

MDST Graduate Student Handbook (2024)

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Introduction

This version of the Media Studies Graduate Handbook is for those students who entered the program in the 2024-25 academic year. Students who began earlier may consult the prior Handbook (2020). Prospective students consulting this handbook should be aware that there may be some changes to the policies and procedures for those entering the program in future years.

All policy documents are subject to review and change, and this handbook is no exception. Importantly, the student is covered by whatever version of this handbook was in place at the time she/he/they was admitted. Although some revisions may occur to your year's handbook after you've begun the program, these will not entail changes in the requirements you must meet. Any changes will consist of clarifications to policies, changes in language to align with the Graduate School Handbook, or minor, non-substantive edits (including moving or copying of important information into multiple sections for clarity).

This handbook contains the policies that structure graduate study in the Department of Media Studies at UVA. Students are responsible for making certain that procedures, deadlines, requirements, and policies described here are met. If there are questions about any of the policies described here, a student should consult with their advisor first. If there remain questions, they should ask the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) or the department Chair.

The website of the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences also may provide answers to questions that arise, and you will find useful information in the [Graduate Record](#); use the pull down menu to reach the Graduate Record.

Frequently Asked Questions

The following list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) is presented to address common graduate student concerns. You may or may not find your exact questions reflected here; you may, instead, find answers in the sections dedicated to departmental policy that follow.

Any questions you have that are not addressed can be brought to your advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies, or (in some cases) departmental administrative staff. This is a living list, so new questions may be added over time.

1. How many hours do I need to enroll in order to be considered a full-time student?

To be "full-time" you must enroll for 12 hours or receive an exemption through GSAS. Email the DGS if you are interested in being part time (MA) or facing extenuating circumstances (PhD).

2. Can I get tuition remission or in-state tuition awards during summer sessions?

No. You must pay your own tuition and fees during summer sessions.

3. How many independent studies (MDST 8900) can I take?

No more than two (6 credits).

4. How are graduate courses graded?

Graduate coursework is evaluated on a standard lettered scale (A through F). Generally, students should expect to earn an A for excellent work. Students must maintain a minimum of a B average to be in good standing in the Graduate School.

5. What if I get a C or failing grade in a course?

Graduate students must complete each of their degree courses with a grade of B or higher to remain in good standing.

If a student receives a grade of C, D, or F in a required course, they may repeat the course once. If the grade for the retake is still lower than a B, the department's obligation to provide further funding for the student to continue in the program will end.

6. What are the norms and expectations for seminar papers?

All graduate seminars must include a significant written component. The aims of this requirement are to give students plenty of opportunities to engage with course content in original and productive ways, to develop research skills and interests, and to prepare for the discipline and practice of research presentation and publication. Research papers may be significant steps in developing an overall research agenda. Essay assignments may vary but typically require students:

- to investigate a particular area of interest per those stipulated on the course syllabus or by the course instructor(s);
- to integrate assigned and relevant, supplemental readings in thorough discussion of related topics;
- to develop a focused research question, explication and justification, and basic methodology; and
- to prepare a clear, complete, and compelling argument.

Any paper handed in should reflect the student's best thoughts and best writing. It is not appropriate to submit early drafts, unless invited or approved by the instructor. Papers of all types should be drafted and revised, proofed and revised, until the student is satisfied that this is the best work that he/she can produce for this assignment. All work should be fully, appropriately documented, following APA, MLA, or Chicago Style handbooks as instructed by the professor.

Students are encouraged to pursue integration of course topics and research interests across the span of their graduate careers. However, students may not submit the same paper for two classes except by prior arrangement with the instructors, in which case the student and instructors should develop a common, substantially extended or otherwise modified assignment.

7. What if I need to take an Incomplete in a course?

Only under exceptional circumstances will such a grade be permitted, but your course instructor is under no obligation to assign such a grade. Should you feel an Incomplete is necessary or warranted, you should request an "IN" from your instructor in person, simultaneously making arrangements for completion.

Per Department policy, if an IN is given, your instructor can set a deadline of up to, but not exceeding, one semester (from the date the IN grade was assigned) for you to complete unfinished work and have the grade changed. If you exceed that deadline, the course instructor will change the IN grade to an F. If documented exceptional circumstances persist, the student may appeal the deadline with the Director of Graduate Studies, but the DGS is under no obligation to allow an extension. (Graduate School policy stipulates that IN grades will default to an F after one year, so if the DGS grants an extension, the IN grade cannot exceed one year total.)

