

Honors Thesis in Film and Media Studies (Finalized AY 2021-22)

FAMS majors are encouraged to consider the opportunity of pursuing Honors in Film in Media Studies via the completion of an approved senior thesis. As with most academic disciplines, Honors in FAMS is meant to signify work that is both advanced and exemplary. Attempting an Honors Thesis is a significant commitment, and in any typical year, only a small percentage of majors will earn the distinction of Honors.

I. Requirements and Process

College-wide policy regarding department or program Honors begins with a minimum overall GPA of 3.0, and a minimum FAMS GPA of 3.50. The details of the college policy on Honors can be found on the Registrar's page:

<https://registrar.lafayette.edu/additional-resources/honors-requirements/>

College-wide, all candidates for Honors register for two approved senior (400-level) courses in their major, one in the Fall semester and one in the Spring semester of their senior year. These courses vary depending on the major—in FAMS the courses are FAMS 420: Capstone and FAMS 496: Thesis.

All senior FAMS majors take FAMS 420: Capstone in the Fall semester of their senior year. Students who earn the final grade of "A" (not "A-") in FAMS 420 are eligible to formally propose a Thesis project. Eligible students are not required to propose a thesis, and proposing a thesis does not guarantee approval. Proposals are typically due to the FAMS Chair the week before the start of Spring semester. Thesis proposals are reviewed by FAMS faculty and decisions are communicated to the student before the start of the Spring semester. Not all thesis proposals are approved, and approval of the proposal requires the majority support of FAMS faculty reviewing the proposals.

If approved to attempt Honors in FAMS, the student then registers for FAMS 496: FAMS Thesis in their senior spring. Once approved, the student, in consultation with FAMS faculty, forms a thesis committee and commences work for the semester. Honors candidates present their work-in-progress to FAMS faculty around midterm, then, if successful, schedule a formal honor's defense in May. If, following the midterm presentation, FAMS faculty determine the project has not adequately advanced to warrant continuing, the student's enrollment in FAMS 496 will be converted to FAMS 296: Independent Study, and the work will no longer be considered for Honors in FAMS.

If you choose to submit a thesis proposal and if your proposal is approved, you will defend/present your in-progress thesis project in March. Part of your planning should be this major, in-progress presentation, essentially a mid-term exam. You must pass FAMS departmental review at this point to continue on. This presentation will be 15 minutes in length and attended by all FAMS faculty and thesis advisors, plus others. Even if you pass the March review, please understand that your thesis advisors can—at any time and based on your performance—ask you to suspend your work, effectively converting the thesis hours into Independent Study credit. If your work develops and, in the determination of FAMS faculty you are ready to stand for honors, your formal defense will be in early May.

Approved honors thesis students will have three people on their committee, a thesis director, another committee member (both from FAMS) and an outside reader from another department/program. Please think about who that person will be ahead of time and have an informal conversation with them to assess their willingness and availability.

Formal Thesis defenses are typically held during the last week of classes or the first week of finals in May. Defenses result in one of three possible outcomes: 1) Pass, 2) Pass with revisions, 3) Does not pass. If the Thesis earns a Pass and all college requirements (including revisions to the thesis) are met, the student then graduates with Honors in Film and Media Studies.

II. Proposing an Honors Thesis in Film and Media Studies

The Honors Thesis is a deepened and extended study of your capstone subject, so how you will deepen/extend the work needs to be clearly explained in your proposal. You can use the same format used for your project capstone proposal but remember to include how your Honors proposal is different from your capstone. Also make sure to include your references/bibliography section.

Write a sharp, revised proposal (5 pages maximum, single-spaced) and include an answer to the "so what?" question. How does your project offer a significant intervention or contribution in film and media studies? How will your project be different than what you produced in capstone? Make sure what you propose is both ambitious AND doable in this timeframe. Your carefully completed proposal must:

- clearly identify your topic
- clearly articulate the research questions that you are pursuing related to that topic
- clearly demonstrate the research you have conducted thus far
- clearly identify your method or critical framework and explain why you have selected your particular method
- clearly outline what remains to be done
- describe a plan for distributing your work, including a "community" component. How will you get your work to a wider audience? How will you and your project enter the larger world, beyond Lafayette?
- provide a detailed timeline for what happens when, including weekly markers for 15 weeks of work.

