

Guidelines and Requirements for BFA Thesis Projects (ART 402) **-with additional information on ART 401 Professional Practices**

The BFA Thesis Project (ART 402) is an optional 6-credit independent project that BFA majors may choose to pursue in their final year. The BFA Thesis Project consists of a body of work or major individual project, a written thesis paper, a solo exhibition (or other appropriate public presentation), and an oral examination. The project is conducted with the guidance of a committee of faculty. Thesis projects must be proposed and approved in the semester BEFORE they occur.

Students who choose not to conduct a thesis project will instead complete 6 credits of studio electives, 200-level or above.

ART 401 Professional Practices

3 credits, required of all BFA Studio Art candidates (excluding Art Ed)

This course is the Integrative Experience (IE) for all BFA *studio* majors. Regardless of your choice to pursue a thesis project, all BFA studio candidates must take ART 401 Professional Practices. This course can be taken in either semester of your final year. 401 will cover topics such as creating portfolios, writing applications and proposals for grants and residencies, researching exhibition opportunities, writing artist statements, etc. 401 will also include a student-led group show of enrolled students.

For students who are doing a thesis project, this means you will participate in the group show as part of 401 AND your own thesis presentation. To avoid conflicts, the ART 401 group shows will be scheduled so they do not overlap with thesis presentations. Thesis students should note that 401 and 402 need not be taken at the same time, and should consider taking 401 in the semester BEFORE their thesis projects.

ART 401 will not cover material or devote time directly related to individual thesis projects. Thesis projects are directed by thesis committees.

ART 402 BFA Thesis Project

6 credits, optional for BFA Studio Art candidates

The BFA Thesis Project is intended for students who want to develop an independent body of work, and write about it in depth. The Thesis Project represents the culmination of four years of study, and six credits of sustained, semester-long inquiry outside the structure of a course. The written portion of the Thesis Project (the thesis paper) is ten pages of research and reflection that rigorously examines your work, its sources, context, and methods. The solo

exhibition (or other public presentation) must demonstrate a deep engagement with your chosen media and concepts, and must present them coherently and professionally. Thesis Projects mark a transition from student to working artist, and from academic assignments to individual, self-guided artistic research.

The Proposal

Your BFA Thesis Project Proposal must be submitted well in advance: **the semester BEFORE you intend to do your Thesis Project, by the end of the fourth week of the semester.** You are encouraged to meet with a faculty mentor in your discipline to help develop your proposal. On the department website, please find the Microsoft Word document called **BFA Thesis Proposal Template**; download this file, edit it by adding your proposal information, and save it as a PDF. Further instructions on how to submit are included at the top of the template document.

The proposal should include:

- Your name, BFA discipline, and expected graduation semester
- A ranked list of three full-time art department faculty to serve on your committee. Every effort will be made to honor student preferences, while balancing the workload evenly amongst faculty.
- A 300-500 word project proposal that includes:
 - questions/topics you intend to explore;
 - the significance of this project to you/your reasons for pursuing it;
 - a selection of artists/critics/theorists that relate to your project, with a brief description of their relevance;
 - a description of your intended media and working processes;
 - the format in which you expect to present your completed project (e.g. solo gallery exhibition, performance, screening, etc.);
- 3 to 5 artwork sample images
- a writing sample from an academic class (e.g. term paper or research paper), 8-10 pages

TIP: Do not conceive of the proposal as an exact description of the finished work you will make. The thesis project is an opportunity to explore and develop ideas over the course of a full semester, and it is expected that projects will evolve and grow as you make discoveries in the studio. Think of the proposal as a starting point, or as preparation for a journey into unknown territory. Which direction do you plan to go? What tools and ideas are you bringing with you?

Proposals will be reviewed by the department faculty to ensure that proposals are well-developed and to distribute committee assignments. Proposals that do not meet the standards described above may be returned to students for revision, if time permits and at the discretion of the Undergraduate Program Director.

You will be notified of your approved projects before registration for the following semester, and you will be granted permission in SPIRE to register for ART 402. You will also be notified regarding the faculty who will serve on your committee. Students whose proposals are not

approved will not be granted permission to register for 402, and instead will take 6 credits of studio electives (200-level or above) to complete their degree.

The Thesis Committee

BFA Thesis committees consist of two full-time Art Department faculty, one of whom is designated as the Committee Chair. Committee assignments are made by the faculty, based on preferences listed in your Proposal. You may choose to add an additional third committee member of any full-time 5 College faculty; it is your responsibility to seek such faculty member's approval to serve as a third member.

The role of the committee is to support the development of new work through individual studio visits, offering advice and resources relating to your project, and helping you to move toward a cohesive presentation. The chair of the committee will work most closely with you on your project, in particular on the thesis paper. Your committee chair will also establish a set of deadlines for successive drafts of the paper throughout the semester.

