

MONTANA *state university* **SCHOOL OF ART**

MFA
Program
Student
Handbook

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BASIC PROGRAM STRUCTURE:

(note that references to first-year, second-year, and third-year graduate cohorts will be abbreviated, respectively, to FYG, SYG, and TYG throughout this document)

CREDIT REQUIREMENTS:

The MFA degree requires a minimum of 60 credit hours of coursework, including a minimum of 15 credits of thesis. This degree is designed for the professional artist.

Supporting courses (not counted in the sixty-hour total) may be required as preparatory work by the School of Art's Tenure Track Studio Faculty if it is felt that the student is lacking in some area of study critical to their graduate-level development. The Graduate School may also require supporting courses to satisfy either certain undergraduate course deficiencies or other provisions for admission.

All students are required to take the Graduate Seminar and Caucus Course each semester that they are enrolled - including their thesis year. Both Graduate Seminar and Thesis are graded as Pass/Fail. Caucus is assigned a letter grade.

9 credits are considered full time at the graduate level for financial aid and health insurance purposes.

Until the graduate student's committee is formed, the MFA Program Coordinator serves as the student's official advisor. A graduate committee is submitted to the Graduate School toward the end of the second semester of attendance.

All graduate coursework should be completed within three consecutive years. (Additionally, there may be limits regarding studio allocation, GTA options, and course releases – See Financial Aid and Studio Policies)

In extreme circumstances, should faculty support of extension be determined, a master's degree must be completed within five consecutive years. The five years begin with the first course included on the student's program of study.

RESIDENCY:

The MFA Program in Studio Art at Montana State University is an intensive, 3-year program in which students are required to commit to being in residence in Bozeman and on campus making use of both their individual studio spaces in the Melvin Graduate Studio facility as well as facilities and tools in Haynes Hall and other facilities on campus. This allows MFA candidates to take advantage of offerings on campus in the pursuit of their work and to contribute to the academic community of working artists that the MFA Program and the School of Art aspires to be. **Apropos, remote work from home studios is not permitted** except in special circumstances, such as health or accessibility concerns.

GRADUATE COMMITTEE:

Per the assessment criteria outline in the Graduate School of the university, MFA students are required to have an assessment committee composed of three (3) tenure-track members of the Studio Art faculty of the School of Art. Selection of Committee Chair and assignment of additional members occurs toward the end of the spring semester of each MFA student's first year in the program.

Students may express preferences for the selection of their Committee Chair, but the other two members will be assigned by the MFA Program Coordinator in consultation with the faculty and Director of the School of Art. These assignments are made with consideration of offering MFA students broader diversity of perspectives from within the School of Art as well as out of general workload considerations for faculty. Once assigned, the Committee Chair serves as the MFA student's primary academic advisor, lead mentor for the development of their studio work, and chairperson for their Thesis Defense. The second two committee members serve a vital supplementary role of mentorship and critique, possibly with critical perspectives or pushback either from within or without each student's preferred working discipline, aesthetic modes, or conceptual motivation.

Depending on needs or preference, MFA students may also add up to two (2) additional members to their graduate committees. These additional members may be other faculty from Studio Arts, from other areas from within the School of Art (such as Art History), or even faculty members from other disciplines or professionals within the broader community (although the latter may only serve in an advisory capacity). Of course, students seeking committee members from other areas or disciplines must ask permission of these potential members and treat them with the same high level of respect and professionalism as their regular faculty and peers.

The Director of the School of Art is an ex-officio member of all thesis committees.

FACULTY ADVISOR:

Upon starting the program, the MFA Program Coordinator will also serve in the role of Faculty Advisor to each incoming FYG. Despite the Coordinator's role as advisor being similar to a committee chair, mentorship may be more limited until the student finds their footing among the faculty and expresses their preference for the role of chair. Meanwhile the advisor will broadly ensure that their advisees are progressing through the initial stages of the program, providing feedback and guidance when necessary.

MFA PROGRAM COORDINATOR:

The MFA Program Coordinator is a member of the tenure-track, studio faculty whose responsibility is to oversee the academic/studio production aspects of the MFA program. The Coordinator manages the MFA Program Calendar of events and activities (see below), serves as academic advisor to each incoming FYG cohort,

and supervises FYG monitoring responsibilities. Further, the Coordinator is the general program advocate and counselor for the entire MFA student cohort regarding their academic and studio experience, working with Department and College leadership to ensure any problems, questions, or concerns are addressed in a thorough and timely fashion.

FOUNDATIONS COORDINATOR:

The SoA Foundations Coordinator also works closely with the MFA cohort in that they are responsible for oversight of the delivery of all coursework within the SoA's undergraduate Foundations Program. Since the GTA positions commonly awarded to Studio MFA students are significantly intertwined with the Foundations Program, all MFA students must successfully liaise with and work under the Foundations Coordinator to maintain their GTA position in good standing.

THESIS PROJECT:

The MFA Program culminates in the Thesis Project, a summative project of the MFA studio program and occurs within the Helen E. Copeland Gallery. As soon as a Pre-Thesis proposal has been approved by a student's graduate committee, the student may enroll in Thesis tutorial credits at the beginning of their third year. TYG's in the pursuit of a Thesis Project must complete a substantial artwork, body of work, installation etc. that represents a major investigation and articulation of their interests and motivations as artists. Additionally, the Thesis Project must be accompanied by a robust written component as well as an artist statement (see THESIS PROJECT FRAMEWORK section below).