Having more than one outstanding Incomplete can result in enrollment holds from GSAS.

8. What UVA policies should I be aware of?

See the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences page on [Resources & Policies](#) and be aware all notices sent regularly by GSAS and other administrative offices. In particular, see:

- Discrimination & Harassment: <https://eocr.virginia.edu/discrimination-and-harassment>
- Graduate & Postdoctoral Diversity Programs: <https://graddiversity.virginia.edu/>
- FERPA Policy: <https://www2.virginia.edu/registrar/privacy.html>
- The Honor System: <https://honor.virginia.edu/>

MA in Media, Culture & Technology

The University of Virginia's Department of Media Studies offers a 30 credit hour Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in Media, Culture, & Technology. This program provides opportunities for advanced studies in the history of media and communications technologies, exposure to a wide range of theorizations of how these technologies shape individual and collective experience in modern society, and high-level training in the research methods that allow practitioners to identify and analyze contemporary media-related issues confronting businesses, policymakers, and the public. Students will graduate with a comprehensive understanding of the historical roots of pressing questions surrounding media technologies and infrastructures and will take with them skills that will allow them to bring a deep understanding of the field of media studies to bear on a variety of careers and social contexts.

The MA in Media, Culture and Technology is a taught, in-person degree, meaning that students are expected to be enrolled full-time, attending in Charlottesville, and taking graded courses throughout their time in the program. Full time enrollment is 12 credit hours (usually 4 classes). **Students in the MA are not usually funded by the University and are encouraged to explore other forms of funding.** Costs can be found here: <https://graduate.as.virginia.edu/tuition-and-health-premiums>

Application Procedures

Information about the application for the MA in Media, Culture & Technology is available on our [website](#). Applications open October 1; our priority deadline, after which applications are reviewed by the GCC is January 15. MA applications remain open until May 1, and are considered on a rolling basis. All applications are submitted through the [GSAS portal](#) (other than initial [Master's Promotion applications](#)).

Course Requirements

There are five required courses (15 credit hours) in the MA in Media, Culture and Technology:

- MDST 8000 Media, Culture & Technology
- MDST 8001 Histories of Media Technologies
- MDST 8003 Methods of Media Research
- MDST 8004 Master's Thesis Development
- MDST 8005 Master's Thesis Writing

MDST 8004 and 8005 should be taken while you are working on your thesis, as they are designed to support that process through cohort-based iterations of your research. Generally, 8004 is offered in Fall and 8005 is offered in Spring. If you anticipate completing your thesis on a different schedule, you should reach out to the DGS as soon as possible to ensure that these courses will fit into your plans.

Students can learn more about [registration procedures](#), including common issues such as course overloads, time conflicts, VA resident status, off-Grounds full-time status, and more by visiting GSAS resources for current graduate students.

Electives

Beyond the required courses, students will need 15 additional credit hours (5 courses) in the department to complete their degree. Electives vary semester to semester, based on the availability and interests of teaching faculty. There are efforts made to ensure a range of topics are covered, and it is understood that students' work in elective courses may involve forming connections between the material covered in class and their own research interests.

While MA students must complete 30 credits in the degree (with the MDST mnemonic), they may also want to supplement their study with courses from across the University. Courses in relevant languages or methods are encouraged, as is the pursuit of a graduate certificate alongside the degree. Students may be particularly interested in available certificates in [Africana Studies](#), [American Studies](#), [Digital Humanities](#), Environmental Humanities, and [Gender & Sexuality Studies](#).

In some circumstances, students can petition the DGS to allow one course taken outside the department to count towards the degree. You will need to submit the syllabus for the class in question and a brief explanation of its relevance to your interests. The department website also lists courses that have received blanket approval to count towards in-department graduate credit.

Independent Studies

On occasion, a student may be interested in taking an independent study with a faculty member in the department (MDST 8900: Graduate Independent Study). Independent studies are most appropriate when a student needs additional exposure to a specific topic or method before embarking on a thesis, and when a faculty member has relevant expertise to oversee this work. Independent studies can be particularly valuable as a student begins work on their thesis.

