

Appendix C
School of Music, Theatre & Dance
Department of Dance
Thesis Committee Guidelines

Thesis Committee Handout/Guidelines

Thank you for considering a request to be a thesis committee member for an MFA candidate in the Department of Dance, School of Music, Theatre & Dance. Dance MFA candidates are required to have three thesis committee members: two from the Department of Dance, one of whom is the Thesis Chair; and a third, non-Dance U-M faculty member or a member of the private sector.

Thesis committee members will serve for both the Fall and Winter terms of the student's final year. Committee members are asked to meet with the student twice during the Fall term and three times during the Winter term, and to provide constructive feedback regarding the MFA candidate's overall progress. The Department recognizes that committee members may not be able to attend all of the recommended showings or sessions, in which case the MFA candidate will make other arrangements to meet with the committee member.

The recommended meetings include:

Fall Term

- Attend one session of DANCE 631 *Graduate Studio* to provide ongoing feedback to developing ideas. Discuss the thought process and research the student used in developing the work and the connections between the creative work and the area of expertise of the committee member.
- Review a developed draft of the student's thesis proposal and provide feedback.

Winter Term

- Attend a thesis works-in-progress (WIP) showing and use this as an occasion to provide feedback on the process.
- Attend the formal performance of the Thesis Project as the second of the three meetings of the Winter term.
- In late-April or early-May, meet with the MFA candidate as a full committee to evaluate and discuss the Thesis Project. This meeting serves as the third and final meeting.

It is the responsibility of the MFA candidate to set up these meetings with her/his/their committee members in a timely manner.

Evaluation & Grading

The Dance faculty member designated as Thesis Chair is responsible for supervising the thesis documentation and for submitting the final grade for the Thesis Project. The other two thesis committee members will receive a copy of the final thesis documentation in progress and may choose to provide comments and feedback, but they are not required to do so. The Thesis Chair will grade the Digital Portfolio when it is finalized and the student will then submit the Portfolio to the Department and the DGS will sign off ahead of graduation.

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Overview of the MFA Dance Thesis Process

The MFA degree culminates in the creation of a Thesis Project, which may take the form of a performance and/or other public presentation. These projects are completed in March/April of the final year.

The student prepares for the Thesis Project in a sequence of courses and research activities that blends practice and theory. These courses encourage an in-depth development of materials and ideas, as noted below:

- After taking a core curriculum of studio and theory courses in the first term of Year 1, candidates submit **grant proposals to funding sources** for summer research projects early in the second term of Year 1. These summer research projects feed directly into the student's thesis work during Year 2.
- Between the first and second years, students undertake extensive research off-campus, conducting fieldwork and investigations for their thesis in **DANCE 595 Thesis 1: Summer Research Project** (2 credits). DANCE 595 comprised of the following three components:
 1. A 1,000-word proposal articulating the aims, methodology, research context and questions of the project, and of their relevance to the student's subsequent thesis and to the field;
 2. A minimum of 40 hours in the field;
 3. A 15-minute presentation of results, to include audio-visual examples and/or a performative element, plus Q&A. This 15-minute presentation takes place in September of the second year.
- In the Fall term of the Year 2, MFA candidates enroll in a 3-credit course, **DANCE 631 Graduate Studio**. This course serves as a forum for second year MFA students to investigate and workshop ideas, movement materials and production elements for their thesis projects. As noted, it is recommended that the committee members attend one of these class sessions as one of the Fall term meetings with the candidate.
- Also in the Fall term of the Year 2, MFA candidates enroll in the 2-credit course **DANCE 695 Thesis 2: Proposal**. In this course, the students determine a Thesis Chair by **September 15** and a Thesis Committee by **November 1**. A 3,000-word written proposal is submitted to the Thesis Chair by **December 1**.

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- During the Winter term of the final year, MFA candidates are immersed in **pre-production and rehearsal/performance activities** for their Thesis Projects, enrolling in the 6-credit course **DANCE 699 Thesis 3: Project**. The Thesis Project must include a performative element (2 credits), production work (2 credits), and final documentation (2 credits). Showings of the works-in-progress are typically scheduled in February. It is recommended that committee members attend a works-in-progress showing if possible. If that is not possible, they can attend a rehearsal or review a video of a showing with the candidate.
- **Final Thesis performances and presentations** are typically scheduled in March/April. It is expected that committee members will attend this culminating performance, if at all possible. If not, they must review a video of the performance or project.
- Within approximately two weeks of the thesis project presentation, the full Thesis Committee meets with the MFA candidate to discuss and evaluate the thesis work and to launch the written documentation process. The MFA candidate then continues with the documentation of the thesis, which entails writing a 20-25 page thesis paper, and assembling a portfolio of digital documents that archive the project, including photos, videos, press releases, lighting plots, program, poster, grant proposals, and more. The student submits a first draft of the thesis paper to the Thesis Chair by **May 20th**. The student submits a subsequent draft to other committee members by **June 1st**. The committee members may choose to provide editorial feedback, but they are not required to do so. The student submits all required documents of the Thesis Portfolio to the Thesis Chair by **July 1st**.

MFA Candidates are required by the Department of Dance to complete their thesis documentation by the end of the Spring/Summer term immediately following the completion of all taught courses.