An oral defense and thorough documentation of the thesis exhibition is required. The School of Art's academic requirements for graduate students exist within the framework of requirements established by the Graduate School. Final approval by the Graduate School is required for all applications for admission, for the acceptance of transfer credits, for the formation of and changes to all graduate committees and graduate programs, and for the written and visual documentation of the MFA thesis exhibition. The Director of the School of Art and the Tenure Track Studio Faculty serve as liaison between the School of Art and the Graduate School.

GRADES:

Students must maintain a 3.0 GPA. Additionally, no grade lower than "C" will be counted towards the completion of degree requirements. All thesis credits (ARTZ-590) are taken on a pass/fail basis. Up to six credits of course work (ARTZ-594) other than thesis may be taken pass/fail.

Instructors may assign the grade of "I" (Incomplete) under two sets of circumstances: 1 - unusual academic situations such as equipment failure and other situations clearly beyond the control of the student, and 2 - personal hardship as defined by the most recent Graduate Catalog available online at:

http://www.montana.edu/gradschool/policy/grades_academicstanding.html

In either case, the “I” grade may be initiated by the graduate student’s full committee or faculty advisor.

Continued enrollment in Montana State University’s graduate program requires a student to maintain academic progress toward their degree objectives, which consists of the timely pursuit of program courses as well as a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher. Failure by the student to achieve either of these conditions will result in academic probation and may result in ineligibility for financial aid, teaching assistantships and possible removal from the program.

SUSPENSION POLICY:

A student whose cumulative grade-point average is less than 3.0 (“B”) at the end of a semester of probation may be suspended from the Graduate School. A student who is suspended from graduate school may continue to enroll in graduate courses as a non-degree graduate. Non-degree credits during this time will be ineligible for use on a graduate program.

A student may request a reconsideration of admission after one or more semesters of full-time graduate work have been successfully completed (a minimum of 9 credits with a 3.0 GPA.) A request for reconsideration for admission must be made in writing to the Graduate School.

FEES:

Students are responsible for the payment of university and departmental fees that support their access to services, facilities, and studios on campus. In most instances, these fees may not be waived or covered by tuition waiver vouchers and must be paid by students through GTA stipends or personal finances. Fees typically amount to \$1,400.00 per semester.

REGISTRATION:

All graduate students are required to register for their own courses each and every semester. Please consult this handbook as to course structure and requirements. Graduate students have only limited flexibility of course selection in the MFA Program and may select the graduate-level Art History courses they wish to pursue, as well as the studio tutorial credits they wish to enroll in – though in the case of studio tutorials, the precise credit load and distribution outlined in this handbook should be stringently adhered to. **Please note: no individual studio tutorial course number (e.g. ARTZ526 Drawing) may be taken for more than 15 credits total.**

Neither ARTH 492 credits nor 300 level art history classes may be applied toward the graduate program. Registration for required Art History courses takes place in the semester prior to the course you seek enrollment, and graduate students enjoy priority enrollment over undergraduates. Please pay attention to announcements regarding the timing of registration.

Each semester graduate students will receive a new registration PIN from their committee chair or advisor. The PIN allows online registration for ARTH courses, Seminar, Caucus, and Thesis credits. To enroll in studio tutorials, graduate students must contact the specific faculty member they wish to take credits with, noting the specific course and number of credits. Provided there are no schedule conflicts, and the faculty member can advise the student, they will be able to add said student to their roster for the semester. Please review and adhere to the appropriate number of studio credits (ARTZ-5XX) to be taken each semester as prescribed in this handbook.

SYG and TYG students may use excess credit waivers they receive from their GTA positions to enroll in supplemental courses on campus, though these courses cannot replace the necessary coursework towards the MFA degree, nor will they enable MFA students to in any way speed up their progression through the program. As such, students should carefully weigh the schedule and workload impacts of any supplemental coursework on their standard degree requirements. Costs associated with supplemental credits enrolled in beyond the credit waivers allocated to each student are incurred at said student's own expense.

PROGRAM OF STUDY:

Toward the end of their first year in the program, each MFA student is required by the university's Graduate School to submit a Program of Study (PoS) that outlines their proposed path toward completion of their degree. While this PoS process may seem odd to Studio MFA students, given that their credit load is clearly outlined in this handbook, the PoS system is designed to accommodate every post-graduate program on campus, requiring students to credibly outline coursework appropriate to their individual research goals. In the case of MFA students, it is important that once a Program of Study is completed, it is adhered to *exactly* – otherwise an official change to the PoS must be submitted to and approved by the Graduate School. For example, if a student has planned to enroll in ARTZ526 Drawing credits, but decides to take credits in another studio option, this would be enough to warrant a PoS change.

Program of Study submission guidelines and procedures can be found at:
<https://www.montana.edu/gradschool/forms.html>

BASIC CREDIT STRUCTURE:

This section outlines the basic curriculum of the MFA Program on a semester-to-semester basis. The credit load and basic outline should be adhered to by each student. This is to ensure a general parity of experience for each cohort as they progress through the program. For reference, MFA Studio credits are designated as follows:

ARTZ 505 – Painting
ARTZ 515 – Ceramics
ARTZ 524 – Metalsmithing
ARTZ 526 – Drawing
ARTZ 527 – Printmaking
ARTZ 529 – Sculpture

Reminder! Each student may enroll in no more than 15 total credits in any of the above tutorial sections.

