**FAMS 420: Senior Capstone (W)**

FAMS 420 is a unique opportunity, but one that requires careful forethought and focused action by you before you walk into class on Day 1. Here is the course description:

> "This required course for FAMS majors is a chance for students to synthesize their course of study into one major individual project. FAMS capstone is a workshop-based experience where students design and complete a significant film and media project that results in a public presentation of their most advanced work as FAMS majors. Open only to Senior FAMS majors."

The above description is fairly self-explanatory, but what follows are instructions for how you can make the most of the course:

1. **The philosophy of the course:** This is the course where you get to enact what you can imagine. This is the course where you get to put your strengths into practice. This is the opportunity to put in motion all that you've learned in your previous 3 years and produce what is likely to be your largest, most thoughtful contribution. If, as a senior, you still get excited by the prospect of studying and making film and media (and your professors certainly hope you do), this chance should have you giddy with anticipation. And you should risk showing people your giddiness, making them wonder why you are so giddy (and if they aren't, why they aren't). In short, this is not a class you "have to take" (well, you do); this is the class you have taken all those other classes to get to. A good beginning is to recognize and embrace that fact.

2. **The format of the course:** While the course will have shared texts and assignments, the main material for the semester will be the work generated by you and your peers. The course is workshop-based, which means you will be actively and constantly engaged in giving and receiving feedback on each other's work as the projects move from idea to actuality to polished product. You will function individually **and** as a group, serving as resources, collaborators, readers, and even crew members on course-related activities. Whatever your project, it will develop and even change dramatically throughout the semester. You will research, generate, revise, reshoot, recut, expand, reimagine, retool, proof and polish. Again, this is about producing significant and high-quality work. The workshop format puts responsibility on you for the overall quality of the work. Your success is tied not just to how good your project is, but to how much you have done to raise the quality of all the other projects. Such a structure ensures better projects across the board.

3. **Diversity of projects:** The very best capstone projects will be at once creative and critical. Worthwhile projects often proceed from your serious reflection regarding the most interesting ideas or questions that you have encountered thus far in your course of study. It is often invaluable to identify such questions, ideas and concepts—the ones that you want to think and know more about, then find your way, through research and reflection, to the form that best allows you to advance your questions. Ultimately, the final form of your project may be a substantial critical/theoretical essay on a relevant topic in film and media studies; an original film; an original screenplay; an audio or web-based project, or other forms. The possibilities are legion, but you should begin by imagining what you wish to know more about, and what you would be most satisfied to have produced. Imagine the finished work, imagine yourself presenting that work in December of your senior year. Who is your audience? With what influences or bodies of work are you engaged? What are you contributing to the scholarly, artistic traditions of film and media studies? About what are you most curious? What are your strengths? What have you been waiting to work on? Here's your chance.

4. **Start fast:** No matter your project's subject, approach and form approach, everyone will be deeply engaged in research, reflection, creativity, criticality, analysis, artistry, and ethical, communal work. The way to squander this exceedingly cool opportunity (and do poorly in the course) is to do little or nothing (or hover in indecision) between now and the start of the class. The way to do well is to hit the ground running before the first day of Fall semester, already having the project considerably underway. Again, this is not a normal course. What are your answers to the questions above in #3? Ask these questions of yourself and start generating possible answers. Nobody is going to police you on this over the summer—but if you aren't motivated to do this on your own, it's probably an early warning sign.

5. **Your first assignment is due on the first day:** On the first day of class you will be asked to present on your capstone project. That's right—everyone will walk into class on day 1 and give a smart, focused, 5-minute presentation on their project. If you start thinking and brainstorming and working on your ideas now and over the summer (in truth, you probably have interesting ideas that have been swirling around for months/years), it will be easy to talk about your project come August. Please do seize this opportunity—the day 1 presentation is your first formal chance to show off your work and your first chance to convince others that this is a project worthy of investing their efforts. And yes, your day 1 presentation will be graded. If you present on this day having done little, it will be obvious, and you will struggle uphill the whole semester and the final product will likely be less than it might be. The point is: succeeding in the capstone means you need to act before the capstone begins.

6. **Projects must be approved by the instructor:** The capstone proposal form below invites you to communicate your intentions and identify your strengths regarding a project that might become your capstone. Your discussions with the instructor (beginning with, but not limited to the one-on-one conference) are meant to help you refine and focus your project. It is important to get as specific and tangible as you can as early as you can, but it is also important to realize that the project will evolve and change from what you originally imagined. Once classes begin in the Fall you will receive feedback from everyone, but part of the instructor's role is to make sure that you settle on a project with the appropriate scope (that is, can it be done in a semester? Is it rigorous enough and worthy of thoughtful, syncretic, senior-level work? Do you possess the knowledge/experience to do the project at a high level? etc.). Projects that are not approved must be revised or abandoned for a new topic.

7. **(W) Course:** As a writing course you will be expected to do a fair bit of writing, even if you are completing a visual/sonic project. This includes the project proposal, an annotated bibliography and blog posts and reflections. Much of this writing is recursive, which means you will write and revise your work with peer and professor feedback throughout the semester.

   Thanks for giving this your attention. Please talk to your professors early and often about your capstone hopes, plans and questions, they are a resource and sounding board. Most importantly, please use the next three months actively and steadily, and do begin work—as soon as you can—on the project you've been working toward for so long. I look forward to your proposal and to talking with each of you in June.

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**FAMS 420: Capstone**
**Capstone Project Proposal Form**

*Instructions*

1. Where are you beginning? What are the questions, ideas or concepts you are thinking about exploring in a capstone project?
2. Given your answer above, what is the medium or mode of expression you think will allow you to explore these questions, ideas or concepts? What is the necessary relationship between your idea and the format?
3. What are your influences? What have already you read, seen or studied that has brought you to where you are now?
4. What urgent and relevant knowledge do you already possess and what do you need to know more about?
5. Why does the project matter? What about it is interesting or essential? Who is your imagined audience? Why must you work on this and why will others care?
6. How will this project serve you beyond capstone? Is this project connected to your plans for graduate school? Are you aiming for publication or placement of your work? Is this part of a portfolio of work you are building?
7. List whatever work you have already done on project. What are your plans for working on the project between June and August of your senior year?
8. List the courses you have taken that have prepared you to do either of the projects.
9. List your completed works that help illustrate your skill level for the projects.
10. Describe your history participating in workshop formats. Do you receive and give feedback readily? What are your strengths/weaknesses in collaborative contexts?
11. What is your history and standing with borrowing FAMS equipment?
12. Describe your strengths and weaknesses regarding large, complex projects.
13. Why won't the project work? Why will the project work?
14. What is your COVID-19 contingency plan?
15. What else do you want to add?