

DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Thesis and Senior Project Guidelines for Students and Advisers

Although many senior concentrators in VES do a thesis or a senior project it is not a requirement, nor is it necessary to be recommended for an honors degree from the department. All senior theses or projects are designated with the course number Visual and Environmental Studies 99* and are ordinarily two-semester projects.

* Except for joint concentrators whose primary concentration is not VES. Joint concentrators enroll in only one senior tutorial but may have two advisers.

Academic Requirements

A thesis or senior project is a serious commitment and is the capstone experience in the department. During this two semester project, the student meets at scheduled intervals with his or her thesis or senior project adviser to formulate, develop, and ultimately refine their thesis work. Scheduled into the department calendar are series of dates to serve as checks on the progression of thesis work, which are explained below.

- A thesis in film must represent the third year of work in film production.
- A thesis in video must represent the third year of work in film and/or video.
- Studio thesis applications should be accompanied by a portfolio of work (CD or printed digital images).

All theses in studio and film/video should also be preceded by a related historical or theoretical course.

Applying for a Thesis

All thesis and senior project proposals must be reviewed by the Honors Board before the project can go forward. Students ordinarily apply to do a thesis or senior project in the term before the work begins, although sometimes applications cannot be made (or approved) until the start of the following term. This can be for a variety of reasons including student or adviser leave of absence, or if the proposed adviser is a visiting faculty member not yet in residence.

Sometimes project proposals will shift significantly from the time of initial application or the Honors Board will recommend that the proposal be re-written. In these cases, students should submit a revised proposal at the start of the following term.

Please consult the academic calendar for application and re-application due dates. Students should not enroll in VES 99 before work or revised work is approved by the Honors Board. The Director of Undergraduate Studies is the course head and signs the study card for all VES tutorials, not the project adviser.

Any student who is unsure about applying for a thesis or senior project, or whether or not they have met department requirements to do a thesis, should set up an appointment with their concentration adviser, Director of Undergraduate Studies, or the Manager of Academic Services.

Finding a VES 99 Adviser

A student must find their own project adviser, and ordinarily that is a full-time faculty member in the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies. Graduate students and faculty from other departments ordinarily do not serve as VES 99 advisers. Sometimes a project adviser will be a visiting faculty member who is not in residence until the following academic year. In this case, the student should apply by the designated due date and the project would not receive final approval until the visiting faculty member is able to meet to discuss the proposal.

In general, VES students should conceive their theses in conjunction with VES faculty, and with the idea of working with the department's own faculty members as principal advisers. In the unusual circumstance that the appropriate VES adviser will be on leave during the thesis year or some part thereof, that VES faculty member should be consulted, in advance of the submission of the application, on which other colleague(s) might serve in his or her stead. Normally, only in cases where the VES faculty adviser strongly urges that a faculty member outside of the department supervise the thesis would the Honors Board agree to this arrangement.

Readers

A VES thesis has three readers assigned. One reader is also the VES 99 adviser; and two other faculty members are assigned by the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Unlike in many other concentrations, in VES the readers are known to students before the thesis is completed. In fact, in studio and film/video theses, readers play an important role during the thesis review process. Senior projects do not have readers.

Grading

The VES 99 tutorial is given a letter grade by the adviser whether it is a thesis or a senior project. This grade appears on the student's transcript. If the VES 99 tutorial is to be a thesis, in addition to the tutorial grade given by the adviser, the thesis work receives a Latin honors grade by the three readers (*summa*, *magna*, *cum*, and plus/minus versions thereof).^{*} As with traditional letter grades, the Latin honors grades have numerical equivalents and the three reader grades are averaged together to determine a final thesis grade. The thesis grade does *not* appear on the student's transcript as a separate course, however, this grade *is* averaged into the final department grade point average, and it is counted as two half-courses, since it is work done over two terms.

* If the thesis is not considered honors-level work, it is given a non-honors letter grade (B- and below).