First Year Graduate Student (FYG)

Fall:

Seminar: ARTZ-594 – 1 Credit
Caucus: ARTZ-500 – 2 Credits
Contemporary Art History Offering: ARTH-451 – 3 Credits
Ind. Studio with Faculty Advisor: ARTZ-5XX - 1 Credit
Pedagogy: ARTZ-5XX – 2 credits

Spring:

Seminar: ARTZ-594 – 1 Credit
Caucus: ARTZ-500 – 2 Credits
Any Art History Offering: ARTH-4XX – 3 Credits (consult Advisor)
Ind. Studio with Faculty Advisor: ARTZ-5XX - 3 Credits (can be spread between multiple faculty/tutorials – RECOMMENDED)

Total First Year Credits: 18

Second Year Graduate Student (SYG)

***Fall:**

Seminar: ARTZ-594 – 1 Credit
Caucus: ARTZ-500 – 2 Credits
Any Art History Offering: ARTH-4XX – 3 Credits
Ind. Studio with Committee Chair: ARTZ-5XX - 1 Credit

Additional Independent Studio Credits: ARTZ-5XX – 2 Credits (can be spread between multiple faculty/tutorials)

***Spring:**

Seminar: ARTZ-594 – 1 Credits

Caucus: ARTZ-500 – 2 Credits

Ind. Studio with Committee Chair: ARTZ5XX – 1 Credit

Additional Independent Studio Credits: ARTZ-5XX - 6 Credits (can be spread between multiple faculty/tutorials)

Total Second Year Credits: 19

*Fall and Spring credit loads are interchangeable in the 2nd year, should an appropriate Art History offering not be offered in the Fall.

Third Year Graduate Student (TYG)

Fall:

Seminar: ARTZ-594 – 1 Credit

Caucus: ARTZ-500 – 2 Credits

Ind. Studio with Committee Chair: ARTZ-5XX – 1 credit

Thesis Work: ARTZ-590 – 8 Credits

Spring:

Seminar: ARTZ-594 – 1 Credit

Caucus: ARTZ-500 – 2 Credits

Ind. Studio with Committee Chair: ARTZ-5XX – 1 credit

Thesis Work: ARTZ-590 – 7 Credits

Total Third Year Credits: 23

Total Credits Towards Degree Requirements: 60

FINANCIAL AID:

Each Studio MFA student, upon acceptance into the MFA program, is awarded the status of Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), a form of work-study program that provides a full tuition waiver as well as a stipend. However, these credit waivers and stipends require certain departmental work and support responsibilities from MFA students, up to and including serving as instructors-of-record within the Foundations Program of the School of Art (in their second and third years in the program). If students wish to waive these responsibilities and the concomitant financial and tuition support, they may do so, but will then be responsible for covering their tuition and expenses themselves. Additionally, there is a performance review process for maintaining the GTA position, and in rare cases a GTA position may be withheld due to poor, unprofessional, or negligent implementation of GTA responsibilities.

Financial aid (other than GTAs) is available to graduate students who show evidence of financial need. While such assistance may take various forms, most graduate students receive aid through loans or the work-study program. For further information, consult the Financial Aid on-line at <http://www.montana.edu/wwwfa/> or at MSU (located on the lower floor of the Strand Union Building, (406)994-2845).

Although fellowships are not awarded by the School of Art, certain students newly accepted to the MFA program may be nominated by the faculty for a Presidential Graduate Scholarship on the basis of an unusually outstanding academic undergraduate record and a record of special achievements, awards, exhibitions, etc. This is a 1-year non-renewable scholarship.

Nine credits and above are considered a full course load and full time status for a graduate student. A teaching assistant must enroll in a minimum of six credits a semester in order to keep his or her fee waiver. During the semesters he/she is teaching, a TA can enroll in no more than 15 credits.

CAREER PLACEMENT OFFICE:

Graduate students in art, especially those planning to look for jobs in the teaching field, should consider viewing MSU's Career, Internship, and Student Employment Services website: <https://www.montana.edu/aycss/careers>. This site details the many services MSU offers to continuing students as well as students transitioning into professional life.

STUDIO POLICIES:

Haynes Hall is open during the posted regular and holiday hours. The Melvin Graduate Studios are open 24 hours with the exception of maintenance closures. Graduate students will be issued a key to the Melvin studio facility upon enrollment in the program. Graduate students may also request a key to varied facilities within Haynes Hall, where appropriate (such as the graduate prep-office on the second floor). Keys are obtained with a requisition form from the School of Art Office and must be signed by the Director of the School of Art. Once a student has completed the requisition, they will receive an email notification that their key(s) are ready for pick up at Facilities Services, located at the Plew Building (6th Ave and Grant Street). Not all facilities in Haynes Hall are accessible to graduate students at all times (for example, Sculpture has specific, posted hours).

MELVIN STUDIO ALLOCATION AND USE:

The allocation of specific studio spaces at the Melvin facility are made on a yearly basis. Students may expect a seniority preference in allocation, with continuing TYGs allowed first pick, followed by continuing SYGs, and so on. Studios are typically allocated with a drawing of straws within the respective cohorts.

