

King's College London - FILM STUDIES
6AAQS400 INDEPENDENT STUDY GUIDELINES 2013-14
for final year students

Convenors: Mark Betz (through summer 2013, then from 1 January 2014)
Belén Vidal (1 September – 20 December 2013)

Students taking the BA Film Studies undertake a compulsory research dissertation in their final year. In giving you the opportunity to tackle such a project our aim is to allow you to pursue a subject or topic which is of special interest to you and which you have either not had the chance to study on the degree or one which you feel you would like to explore in more depth. **Note that this opportunity is defined as *independent* study—while you will be assigned a supervisor, you yourself will be expected to formulate the topic, research it and develop a structure for writing it up.**

The length of the dissertation (10,000 words) invites sustained and in-depth analysis. The dissertation option is also an invitation to further develop the skills and interests that, we hope, have been fostered by the taught courses on your degree programme. In particular, the dissertation will test your independence of mind, your motivation, and your ability to organise and synthesise a rich range of primary and secondary materials and arguments. The dissertation is, then, both a sound way to ‘round off’ your BA degree and good preparation for the kind of work that will be required of you either in postgraduate study or in any number of professional careers.

Students should take note of the fact that the Independent Study module is worth 30 credits. In other words, the dissertation requires the amount of total work you would be expected to do for two semester-long courses. The dissertation should not be treated as simply a longer-than-normal essay; you should commence work on it early in the first semester in order to familiarise yourself with the area, gather the primary and secondary (critical) materials that will help you develop the topic and compose an argument carefully and systematically.

INDEPENDENT STUDY: DEADLINES

- Summer term before the start of Independent Study: mandatory workshop.
- Dissertation proposal: due by **Friday, 6 September 2013, 12 noon**. Please email it as a word doc attachment to Laura Brown: laura.c.brown@kcl.ac.uk
- End of supervision period: **1 April 2014** (or nearest working day)
- The dissertation will be due in the 2014 spring assessment period (deadline TBC)

The Dissertation Proposal

The proposal consists of a brief description of (1) the aims and objectives of the project, (2) the approach or method the project will take and (3) the critical literature most relevant to the research. The proposal should be between **400 and 600 words** long. The proposal will be considered in terms of the clarity of focus of the topic, the amount of evident thought and research that has gone into it, and its practicality.

How to structure your dissertation proposal:

- Title and Name
- Aims of your project: What are my research questions? How is my topic both similar to and different from other research that has already been done?
- Approach or method: How do I intend to approach my topic in relation to the films that I will be analysing? What is my approach or methodology, i.e., which theoretical or historical models will be most helpful for the analysis of my primary texts (normally films)?
- Most relevant critical literature that you intend to research (i.e., some evidence of preliminary research). You need to think about two types of critical literature:
 - literature directly related to your topic and
 - literature that deals with the concepts (theoretical and/or historical) that will be useful for formulating your approach or methodology.

How to present your dissertation proposal:

- All work you submit should follow the departmental layout, including a complete bibliography and filmography following the Chicago Manual of Style:
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html
- At this stage proposals are not expected to refer to critical sources in great detail.
- All in all, the proposal should take **up to** two double-spaced pages, **plus** one page of preliminary bibliography and filmography (this is indicative—the bibliography accompanying the proposal may well take up less than one page. Likewise, it is acceptable to hand in a bibliography longer than one page, if it is *selectively* compiled. Do not copy-paste every book title coming under a given topic on an online library catalogue).

The dissertation proposal is *not* marked, but it is a requirement that you hand it in by the set deadline in order to be assigned a supervisor.

Supervision

- Students are assigned a supervisor for their projects by the beginning of the first semester. They are then required to contact their supervisor to begin supervision.
- Please note that the department cannot guarantee to provide supervision on any topic within Film Studies whatsoever, nor that members of staff specialising in a given topic will be available in the year in question.
- Each student is assigned **four hours of individual supervision**, spread over the two taught semesters. These may be organised to best suit supervisor and supervisee. However, in all cases please note that it is crucial to start working on the dissertation early.
- Students are expected to take the initiative in arranging supervision meetings, and to keep supervisors informed of their progress. Avoid leaving most of the meetings for the end of the supervision period—your supervisor may not be available exactly when you need him/her. Above all, do not put yourself in a situation in which you have to rush the final draft, thus undermining two semesters of hard work.
- **Supervision will end by 1 April 2014** (or nearest working day). Supervisors can be expected to read and feedback drafts following a mutually agreed work plan up to that date, but not after.

Word length

The dissertation should be **10,000 words, including endnotes but excluding bibliography and filmography**. Word-count restrictions and penalties are similar to those of other written essays:

- An electronic word count should be noted on the front of all pieces of course work.
- There will normally be a 5% tolerance for work that exceeds the word limit: no penalty will be incurred for up to 5% over the limit.
- Thereafter 2 marks will normally be deducted for every additional 5% over the limit, until 50% is reached.
- After 50% 3 marks will normally be deducted for each additional 5%.