In sum, if a student does a senior project they will receive a letter grade for the VES 99 tutorial. This ordinarily counts as two half-courses toward the department GPA. If a student does a thesis, they will receive a letter grade for the VES 99 tutorial (which will count as two half-courses toward the GPA) and they will receive another grade for the thesis, which does not appear on the transcript but will count as an additional two half-courses toward the department GPA.

Grade Report

At the end of each term, fall and spring, the student's progress in the Senior Tutorial (VES 99) is graded and the adviser writes a brief progress report of the tutorial to date. At the end of the first term, the project adviser gives a grade which is always superseded by the final letter grade, presuming the course is continued into the second semester. Since VES 99 is ordinarily considered a full course, the final grade (which is always a letter grade) will count twice toward the student's grade point average.*

* Out-of-sequence seniors must file a special “combine” petition with the Allston Burr Resident Dean. This petition requires the signature of the instructor of the course (VES 99 is always the Director of Undergraduate Studies) and must be filed by the seventh Monday of the term in which the student is enrolled in the course for the second time. Later or retroactive petitions to combine cannot be accepted by the Registrar without Administrative Board approval. When the halves of a full year course have been combined, the final grade is a cumulative one. The transcript notation for the first half of the course is changed to SUS (suspended).

Reader Reports

Each of the three thesis readers assigns a grade and writes a report on the thesis work. As explained previously, the three grades are averaged together to form one final thesis grade. Students receive copies of the reader reports after the department’s degree meeting.

Honors

All VES concentrators are eligible to be recommended for an honors degree. The VES Honors Board calculates a recommendation for honors based on the factored grades of the thesis and the student’s grades in all concentration courses. This recommendation is presented to the faculty at their meeting in May for review (or January for March degree candidates). A faculty vote is taken and this decision is passed as an honors recommendation to the Registrar of the College. The decision of final honors to be granted on the degree is made by the Registrar based on departmental recommendation and grades overall. Students can consult with their Allston Burr Resident Dean to determine what final honors might be anticipated at Commencement. It is Department policy that there are no reports of decisions regarding the thesis until after the Faculty has considered and voted upon each recommendation for honors. After the faculty has voted honors recommendations, students will be notified of the department’s recommendation to the College and will receive copies of their thesis evaluations.

Discontinuing a Thesis

The process of undertaking thesis work is a serious commitment of time and energy for both the thesis student and adviser. In some cases, however it might be agreed that the thesis should be discontinued at mid-year. If this situation occurs, the student or adviser must indicate this *in writing* to the Director of Undergraduate Studies after the first thesis review and **no later than February 15th (October 15th for Feb. degree candidates)**. Two scenarios may result from this decision:

1. The student turns the thesis into a “Senior Project.” The student will continue to work with the project adviser for the rest of the year. There may or may not be a finished body of work at the end of the tutorial. The student would still remain enrolled in VES 99, but would not have work to submit at the thesis deadline and would not participate in any thesis reviews or have the work read. The adviser would then grade the VES 99 tutorial at its conclusion.
2. The student discontinues both the tutorial *and* thesis work. In this rare case, the student receives a letter grade for the one term of VES 99. Because VES 99 is ordinarily considered a full course, the student must file a *Divide with Credit* (DWC) petition with their Allston Burr Resident Dean. The grade from the first term as well as “DWC” will appear on the student’s transcript. VES 99 would then be given one half-course credit. It is possible to discontinue a senior project by following these procedures as well.

Financial Eligibility

All tutorials and theses are eligible for financial support by the department. The Director of Undergraduate Studies and the Manager of Finance evaluate all projects on an individual basis. Each student can request funding to support their project by filling out a **Budget Request Form**. These forms are due at the beginning of the term in which the thesis or project begins. If you anticipate any unique or extraordinary budget requests, you must make an appointment with the Director of Undergraduate Studies and Manager of Finance well in advance of the start of the project, and before the Budget Request form is submitted.

Senior Project vs. Thesis?