A continuing graduate student (i.e., one who was enrolled the preceding spring semester) may use his/her studio space over the summer provided he/she has preregistered for fall semester and has followed appropriate protocol regarding studio clean-out, use, and studio draw. If a continuing student intends to use lab equipment, shop facilities or shop space outside of the graduate facility during the summer session, he/she must register for a minimum of one credit in the area in which he/she intends to work (regardless of the declared area of study). The reason for this is to ensure that the appropriate lab fee is paid to cover materials and/or costs of running equipment; furthermore, should an accident with equipment in a university space occur in the summer, the registered student will be covered by the university insurance they paid for at the beginning of the preceding spring semester. Please note, if the student waived the university insurance coverage in the spring any accidents will be his/her own financial responsibility.

Above all, though the studios are university facilities that adhere to general MSU policies (e.g. with regard to safety and risk as well as alcohol and tobacco consumption), MFA studio spaces should be considered semi-private, personal spaces. ***Always request permission to enter a studio space when the artist is present, and do not enter others' studio spaces whilst they are away, except in emergencies. Be respectful and responsible peers and stewards of each other's artwork and processes.***

The following guidelines apply to graduate studio and office spaces:

- Each student is responsible for maintaining a clean and safe workplace at all times and must keep common areas clear for programmatic and public use.

- University regulations apply to all studio spaces including those prohibiting **alcohol consumption and smoking**.
- All adjoining hallways and common areas must be kept free of trash and materials at all times.
- No permanent alterations should be made to studio spaces.
- Be considerate of other students when playing radios, making noise, using noxious materials, etc. (Safe and conscientious studio practice is required)
- A mandatory studio cleanup occurs at the end of each semester and a mandatory clean out will be scheduled after week 17 (the week after finals week) each spring semester.
- Any work left in studios and offices after a student graduates, abandons after mandatory clean out dates, withdraws from the program, will be removed and is not the responsibility of the School of Art.
- Vandalism, disregard for other students, and failure to obey University regulations will not be tolerated.
- No animals of any kind are to be kept or housed within the Melvin Graduate Studios
- You may not use your studio as a living space any duration of time. The studio spaces are to be used solely for the purpose of creating your work and as labs and working spaces.
- You must get written permission from the Director of the School of Art and any other University agencies should you wish to store vehicles of any kind at the graduate students. Unauthorized vehicles are subject to ticketing and towing.

Graduate Studio common spaces are public spaces and must be kept clear of debris and other items at all times. Shared resource spaces such as the MFA Student Workshop, yard, and kiln areas also must be cleaned after use and kept clear of personal items at all times they are not in active use. Vehicles (working or broken) and non- practice related items are not to be stored on the grounds at any time for any reason. Faculty should be consulted if you have any items you are unsure about prior to depositing them in the grounds. Students are expected to always follow and abide by all studio safety protocols. Disregard for these rules will result in punitive measures. **Ignoring safety and use jeopardizes not only your own safety but the safety of others and the longevity of our program.** Studios are allocated to graduates for use during the year but at no time become the property of the student. Spaces are to be returned to their original condition at the end of each year. Failure to return spaces to their proper state when requested (studio cleanout dates) will result in financial, transcript, and registration holds and possible loss of studio privileges.

CALENDAR AND PROGRAMMING:

The Studio MFA Program Calendar is the fulcrum upon which the program pivots. It acts as a general timeline for program activities, such as Crit Crawls (open studios), exhibitions, and other program events and deadlines. Perhaps most importantly, it provides an “appointment calendar” for the SoA community for events at the Melvin Studios, a vital conduit for community feedback to MFA students.

Program deadlines and exhibition timeframes are usually outlined in advance each semester, though these may be subject to change due to schedule conflicts or curricular opportunities that emerge. Students must always ensure they can check their university email accounts for updates on program and schedule changes.

Below are general descriptions of MFA program, events, and calendar items:

MFA STUDIO CREDITS:

MFA Studio credits (ARTZ 505, 515, 524, 526, 527, 529) are enrolled in under the auspice of independent tutorials with School of Art tenure-track faculty. These independent tutorials can be as simple as regular meetings for critical feedback and advice on the development of ongoing studio work, or more specifically directed, such as material and technique instruction or special topics and research. Credit load and specific topics or learning outcomes must be developed and agreed upon between MFA students and faculty.

Regardless of the topical specificity of a studio tutorial, students and faculty **must meet for *at least* two hours of face-to-face contact per registered credit**. For example, if a student enrolls in ARTZ 529 for 3 credits, then the student and faculty must meet face-to-face for *at least* 6 hours during the semester. These studio credits are undertaken in support of MFA studio practice, so *unless otherwise stipulated in the scope of a tutorial project*, meetings should occur at the MFA Melvin studio facility, where evidence of the student’s ongoing development can be clearly seen and assessed by faculty. Finally, MFA students must keep a studio meeting log (see below) as a record that meetings with faculty are proceeding apace.

MFA Thesis credits are intended to be fully independent and as such are excepted from this basic requirement (though regular meetings with committee members must still occur).

