

REED COLLEGE

MALS CREATIVE THESIS

REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES

The Creative Thesis

The Committee on Graduate Studies is very cautious about approving creative projects and considers carefully the nature of the project, the student's prior course work, the educational benefit of the project for the student, and the availability of an appropriate adviser. It is imperative that the project arise out of prior course work at Reed—through creative writing, literature, theatre, music or art classes—and that it is a natural outgrowth of Reed course work. The proposal should address explicitly this connection and the following requirements:

- Students must successfully complete a minimum of two Reed courses in the genre of the thesis project they propose to undertake.
- The adviser must be a Reed faculty member who has produced work in the genre of the proposed project.

The creative thesis must include a critical component. Depending upon the project, this may take one of two forms:

- A separate critical paper or chapter that relates to the creative piece; or
- A critical introduction in which you present the artistic goals (the formal, stylistic, and thematic strategies of your creative project) in the context of its genre.

Generally either of these critical options requires about 20 pages of written work plus a critical bibliography. In both cases, the proposal should address the relation of the critical and creative components—each component needs to inform the other. In addition, students may include a critical afterward with reflections on the process.

When deciding on a creative thesis, students should be realistic about the amount of quality work that can be completed in one term. One of the primary challenges with MALS creative projects is the time limitation. Please keep in mind that to include both a creative and critical component in a one-semester project requires a significant commitment of time and energy on your part. In addition, the short turn around (particularly for spring and summer projects) between the committee's decision and the start of the thesis term requires flexibility. Given the very real possibility of a denied creative proposal, students who hope to undertake a creative thesis also should be working on an alternate proposal which would involve solely a critical project (presumably an extension of the critical component described in the creative project).

The following sections address additional considerations for each creative field, along with a recent example of a MALS creative thesis (the theses are available for check out in the Reed library and in the MALS office):

Creative Writing Projects

Students need strong creative writing technical skills to undertake a creative writing project. Please keep in mind that the opportunity to take creative writing classes at Reed is not predictable, due to limited enrollment opportunities. Upper-level

undergraduate creative writing courses enroll a maximum of 15 students, the demand is generally quite high, and selection is made by portfolio submission (MALS students would be subject to the same rigorous application standards as the undergraduates). In addition, the MALS program is able to offer a course in creative writing only rarely.

Creative writing thesis proposals must be approved by both the creative thesis and graduate studies committees. The required one-page prospectus should detail the student's past experience as a writer (along with classes completed as noted above) and a writing sample—six to eight poems if poetry, or ten to twelve pages if fiction. Due to a required review by two committees, students should submit a proposal one month earlier than the usual deadlines: April 1 for fall projects, November 1 for spring projects, and March 1 for summer projects.

If accepted for creative thesis work, students may be asked to put together a reading list appropriate to the project genre in cooperation with the project adviser. Such a reading list should reflect both the student's interests and objectives in the genre, and might include critical as well as creative texts. Often, creative writing students give a public reading.

Example of a creative writing project:

David Melville, *Wrestling Shakespeare: Excerpts from a Novel* (2008)

David completed the draft of a novel that examined the place of professional wrestling in popular culture. His thesis included the submission of a few key chapters, a plot summary, and a critical introduction that addressed how the novel exhibited aspects of postmodernist fiction, such as the interaction between high and low culture.

Music Composition Projects

A compositional project must include a printed score and a recording of a performance (or a live performance). To be considered for a composition thesis, students should already have taken composition and at least one semester of independent study in advanced composition.

Example of a music project:

Barbara Skipworth, *Engaging Music: The Ernste Gesänge of Hanns Eisler and How One Cycle Affects Another* (2007)

Barbara explored the making of music as a means for both personal expression and social engagement through a critical examination of East German composer Hanns Eisler and through her own compositions. The project included a performance of the songs with accompanying program notes. (*A copy of Skipworth's proposal and rewrite is included in this handbook.*)

Studio Art Projects

The thesis project should show individual initiative and independent work, culminating in a unified body of art. The project involves a substantial written component, a discussion of the development of the project, and its historical and theoretical context. There is no private studio space guarantee for MALS students. The student's creative work, however, may be installed in the

Feldenheimer Gallery in the Art Building, Vollum Lounge gallery, or another location on or off campus.

Example of an art project:

Paul Platosh, *Reenvisioning the Marketplace: A Radical Redesign of the Modern Supermarket* (2006)

Paul investigated the historical precedence of the supermarket and sustainable materials, then created new designs of both the store and product containers.

Theatre Projects

The theatre department requires that students choose one area of focus when considering a theatre practice component to the thesis: acting, directing, playwriting, dramaturgy, or design. The use of theatre department resources and space is dependent on the undergraduate production schedule. Creative projects are sometimes undertaken in the context of faculty directed productions; such collaborations require, of course, the consent of the faculty member. More specific information required for a creative proposal may be found in the Handbook for Theatre Majors, <http://academic.reed.edu/theatre/handbook.html#CreativeProposal>

Example of a theatre project:

Kristina Satter, *Form of One's Own: A Study of Playwright Maria Irene Fornes*
Accompanied by an Original Play (2004)

Kristina critically examined the work of Maria Fornes, who was Kristina's source of inspiration in also writing her own play. To garner audience response to her play, Kristina directed a staged reading for a Reed audience.

Exceptions to the above requirements must be approved in advance by the graduate studies committee.

December, 2015
MALS Office