There are a few main differences between a “senior project” and a thesis but since the student enrolls in VES 99 in either case, there is no discernable difference on the transcript. The first difference is that a thesis must conclude with a finished body of work, submitted by the specified due date. A senior project may or may not result in a finished body of work. The due date of a senior project is usually the same as the thesis, but can be as late as the last day of Reading Period. The due date must be worked out in advance between the adviser and the student, particularly if it involves using department equipment or materials also used by regular classes. The second main difference is that there are no readers assigned to critique and grade a senior project. For information about turning a thesis into a senior project, please refer to “discontinuing a thesis” above.

Regarding Studio and Film/Video Theses

Thesis Reviews

A studio or film/video thesis has three reviews during the course of the project, which are attended by the student, the tutorial adviser and readers. The entire faculty is invited to attend the final thesis review. Attendance at all reviews is limited to the thesis student and faculty members. Please consult the current year’s academic calendar for the specific weeks set aside for the scheduling of thesis reviews. In general, the reviews are in early-November, mid to late-February, and final reviews shortly after the thesis is due, in early April. Studio and film/video students working toward a February degree will follow a schedule to finish the thesis by early December, with the first review in March, the second in October of the following academic year, and the final review in early December.

The Manager of Academic Services schedules the reviews, and all students and faculty must be available and in Cambridge during thesis review weeks. Thesis reviews are intended to be no more than 1-hour in length.

Due Dates for Studio & Film/Video Theses

Please consult the current year’s academic calendar for the specific date and location for hand-in.

What to Submit

Studio Theses: Each student who has worked on a studio project should submit two copies of a thesis statement (if appropriate) along with a complete list of works. Samples of past thesis statements are available to review in the department office. Students should bring photocopies of the summary to the final thesis review and distribute this to their readers in advance of the final review. One of the two

statement/list copies should be printed on acid-free, acid-neutral (pH 7.0 - 8.5), or "buffered" paper (Xerox XXV, Howard Permalife, Hammermill Bond or Crane's thesis paper are suggested by Archives, but any kind of acid-free or acid-neutral paper will do).

Following the thesis show installation in May, theses whose grades average *magna* or higher should have images made for permanent archival. One set of slides and list of works and thesis statement placed in the University Archives. Slide labeling can be done by hand but it is better to do this in MS-Word. Students may also submit a CD of digital images, but please make sure all images are labeled.

Film/Video Theses: Students who have produced films or videos should submit film reels or tapes, along with two copies of a summary of the project. The summary should be no longer than 1 page. It is meant to be a synopsis of the film. Students should bring copies of this summary to the final thesis review and distribute this to their readers in advance of the final review.

*** IMPORTANT: Prior to the final review, students must retrieve their film or tape from the department office in the Carpenter Center. Please allow for sufficient time to set up prior to your final review!**

Film Studies, Environmental Studies, and other critical theses

Written theses also have a project adviser and two readers. Unlike studio and film/video theses, however, there are no set thesis reviews.

Students writing theses should consult with their thesis adviser about work submission and create a schedule of one on one meetings that works best for the student and adviser.

Due Dates for Film Studies, Environmental Studies, and other critical essays

Written theses are due on the same day as the studio and filmmaking thesis. Please consult the academic calendar for the exact dates.

What to Submit

Prepare and submit **three** complete copies of the thesis. Two will be returned. (Please see "copies" in the addendum for further information).

ADDENDUM

Contents and Form for Written Theses

Length: The normal length has been set at 10,000 to 15,000 words. Immediately following the title page, insert a separate page indicating the word-count for the text of your thesis. These figures include only the text; they do not include footnotes, documents, bibliography, or appendices. Any extension of the thesis beyond the maximum must be merited by the nature of the topic, or sustained excellence in the treatment of the subject, or both. That extension must be granted in advance by the DUS upon application by the **adviser**. Even theses that receive permission to exceed 15,000 words can still be penalized if readers do not think that the excess length is warranted.