WALLER YOBLONSKY GALLERY EXHIBITIONS:

MFA students can be expected to mount and/or attend several group exhibitions of their nascent work during the course of the semester. The W-Y Gallery may also host additional exhibitions during the course of a given semester, either of the MFA

students' work, or the work of guest artists or students, depending on SoA programming or need.

- FYG/SYG “intro”, “kick-off” and “closer” exhibitions - Held each semester, these are required mixed of cohort-specific group shows in the WY Gallery that are coordinated by the SYG cohort and curated by either the entire FYG/SYG group or by specific nominees chosen by the group. These can be simply open “show whatever’s fresh” affairs, or they can be modeled after a curatorial theme or conceptual impetus. MFA students are encouraged to experiment with different ways of organizing or staging these shows. They serve as milestone deadlines for presenting work and are thus important and helpful for assessment purposes.
- TYG “teaser” exhibitions – Held toward the end of the Fall semester of each year, this exhibition features and is curated by the TYG cohort. This exhibition usually features work that will either appear in the coming thesis exhibitions, or it can serve as a useful opportunity to troubleshoot options or ideas for the thesis exhibition. Like the FYG/SYG shows, these teaser exhibitions can be curated and/or thematically linked as much or as little as the TYG cohort deems appropriate. The exhibition culminates in critiques and Q&A on the afternoon of the final Friday of the exhibition.
- Work In Progress (W.I.P.) exhibitions – held in Fall semester for the SYG cohort, and Spring semester for the FYG cohort, the W.I.P. installations and critiques are required short-term, one-person exhibitions of in-progress work followed by an in-person critique with each student’s MFA peers and the studio faculty and invitees. These are important not only for intense feedback from the Studio Art MFA and faculty community, but also for the opportunity to practice mounting and curating a one-person exhibition of each student’s work. They can thus be viewed as mini dry runs of the final thesis exhibition and defense.
- Other exhibitions - depending on the calendar schedule or student interest, MFA students may also “check-out” the W-Y during weeks free of pre-scheduled programming to mount additional exhibitions or test-installations.

CRIT-CRAWLS:

Crit Crawls are essentially open studio events during which Studio MFA students invite the larger SoA community (faculty and undergraduate students) as well as community invitees, into their studios for conversation and feedback. Crit Crawls are coordinated by the SYG cohort, and occur twice each semester, often occurring on the same evenings as receptions for exhibitions in the W-Y Gallery.

TYG ARTIST LECTURES:

A requirement for TYGs early in the Fall Semester of their thesis year, these are essentially classic artist talks during which the TYGs are required to speak about their artwork generally, and their coming thesis exhibitions more specifically. These are useful means to practice the art of public speaking about one’s work, but more importantly serve as a great opportunity for the TYGs to re-visit their Pre-Thesis

presentations after a summer of work and reflection and to accommodate any changes or course corrections in their work prior to the last few months of studio production in preparation for their thesis exhibitions. The TYG cohort are responsible for the scheduling and formatting of these lectures. Campus classroom or lecture-hall facilities can be reserved via the Astra Schedule on MSU's website. Instructions for this can be found at:

https://www.montana.edu/registrar/classroom_reservations.html

COMMITTEE / ADVISOR MEETINGS:

Each Studio MFA is responsible for scheduling a mid-term and late-term meeting with their committees and/or Advisor for generalized progress check and feedback session. Students are of course also welcome to host many more meetings with faculty at their discretion and faculty availability. However, these two general meetings are required.

FYG INITIAL MEETINGS:

Since they are new to the program, FYGs are required to host introductory meetings with ALL tenure-track Studio Art faculty, mainly in a bid to introduce themselves and their work to the faculty, and to get a better sense of who they might want to work more closely with in the future. These initial, half-hour minimum meetings must be held prior to the 8th week of the first Fall semester. Note that these meetings must be specifically scheduled and focused. In other words, they cannot occur as part of a Crit Crawl or reception event. Students may also meet with other members of the MSU community, including non-tenure-track faculty or faculty outside the SoA.

MEETING LOG:

Studio Art MFAs are requested to keep a basic meeting log to record when and with whom they met for feedback in their studios, to be copied and submitted with their end-of-semester Self-Assessments. These logs are of great utility in the assessment process and allow faculty to gain a sense of how much students have availed themselves of faculty availability (as well as keeping track of which faculty may have been less available, for any reason).

END-OF-SEMESTER ASSESSMENTS + SELF-ASSESSMENTS:

At the end of each semester, each Studio MFA student must submit a self-assessment form to their advisor or committee outlining their sense of progress within the program and within their studio output. These self-assessments are of great utility to faculty in supplementing their final assessments for each student at the end of each semester. Note that SYGs submitting their Pre-Thesis proposals and TYGs submitting their Thesis Papers and Defense are exempt from submitting Self-Assessment forms in those Spring semesters (a self-assessment is either implicitly or explicitly a component of those program milestones). SYGs and TYGs can still expect to receive an end-of-semester Assessment at the end of the Spring semester, however.

GRAD READER:

The MFA Grad Reader forms the basis for the Caucus course each semester. In its most basic and typical form, the Reader is composed of reading submissions from the MFA cohorts and faculty for use in critical discussion during the caucus course meetings. However, the exact format of this reader may vary depending on the scope of the Caucus course in any given semester (see Caucus description below).

