Goals of the MFA Thesis in Dramaturgy

The MFA in Dramaturgy final thesis takes place in the student’s third year and should reflect the synthesis and application of the student’s coursework over the three years of the degree.

While the subject, scope, and methodology of the thesis will vary depending on the student’s interests and skills, this thesis project should function as a stepping stone towards the student’s future career in theatre.

MFA Thesis Criteria

- It should be ambitious in scope. The thesis requires a student to conceive of, manage, and execute a project of significant scope and vision based on his/her research, dramaturgical, and/or creative interests.

- It should reflect thinking and vision that moves beyond coursework and into the creative, scholarly, and/or professional realm.

- It should demonstrate initiative, ownership, and leadership in the field of dramaturgy, broadly defined.

- It should be rigorous, well-planned, well-conceived, and clear in the larger discourses or ideas with which it engages. The student’s research questions should clearly frame and drive the project.

- It should involve a combination of theory and practice, practice and reflection. For example, a thesis might include a performance, curation of a festival or event, or a new translation and adaptation PLUS a significant piece of scholarly writing that accompanies the practical work. The written portion must engage with relevant scholarly literature and theories.

Thesis Process

By end of Year 1
Students should begin to identify research and/or creative areas of interest to them and take courses and focus their work accordingly.

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 Dramaturgy Faculty and a minimum of two additional faculty members, one of whom may be from outside the Theater Department. The student should start applying for funding and secure necessary partners as early as possible.
By Fall of Year 3
Students must submit a written proposal (see below) to their Thesis Committee for approval. The student drafts the proposal in consultation with his/her Chair. The proposal must be approved by all of the committee members before it may proceed so rigorous revision may form part of this process.

By end of Year 3
Students must manage and execute their Thesis Project. 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 Dramaturgy Thesis proposal should be a comprehensive document that includes all of the following:

- A descriptive title
- Goals or desired outcomes for the project
- Framing research question(s)
- A detailed description of the project in terms of scope and vision
- An annotated bibliography of relevant sources
- As detailed a timeline as possible, including major and minor project deadlines and events as well as a plan for the committee’s input and review process across the project*
- Budget
- How (if at all) the project will interface with the Department’s season or other campus, Five College, or external events
- Partners and funding sources, as 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
☐ Begin to refine research/creative focus

YEAR 2

☐ Invite Members and Assemble Thesis Committee
☐ Devise thesis project, in conversation with faculty advisors
☐ Secure funds/apply for grants, as needed
☐ 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
☐ Submit a signed thesis outline to Graduate School (within 4 months of anticipated defense)
☐ Once approved, manage and execute thesis project
☐ 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