Meeting with Your Committee

It is your responsibility to arrange for the requisite number of meetings with all members. You are expected to meet with your Committee Chair 7 to 10 times over the semester, and with your other committee members 5-6 times. Individual faculty members may require more hours and meeting times at their discretion. Download the Meeting Schedule for your committee members to sign and date each time you meet with them. This is required and must be submitted at the end of the project.

The Thesis Paper

The paper should be approximately 2500 words, and must include the following:

- Title Page (download template from department website) with committee members listed and spaces for the requisite signatures
- Background and Intent: Where did you begin? Why were you interested in pursuing this project?
- Sources, precedents, influences (artists, writers, critics, theorists, etc.), with consideration of their relevance to your project: What ideas did you respond to or bring with you?
- Information on processes/media: What materials or techniques did you use?
- Structure of the project: How did the work develop?
- Self-reflection/evaluation of the work created: What does the work communicate? How do you define success in your project? What did you accomplish?
- Bibliography: What textual sources did you reference? You may use MLA or Chicago style formats for citations.

TIP: Think of the paper as an accompaniment to the artwork. The paper should help your reader better understand the work – its ideas, motivations, artistic contexts, and methods. If it doesn't illuminate the work, it probably doesn't belong in the paper.

The finished paper should be made available to your committee members one week before the date of your oral examination.

Public Presentation of Your Project

Your project must be presented to the public in a manner appropriate to the work. It is your responsibility to make a plan for the content and format of your exhibition/presentation, and to review this plan with your committee in advance. Time is reserved in Herter Gallery for BFA Thesis Exhibitions toward the end of each semester. Distribution of exhibition slots in Herter Gallery will be overseen by the Undergraduate Program Director and the Herter Gallery Director. There are also other galleries and venues on campus in which you may decide to mount an exhibition. These include: Student Union Gallery; Augusta Savage Gallery; Hampden Gallery; Incubator at Hampden. If you do not intend to have your show in Herter Gallery, inform the UPD and Gallery Director as soon as possible of this intent; it is your responsibility to make necessary arrangements with an alternative space.

The Oral Examination

The oral examination is a conversation between you and your committee members (approximately 45 minutes in length) during which you will be asked to "defend" your thesis project and paper by addressing its central ideas and sources. There should be a clear correspondence between the work and your words. Print out two hard copies (one for you, one for the department) of your thesis paper, including the Title Page, and bring them both with you to the oral examination. Make sure all of the information on this page is correct, including the spelling of your committee members' names and the title of your thesis project.

Immediately following the oral examination, the committee will confer in private to determine if you have passed, and will communicate their decision to you. If the project artwork and thesis paper are approved (in terms of form and content), you can obtain approval signatures from all your committee members on your title pages immediately. In some cases the committee may decide that there is additional work to be done, and establish a deadline for any additional changes. The second member of your committee may defer to the chair to oversee these changes, in which case you can acquire the second member's signature on the title pages at the end of the oral exam; the committee chair will then sign when the agreed upon changes are made.

It is your responsibility to schedule the oral exam so that all committee members can be present. If you are mounting an exhibition, the exam should take place on site during the exhibition.

What to Submit and When

Your completed Degree Project binder (your “book”) must contain the following, to be submitted to SAB 218 by the last day of Final Exams:

- Title Page signed by your committee members, with correct year, and discipline.
- Thesis Paper
- Exhibition information (include location and dates)
- Photograph of the BFA candidate working on the project
- Signed BFA Thesis Committee Meeting Schedule
- Printed list of documented works, along with digital documentation of all works associated with the project – see next section.

Documentation

On a USB thumb drive, include the following documentation:

For still works/images: JPEG files sized at a minimum of 1000 and a maximum of 2000 pixels wide, maximum 4 megabytes each.

For time-based works: .MOV or .MP4 files, compressed to 5 GB or less

Also include a PDF text document that lists each individual work in your project. This list should be printed and included in your thesis book, and should also be included digitally alongside your work. For each work, include:

- filename
- Title
- Date
- Media
- Dimensions
- Thumbnail sized image 150-200 pixels wide

Thesis Project Timeline

Semester BEFORE Thesis Project begins:

- first four weeks of semester – meet with faculty mentor to develop a thesis proposal
- end of fourth week of semester (approximately October 1 (fall) or February 15 (spring)) – submit your proposal to Department office
- mid-semester – faculty reviews proposals and assigns committees
- students notified of approval before registration
- during registration – students with approved projects register for ART 402

Semester of Thesis Project:

- first two weeks of semester – Orientation meeting for all thesis students w/ UPD and Herter Director

- first 4 weeks of semester – show schedule to be finalized by Herter Director
- regularly throughout semester – meetings w/ committee members
 - successive drafts of paper due according deadlines set by committee chair
- by November 1 (fall) or March 15 (spring) – schedule oral exam with committee members
- at oral examination – if approved, thesis title pages signed by committee
- by last day of final exams – complete Degree Project Binder due to Department Office