GRAD CRITIQUES:

While Studio MFA students are encouraged to arrange formal critiques of their work on the regular, the program will arrange for additional formal critique times during the semester, usually coinciding with Studio MFA student exhibitions in the W-Y Gallery. These critiques serve to further facilitate feedback sessions. Specific times and formats for these sessions should be arranged between the MFA cohort and the MFA Program Coordinator. Note that not all faculty may be able to attend these sessions, but MFA students should not ignore the utility of formal peer critiques and should take the opportunity seriously.

MFA PROGRAM MANDATORY FULL-COHORT COURSES:

SEMINAR – 2 contact hours each week, Fridays from approx. 10 AM until 12 PM

Though specific content varies from semester-to-semester depending on which faculty member leads the course, Seminar will generally address rotating, topical issues such as:

1. “hot-button” topics or questions related to arts practice and discourse
2. professional practices
3. financial and other strategies for career protection
4. studio visits with local artists or visiting artists
5. community service work (outreach to area high schools, alternative shows, workshop offerings)
6. reviews, critiques and or discussions surrounding TYG thesis exhibitions

CAUCUS – 1.5 contact hours each week, Wednesdays from 5:30 until 7:00 PM

Caucus is a discussion and ideation-focused course in which the full MFA cohort meets once per week to discuss and debate one or more content submissions from MFA students and Studio Art faculty. Topics can vary widely but typically follow the basic theme of being information that informs one’s studio practice without however being specifically tied to it. Submissions are usually in the form of readings included into the Grad Reader in each semester. Generally, students can expect to submit written responses to course content on a weekly basis to facilitate discussion. Also, upperclass students, particularly TYGs, can expect to take leadership roles in facilitating discussion and/or to periodically lead the class altogether.

Though Caucus always has the same basic structure of engagement, response, and discussion, the faculty and/or grad cohort can have some impact on the general thrust of the content for each given semester. Hence, dependent on faculty and grad input, the course might take on several basic structural shifts including:

1. Caucus Classic: Reading/Content submissions are not curated and represent simply an interest or concern of each submitter. This structure will “bounce around” topically from session to session.
2. Caucus Curated: Submissions are requested based on an “umbrella” theme or topic through which submitters may curate their selections.
3. Caucus Considered: A deep-dive into one or more topics. In this instance, one or more books or a specific reading list may replace the normal Caucus Reader for the semester

PRE-THESIS PROPOSAL FRAMEWORK:

Description:

The Pre-thesis requires SYGs to conduct brief, oral presentations on the development of their work after four semesters within the program. Candidates will write and speak about the direction of their work, including how they have internalized research references and influences. Presentations are a brief, **10-15 minute lecture with images** given to the full studio arts faculty followed by Q&A and a final closed discussion among the faculty. Additionally, a narrative, pre-thesis document must be submitted to the students' committee two weeks in advance of the presentation for suggestions and feedback. Finalized pre-thesis drafts must be provided to the rest of the studio faculty (printed copies in mailboxes) no later than 1 week prior to the scheduled pre-thesis presentation.

Pre-thesis requires the following components:

1. Portfolio:

This is an overview presentation of the work completed thus far in the program, with emphasis on the direction(s) the work is taking for the thesis exhibition. Images included in the portfolio should help the faculty begin to envision the thesis exhibition the student is planning so that a discourse surrounding concerns and thoughts can ensue. (This will vary considerably depending on the nature of the student's work and we understand that exhibitions will develop and shift beyond this proposal)

2. Outline:

This section is a "table of contents" for the thesis project. It should include both a basic physical description of the studio work proposed, an inventory of the overarching research topic(s) and the arguments each student plans to investigate in the thesis paper. Additionally, please list references, sources, and influences.

3. Pre-Thesis Narrative:

This document requires each student to "flesh out" their sources of ideation and research questions or arguments in narrative form. The narrative should be approximately 3,000 words (around 4-5 pages). This as an abstract indicating the potential for further inquiry through a series of questions as well as possible arguments each student might have about their research topic (refer to the "Topic" section of the Thesis Project Framework). No conclusions are necessary, it is simply useful to articulate the scope of the inquiry, like: what developments in the work spurred the interest?, are there any specific arguments or implications the artist wants to investigate?, what are the expected results? etc. This document, though an abstract, should already show evidence of a developed research agenda, and should be therefore appropriately written and cited/sourced (CMS, APA, MLA).

4. Self-Assessment:

A reflection on the stated goals and research interests with an honest assessment of potential problem areas and difficulties. Please use this assessment to generate a timeline or punch list for proposed work and study for the thesis year. These elements may change/grow based on developments in the work. Timelines are a useful tool in identifying potential problem areas before they become prohibitive to the realization of your thesis work.

THESIS PROJECT FRAMEWORK:

(Beyond The Thesis: Statement, Research Topic, and Outreach Component)

INTRODUCTION:

The primary goal of each MFA student is the creation and exhibition/dissemination of a substantial piece or body of artwork, the precise contours of which are unique to each student and are, as such, impossible to specifically delineate as to programmatic requirements. It is the primary responsibility of each graduate student's Thesis Committee to determine if and how each student's studio output fulfills this remit.