Email your application to FAMS chair Nandini Sikand (sikandn@lafayette.edu) no later than Friday, January 14, 2022. You will receive a decision by Friday, January 21, 2022.

III. Four-Year Timeline for FAMS Honors

First Year

Students interested in Film and Media Studies are encouraged to meet and discuss their interests with FAMS faculty, and are likewise encouraged to take as many FAMS courses from as many FAMS instructors as practicable, beginning with FAMS 101. It is also advisable to go to FAMS events and presentations and get to know students in classes ahead of you, including those engaged in

independent work, Capstone, and Thesis. While it is typically too early to worry about a possible thesis that may happen three years in the future, it is not too early to begin the serious foundational work that will lead to success in the senior year. It is also worthwhile to note that many successful Thesis projects have their roots in work and ideas that go back years.

Sophomore Year

Students declare majors early in the spring semester of their sophomore year. After declaring, all new majors meet with the FAMS chair to discuss policies and strategies for your FAMS course of study, and to give you the opportunity to ask questions. If you are considering attempting a senior thesis, you should begin to familiarize yourself with the policies and expectations of pursuing honors in FAMS. Again, if you think you might be interested and eventually be qualified, it is useful to discuss your developing interests and ideas with your FAMS professors and with the FAMS chair.

As soon as you know you are serious about declaring a FAMS major and about keeping open the possibility of Honors in FAMS, you should, every semester, select courses that give you the richest possible preparation for doing senior work at a high level. During the registration period in late March and early April, you will be assigned and meet with your new FAMS academic advisor. Your course selection should reflect your best sense of what you hope to work on for your senior capstone. Indeed, your forward focus should be directed toward your capstone project, because if you end up pursuing honors, it will be a direct result of your successful work in the FAMS Capstone course. Again, there is no guarantee that a successful Capstone equates to approval for attempting FAMS Honors, but a successful Capstone project is the foundation for the possibility of future work.

Junior Year

We recommend that you take as many potentially relevant FAMS classes as possible before taking Capstone in the fall of your senior year. While it is mathematically possible to complete minimum requirements for the major simultaneously with or even after taking FAMS Capstone, the ideal is to see your course selections as preparing you to do well in Capstone. Since Capstone is an opportunity to synthesize all you have learned into a single project, you should select your first, second, and third year courses so that you have a rich bank of material and skills to draw upon for your senior Capstone project.

In April, all juniors (rising seniors) attend the annual FAMS Capstone/Thesis informational meeting (the date varies from year to year). This meeting is required for all rising seniors who are not currently studying abroad, but all FAMS students are welcome to attend, regardless of their class standing. Rising seniors are required to meet with and discuss their capstone project intentions with the assigned Capstone instructor before the end of the spring semester. Rising seniors are always strongly encouraged to work steadily on their projects in the summer before their senior year. Most successful FAMS Capstone projects are well under way by the time the fall semester begins.

Senior Year

In Fall semester, all senior FAMS majors take FAMS 420: Capstone, which culminates in a symposium, a public presentation of your work, typically on the weekend directly following the last week of classes in December (dates vary). Students who earn the final grade of "A" (not "A-") in FAMS 420 are eligible to formally propose a Thesis project. Students learn of their eligibility to propose a FAMS Honors Thesis once final grades are determined and published, with a final grade of "A" indicating eligibility to propose a thesis.

Thesis proposals (explained below) are due via email on the Friday before the last full week of January break, typically allowing for you to spend the first two weeks of January working on the

proposal. You will hear about the status of your thesis, one week later, on the Friday before classes begin. Should your proposal be approved, faculty will sign/ approve your thesis on Monday, the first day of Spring classes. In the meantime, please keep the Spring courses for which you have already registered. **IMPORTANT NOTE: PROCEEDING WITH HONORS OFFICIALLY DEPENDS UPON YOU MEETING ALL COLLEGE AND DEPARTMENTAL GPA AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS.**

If you are interested in submitting a thesis proposal, please consider several important factors, including your workload and goals for your final semester, as well as the revisions and expansions your project needs. This may be based on feedback you have already received from peers and faculty during your capstone semester and final presentation, and any subsequent feedback. You may already know changes you want to implement and the transformations possible in the project. Consider risking large changes to your capstone project, and taking significant steps towards transforming the work from where it is now. Your articulation of the needed changes must be visible in your proposal. This will be one of the best indications that your project has the potential to succeed at honors level.