Copies: Prepare and submit **three** complete copies. Two copies should be on acid-free, acid-neutral (pH 7.0 - 8.5), or "buffered" paper (Xerox XXV, Howard Permalife, Hammermill Bond or Crane's thesis paper are suggested by Archives, but any kind of acid-free or acid-neutral paper will do). Clear photocopies on acid-free paper are acceptable. The acid-free copies should be presented in black spring binders (available at Bob Slate and elsewhere). The third copy may be presented in a less expensive binder on ordinary paper. Students should allow ample time for possible problems with computers. Theses whose grades average *Magna* or higher will have one copy placed in the University Archives; at least one copy will be returned to the author. Students in joint concentrations should submit three copies to VES and the required number to their other department.

Text: All copies must, of course, be carefully proofread. Text should be in a highly legible 12-point type. Pages should be 8 1/2" x 11". Margins should be generous (we suggest 2" on the left to allow for binding, 1" on the right), and pages should be numbered. Do not right-justify. The lines of type must be double-spaced, except for quotations of five lines or more, which should be indented and single-spaced.

Illustrations: Illustrations should not ordinarily be included on the same page as thesis text. In most cases, an illustration should appear on a separate page immediately following the first reference to it. In those cases, a list of illustrations should follow the table of contents at the beginning of the thesis. In some cases, illustrations may need to be grouped at the back of the thesis or submitted as an appendix in a separate (spring) binder. In those cases, a list of illustrations will precede the group of illustrations, immediately following the bibliography.

High-quality digital images are preferable to photocopies. When reproducing a digital illustration, students should ordinarily choose the maximum size possible that will not reveal the limitations of the digital source, up to the size of the page (keeping the same margins). (Curves in the illustrations should appear as curves, not flights of digital stairs.) Illustrations should be numbered and captioned. For mounting illustrations, do not use rubber cement, cellophane, or gummed tapes. Use a good quality, acid neutral paste (Uhu or Pritt glue stick). Make sure that you properly cite the sources of illustrations in a separate list.

Style: The following notes cover only the most basic considerations. For further information, consult the University of Chicago's *A Manual of Style* or the Modern Language Association's *Style Manual*. Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers* is a good, inexpensive, brief guide to Chicago style. The Expository Writing Program guide, *Writing With Sources*, is very useful. It is available on-line at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources/>. If you have lost your copy, you can buy a new one at Expository Writing, 8 Prescott Street. (**Joint concentrators** who face

conflicting style guidelines should consider the rationales for each set and decide accordingly. If this requires a marked departure from the format outlined here, a note should be included.)

Contents: Every thesis requires a Table of Contents to guide the reader.

Quotations: Quotations of five lines or fewer, surrounded by quotation marks, may be incorporated into the body of the text. Longer extracts should be indented and single-spaced; they should not be included in quotation marks. Each full quotation should be accompanied by a reference.

Documents: Sources should be quoted verbatim if they are unpublished or for some other reason inaccessible (short ones in footnotes, longer ones in appendices).

Appendices: An appendix is essentially an expanded footnote, but it may also serve as a collection of primary documents or illustrations.

Notes: You may use either footnotes (at bottom of page or the MLA style parenthetical notes. Footnotes are properly used:

1. To state precisely the source or other authority for a statement in the text, or to acknowledge indebtedness for insights or arguments taken from other writers. Quotations should be given when necessary.
2. To make minor qualifications, to prevent misunderstanding, or otherwise to clarify the text when such statements, if put in the text, would interrupt the flow.
3. To carry further some topic discussed in the text, when such discussion is needed but does not fit into the text.

Bibliography: A bibliography, or list of works consulted, must be appended to the thesis. It should be regarded as a convenience to the reader and may be descriptive, wholly or in part. Primary documentary sources, filmographies, secondary authorities and so on should be listed under separate headings.

Printing Problems: Do not wait until the afternoon your thesis is due to print the text. When you are about to format the thesis for final printing, be sure to make an extra copy on two separate disks. If your hard drive crashes, you might also inadvertently ruin a disk. In addition, check to see that all of the pages are included in both copies of your thesis. (**Please note:** Students using laser printers should be sure to determine that the paper they choose will accept laser printing. Some students in the past have reported difficulties using matte acid-free paper with laser printers.)

Computer Viruses: Protect yourself. Viruses, like printer problems, are not a legitimate excuse for a late thesis.