This section, however, is intended to provide a framework and suggestions for the components of the thesis project outside of studio work and the resulting thesis exhibition. These include three varied "documents" that help students, as artists, think about what motivates them in making their work, as well as how to develop and disseminate those ideas in diverse forms that can ultimately supplement their studio practice in meaningful ways.

There are three basic components to the thesis project outside of the exhibition of work and the resulting oral defense with the Thesis Committee: the Artist Statement, the Research Topic and Paper, and the Public Outreach component.

THE ARTIST STATEMENT:

The artist statement is the personal (written) expression of each artist. It's often useful to consider the context in which one's work is appearing, and to tailor the statement accordingly. For the MFA thesis, a solo exhibition, each student is given absolutely free reign to furnish whatever they feel they need to supplement the work on view. This can be a "standard" articulation of their thoughts and motivations, a manifesto, a polemic, a poem. As Jean Cocteau allegedly once commented, "An artist cannot speak about his art any more than a plant can discuss horticulture." In some cases, this is quite literally true. Thus, the statement is *whatever you the maker need it to be* – our only requirement is that it must *be*. It might be useful to consider this as another piece of your thesis exhibition, only composed of a different material. If you're confused or have your doubts, consult your committee, as always.

THE RESEARCH TOPIC:

To help determine an appropriate topic for this requirement, graduate students are encouraged to carefully consider their work and its development in consultation with faculty mentors and peers. This must be a robust investigation, with a fulsome articulation (25,000 words, or 20-25 pages) and should be fully sourced and cited along an official styles guideline (APA, MLA, CMS) with an accompanying bibliography, and if necessary, a table of contents.

The etymological foundation of the term 'thesis' generally indicates a 'putting something forth' in the manner of an argument that is substantiated through

evidence. This entire process can seem inimical to the work of an artist, particularly if such work is deemed 'successful' only through an excessive quality that quite literally cannot be defined. If such is the case, how can an academic research topic for such a special kind of idiosyncrasy (or idiocy) be determined? Often, an artist is paradoxically in perhaps the worst position to discuss their work in terms of its ultimate 'meaning', especially since this can be indelibly altered through changes in context. To be sure, artists produce work and such work – even when performative or specifically temporal – becomes manifest in some way shape or form, and this is certainly a kind of 'evidence', but not one that makes much sense to explicate in a written form, unless this writing supplements the work in its own way.

What an artist *can* (and in most cases should) speak about is what informs their work; what motivates them viscerally, emotionally and intellectually – those sparks that spur one to reflection and action. It is in this sense that research including a research topic along the lines of a thesis argument can be useful: as a process for refining ideation. It is in this spirit that we require the development of the written thesis project.

However, how much this research and response *specifically* addresses the studio output of each artist can be left up to the individual to determine with the assistance of their committee of advisors. Our aim at the School of Art is primarily to advocate for the power and usefulness of directed inquiry and research, and to demand a level of rigor in its application. What we do not advocate are desperate attempts to shoehorn 'theory' into pseudo-intellectual, jargon-heavy explications of work processes. In many cases, particularly when artists feel unable to honestly talk about their work in terms of academic norms prescribed more broadly for the humanities, they nonetheless *can* thoroughly research a topic or area that is greatly informative to their work. As an example, let's suppose an artist is deeply and personally inspired by their ethnic identity. Even if this artist finds it extremely difficult to explain choices they make in their work (their working process might be extremely intuitive or "unconscious"), the same artist could likely research and write about the history of colonialism and integration and how this relates to the contemporary situation – up to and including their personal experience. Such a research project would be adjacent as it were to their studio practice, but still entirely related.

When forming the goals for this project, it's important to try to localize a topic for research; the more concise the better. It's also useful to determine a topic at the nexus of bodies of existing literature or evidence (i.e. gender and equity among the North American working class, or: the formal and aesthetic manifestations of social work, or: the history and contemporary ideological implications of "Manifest Destiny", or: effects of indigenous materials in craft in forming regional cultural identity, or: implications of the "Protestant Ethic" within an artistic practice – whatever). Rely on "what your work is telling you" as well as advice from your advisors if you're having trouble settling on a topic. If you already know generally where you want to look, try to formulate a series of basic questions or arguments of your topic. For example, do you "have a bone to pick" with any of the trends or

assertions you see at work in the art and literature you find inspiring? If so, this might be a good place to start digging.

METHODOLOGY:

It may also be useful for you to select a particular methodology (or a particular mixture of methodologies) to help you structure the way in which you assimilate and reflect on the information you acquire. Here are a few broad categories that are often employed in the arts and humanities – NOTE: these descriptions are all too brief and incomplete and are provided in the interest of supplying some framing remarks. If any of them seem “right” or fitting to your work or interests, you should definitely do some follow up research on the history and practitioners of the method. Also note that these are by no means the only methodologies out there; these suggestions are merely food for thought to get you started:

Dialectical Analysis:

Well steeped in the history of logic and philosophy, dialectics is the studied analysis of truth in opinion, or the examination of contradiction in metaphysical arguments and observations. Traditionally dialogic in form, dialectics seeks to achieve a “synthesis” of analyzed observations and experiences; a new logical thesis (or agreement), a “higher level” from which the analytical process begins anew (thesis leads to antithesis, which proceeds to a synthesis, i.e. a new thesis).