Structure

The dissertation is normally structured in three chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion. **The following breakdown is recommended** (though variations are possible):

Introduction (1,500 words)

3 Chapters (2,500 words each)

Conclusion (1,000 words)

Drafts and feedback

Your supervisor will read draft chapters if they are submitted at agreed times ahead of scheduled tutorials. However, *your supervisor will not read a final draft of the whole dissertation*. Feedback will be of a constructive and advisory kind, pointing out problems or apparent errors rather than making detailed corrections.

Preparation

Plan. It is essential to plan your dissertation carefully, and you should present your supervisor with an initial plan as soon as possible. A plan should be ideally one side and no longer than two sides of A4 paper. Anything longer than that will make it difficult for you or your supervisor to keep the overall structure and direction of the project in view. A plan is not to be confused therefore with *rough notes towards a draft of part of the dissertation*. Plan your work, but be prepared to revise your plan. Try always to have an overall, bird's-eye-view of what you are attempting.

Primary materials. Once you have decided on the general theme of your dissertation you will need to select appropriate primary materials from the relevant historical period. These will often take the form of films, but in some cases also articles in scholarly journals, books, contemporary reviews, newspaper articles or internet material. As long as you have your dissertation supervisor's approval, the exact nature of the primary material(s) is to be determined by you. Choose something substantial and do not present it in a token or desultory way. This body of evidence will become one of the main focuses of your critical interpretation and analysis.

Context. Your work should be informed throughout by a detailed sense of the relevant context or contexts: *historical, social, cultural, and/or theoretical*. You should try to integrate contextual knowledge into the essay—into the argument, method, and analyses—rather than merely appending it as a kind of “background.” Resist making sweeping or repeated generalisations: i.e., always substantiate your claims with appropriate references, quotations, and/or data, the sources of which should be properly noted.

Analysis. Once you have chosen your primary texts and established their context, you will need to analyse them in a close, thorough, and careful way. For instance, whenever you quote something make sure you address and interpret the quotation. This applies to secondary, critical material as well as primary. Do not take the meaning of quotations for granted.

Citation of sources and presentation of bibliography

All your sources must be given in full. You will lose marks for inadequate referencing. For the formatting of your sources in the endnotes and the bibliography, please consult the Chicago Style Quick Citation Guide at: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Please make sure you follow Film Studies *Guidelines for the Presentation of Your Work*. Failure to do so will result in marks being deducted. Please be sure that you are also familiar with the Film Studies *Regulations for the Submission of Course Work*. You will find these and other useful documents on the Film Studies web site at:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/filmstudies/study/handbook/assessment/work.aspx>

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/filmstudies/study/handbook/assessment/ug/ugcoursework.aspx>

You should consult the *Plagiarism Form* you signed at the start of the degree (also on the web site) for a fuller explanation of the importance of citing sources properly.

In order to plan your time efficiently, you will need to map out how much reading and research you need to do. You will probably need to locate particular books and articles and this is always time-consuming. For these reasons, then, you should start compiling a bibliography as soon as possible. On completion, be sure to provide full bibliographical details, but try to confine them to works used and cited. There should not be a marked discrepancy between the number of works in your final bibliography and the number of works that you can actually be seen to make use of.

Introduction

Your dissertation should have an Introduction, in which you set out as clearly as possible the **area(s)**, **argument**, and **method** of your work. As a general rule, if you find that you can't say in plain English what your work is about it is quite possibly because you don't actually *know* what it is about. Try to clarify it, and consult your supervisor! Although the Introduction comes first, you are likely to write it (or re-write it) last. Your introduction should set out clearly what you intend to do, but not give conclusions away (as that is for the conclusion).

Conclusion

Problems frequently prove irresolvable and firm conclusions may be hard to draw. Where this happens, it is usually best to confront the issue frankly and openly. Reflect on the problems and do not feel that you always have to tie things up neatly. Even so, do try to assess, to clarify as far as possible, what you think your dissertation has managed to accomplish.

Formatting and Submission

- Comply with the regulations for presentation (remember to double-space your work and provide reasonable margins) style and referencing, following the Chicago-style citation guide (endnotes). Endnotes normally appear at the ends of each chapter.
- Illustrations are not required in final-year dissertations. However, you may decide to insert images (e.g. DVD grabs, images of promotional materials, etc.) for the purpose of enhancing the analysis. Images should *not* be included simply for decorative purposes; they must be referred to in the body of the dissertation as appropriate. For BA dissertations, 12 illustrations is the maximum recommended/allowed.
- **Insert illustrations in an appendix at the end of the dissertation.** All illustrations must be adequately numbered and captioned. If these are frame grabs (usually extracted from DVDs) respect the original aspect ratio where possible. Please include calls for illustrations in the body of the text, in brackets. For example: (see **Image 1**). Illustration captions are excluded from the final word count.
- You may have individual chapter titles, as well as an original dissertation title. Attach a Title cover page (also including your candidate number) and a Table of Contents page. These two pages are excluded from the final word count. You do *not* need to include your original dissertation proposal, nor an abstract.
- Attach the departmental submission cover page, with your candidate number but *no* name (do not include your name anywhere in the dissertation either).
- You may use any binding of your choice—but please ensure that your dissertation is safely put together and easy to handle without falling apart.

Last updated: April 2013