed by the Graduate College.

• The thesis requires a student to direct a project of significant scope and vision based on his/her research and creative interests as well as on the learning goals identified by the members of the Graduate Committee. Although the graduate student may submit potential scripts for consideration, the specific project will be approved by the members of the Graduate Committee and the entire voting faculty.

• The production should reflect thinking and vision that move beyond coursework and previous directing experience.

• The creative process should demonstrate initiative, ownership, and leadership in the field of directing, including in the ability to collaborate affectively with designers, dramaturgs, actors, stage managers, technicians, etc.

• The student’s preparatory textual analysis work should clearly frame and drive the project. Both the preparatory and the rehearsal processes should be rigorous, well-planned, well-conceived, and clear in the larger discourses or ideas with which the play and the production are engaging.

• The formal written thesis should clearly articulate a combination of practice and reflection. It should include the following:
  A. Strong analysis of the play and research of the period, playwright, theatrical conventions, etc.
B. A clear and well-argued statement of the production vision or approach and how that approach guided the design, casting and rehearsal processes
C. A final post-production evaluation of total production experience, objectively and honestly addressing what worked and did not work, and reviewing how vision was influenced by process and how concept was enhanced or tempered by imagination and/or the practical realities of the rehearsal room

**Thesis Process**

**By the middle of Year 2**

Students must submit written production proposals for consideration by the Season Selection Committee, the Graduate Committee, and the faculty at large.

**By end of Year 2**

Students should begin the process of assembling a Thesis Committee, a distinct body from the Graduate Committee (though there is often overlap). The Thesis Committee must include a Chair from the Directing Faculty and a minimum of two additional faculty members, one of whom may be from outside the Theater Department.

**During Year 3**

Students must direct their thesis production. Before the end of the spring semester, students must submit the written component of the thesis to their Thesis Committee members for approval. Students should build in a process for one round of feedback from the Thesis Committee and a final approval round before the Oral Defense.

Students must schedule a Final Oral Defense of their work with all Thesis Committee members. During the Oral Defense, students will be asked to summarize the project and what s/he learned in the process. Committee members may ask the student to defend any part of the thesis and answer questions. The Thesis Committee then meets *in camera* to vote on the student’s thesis and defense. The committee may vote to approve the thesis as it stands, approve with revisions, deny with revisions, or outwardly deny the project’s approval by a majority vote.

**Thesis Proposal**

The MFA Directing Thesis proposal should be a comprehensive document that includes all of the following:

- A descriptive title
- Goals or desired outcomes for the production
- Framing thesis question or directorial approach
- A detailed description of the production in terms of scope and vision
- An annotated bibliography of relevant sources, if appropriate

Be sure to provide ample and workable turnaround times. It is highly recommended that you check with your Committee members on their availability and schedules before setting a timeline.
In addition to these Departmental protocols, you are responsible for completing the Graduate School’s graduation requirements. See
www.umass.edu/gradschool/sites/default/files/checklist_for_masters_degrees.pdf

YEAR 1
☐ Assemble Graduate Committee
☐ Attend Fall and Spring End of Semester Reviews (EOSRs) with Graduate Committee

YEAR 2
☐ Invite Members and Assemble Thesis Committee
☐ Identify thesis production, in collaboration with faculty advisors
☐ Attend Fall and Spring End of Semester Reviews (EOSRs) with Graduate/Thesis Committee

YEAR 3
☐ Finalize Thesis Committee by first day of Fall semester
☐ Submit written thesis proposal to Thesis Committee for approval
☐ Direct thesis production
☐ Attend Fall End of Semester Reviews (EOSRs) with Thesis Committee
☐ Schedule feedback/approval deadlines and Final Oral Defense
☐ Invite Committee members to necessary events (give advanced notice)
☐ Submit written thesis to Thesis Committee for feedback
☐ Submit written thesis to Thesis Committee for final approval before Oral Defense
☐ Oral Defense
☐ Submit paperwork to Graduate School for graduation and degree