Prominent Figures: Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, GWF Hegel

Deconstruction:

Heavily informed by dialectics, deconstructionism has been a hallmark of post-modern thought and activity and is centered on identifying the metaphysical ordering aspects of culture (logocentrism), or the desire for an unmediated access to meaning and presence. Deconstructionism is constantly critical of the possibility of such unmediated access outside of language, and hence the tendency to slip into metaphysical fallacies. Though it is similar to dialectics in the analysis of contradiction (or *aporia*), deconstruction differs largely in that the imposition of a synthesis is deemed at best a problematic sophism and should thus be avoided.

Prominent Figures: Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes

Historiography:

The analysis of the way history is recorded and disseminated. In addition to studying “the historical record”, historiography is concerned with the way in which that history is recorded, where it’s coming from, who’s doing the recording, etc. In other words, how does the “spin” of the basic “data” retrospectively affect the past and enable an analysis that can affect future activity.

Prominent Figures: Voltaire, David Hume

Phenomenology:

An analysis and philosophy of sense perception, in other words, a study of “what appears”. This approach is often informed by and in argument with the framework espoused by dialectical analysis and/or deconstructionism, in that these two find it dubious that we can have reasoned access to “basic” phenomena without recourse to “logos” or language. Nonetheless, this enquiry into the nature of “being” has presented many fruitful trains of thought that have become incredibly influential to artists.

Prominent Figures: Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Historical Materialism:

The study of how society fulfills its most basic needs for the reproduction of daily life, and how these methods of production and sustenance affect the cultural (philosophical, ideological, artistic, etc.) formations that develop as a result of these conditions. Historical Materialism is closely related to dialectics, in that it examines the “dialectic” between the “base” i.e. the material conditions of social production, and the “superstructure”, or the “cultural” formations that emerge as powerful regulating forces, exerting control back upon the base. Various theorists, artists and philosophers have placed more or less emphasis on one or the other of these two sides of the structure. This method is quite well suited to class analysis as well as an analysis of political economy.

Prominent Figures: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, GWF Hegel, Louis Althusser

Logical Positivism:

An attempt to merge a classical study of logic to “empirically sound” scientific methods in the interest of radically destabilizing the human tendency towards creating metaphysical explanations for behavior and phenomena. Empiricism, realism and contemporary efforts in creating philosophies of science are closely related.

Prominent Figures: Karl Popper, Alfred North Whitehead, Carl Hempel, Ludwig Wittgenstein

Sociology:

The study of human behavior in relation that uses method of empirical research and analysis to form knowledge and histories of social development and change. Behavioral analysis based on statistical data gathering, polling; basically examining “hard” evidence of behavior are common to this field.

Prominent Figures: August Comte, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Pierre Bourdieu

New Materialism:

At this point only a loose affiliation of methodologies troubled by an anthropocentric framing of reality in determining research agendas. Referred diversely as Object Oriented Ontology (“OOO” or “Triple O”), Agential Realism, Speculative Realism, Actor Network Theory, and others, this emerging school of thought is organized under the rubric of the so-called “post-human” or the “post-anthropocene”; common to each is an examination of what is problematic with a human-centered hierarchy of relevance and relationality. As such, each “faction” places a significant emphasis of the importance of non-human actors (or “actants”), and what manner of agency such actors express.

Prominent Figures: Graham Harmon, Karen Barad, Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway

THE PUBLIC OUTREACH COMPONENT:

The final part of your thesis project is the public outreach component. This is quite simply an event, open to the public, that we want you to organize the terms of, and which relates in some way to your work and research. Though most Studio MFA students effectively “fold” their oral defense with their committee into a public panel discussion and Q&A, the possibility of doing something different (and holding a private oral defense) is available to each student. Much like the statement, this public outreach component can take a form the student deems to be the most appropriate to their work. Note that this event must be in addition to the eventual gallery reception (but it can be scheduled concordantly with or adjacent to the reception). Some examples might include:

- A public panel discussion on your work, with accompanying Q&A from viewers. (this is the aforementioned typical format most Studio MFA students employ).
- A performance, social, or political intervention.
- “Interactive” installation elements.
- A public lecture at an appropriate venue given by you on your research topic.

These are only several examples – students are encouraged to think creatively and to consider what kind of outreach format closely aligns with their work and their professional goals. As with all of the above requirements, it is strongly advised that each student closely consult with their committee members for advice on how to proceed to collaboratively find a direction that fulfills the requirement while responding to the interests of each artist.

THESIS DEFENSE (ORALS):

The Thesis Defense is a comprehensive exchange between the presenting Studio MFA student and their Graduate Committee. The Thesis Defense is meant to be a mechanism to aid the student as they leave the program and provide them with questions – formal and conceptual challenges they should consider as they leave the university and move into their professional practice. The defense begins with a

formal introduction and a few comments regarding the graduate student from their Committee Chair. This is followed by introductory remarks from the defending student before the beginning of a general exchange that typically lasts for an hour. At the end of the Defense the Committee confers briefly and an announcement as to whether the graduate passes or fails the program is made. Defending students must furnish their Thesis Defense paperwork (<https://www.montana.edu/gradschool/forms.html>), submitting this form to their Committee Chair prior to the defense. Note that the defense can be privately held between the student and their committee (and SoA Director as ex officio member), or be held as a public panel, as described above.