To enroll in an independent study, a student should contact the faculty member they are interested in working with well in advance of the semester in question, propose the topic of study, and ask if they are available to supervise. This may require a longer conversation to iron out details about workload, assignments, and expectations.

If a faculty member is willing to supervise an independent study, they will reach out to the appropriate MDST administrative staff member (Julie Gronlund) to create a course under their supervision, after which a student can enroll. Students may take no more than two Independent Studies, and they must have different topics.

Courses From Outside the Department

Students may take as many electives outside the department as they like. If a student attends for two full-time years, they have 18 credits to fill in addition to degree requirements.

However, only one (3 credit) class from outside the department may be counted toward the MA in Media, Culture and Technology. You will need to petition the Director of Graduate Studies and provide a syllabus for the course in question. This requirement applies equally to courses in other departments or schools at UVA and courses taken at other institutions. There are a handful of courses already approved for MDST credit, visible on the department website.

If you are interested in taking a course on another campus, you will need to fill out the Inter-Institutional Approval Form. The form will need to be signed by your advisor, the Graduate School and then forwarded to the Registrar's Office. For more information on Inter-Institutional Registration, please go to <http://advising.UVA.edu/policies-and-procedures/interinstitutional-registration/>.

Exceptions to the Curriculum

In rare and well-justified cases, the Graduate Curriculum Committee may approve a petition for a change in degree program requirements. If a student wishes to submit such a request, they should write a petition, addressed to the Director of Graduate Studies, that specifies exactly what the requested change is and makes the case for why it should be approved. The petition should be accompanied by relevant syllabi if requesting an exemption on the basis of previous coursework. The petition must be submitted and approved prior to the student acting on the requested change. All petitions will be considered by the Graduate Curriculum Committee.

Students in the Master's Promotion program who were previously taking Distinguished Major Program coursework (MDST 3000 and 8000) do not need to go through this process. However, if they wish to be exempted from requirements (MDST 8000 and 8001), they must make this request to the Director of Graduate Studies in writing.

Thesis Requirements

Students will be required to complete a thesis project under the supervision of a faculty member. The thesis will entail original, independent research.

The format of the final report will be decided by the student and the student's advisor, possibly taking the form of a traditional academic thesis, a policy white paper, or other relevant format (documentary, digital project, etc.). All thesis projects must include a written component of at least 25 pages.

All theses must also be read by a committee and go through a thesis defense. Students should approach faculty and invite them to join a small thesis committee (two people in addition to the advisor, one of whom must be at least affiliated with Media Studies) at least one month before

the proposed defense date and scheduling a defense meeting or report date. No less than one week before the defense, the committee should receive a final version of the thesis to review.

MA theses may be defended in-person, via Zoom or similar remote platform, or (if necessary) be evaluated by readers in a brief report submitted to the student's advisor. If the report structure is used, this must be agreed upon by all parties in advance, and the report must offer feedback and a clear sense of the desired outcome.

Thesis defenses in MDST are intended to be productive, collegial conversations. It is preferable that an advisor delay a student's defense rather than allow an unready thesis to proceed and fail. At the defense meeting, the student will be asked to discuss and answer questions pertaining to their research. The defense may conclude with a pass, a pass with revisions (to be seen by the advisor), or a fail.

Following a successful defense, the advisor and committee should sign of the Final Examination Form.

Should a student not be ready to defend, require more time, or fail the defense, they may enroll in [thesis completion/affiliate status](#) for up to two terms following their intended graduation date. Please coordinate this with your advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

MA Graduation Procedures

As students approach completion of their degree, they should be aware of the procedures put in place by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences: <https://graduate.as.virginia.edu/thesis-submission-and-graduation>.

Most crucially, students should be aware that they need to have passed a thesis defense, submitted a Final Examination Form (see below), and submitted their thesis to the University Library by the following deadlines:

- Fall - November 30
- Spring - April 30
- Summer - July 31

MA Advising

Incoming graduate students will receive initial advising from the Director of Graduate Studies or a member of the GCC, who will reach out to discuss initial enrollment choices and answer questions prior to the beginning of the academic year.

Students will take courses with many faculty members, and should begin to form relationships through courses, departmental events, hourly employment, and office hours. Over time, students should identify and connect with a faculty member who they would like to advise their thesis. Students often choose an advisor based on their thesis topic, academic areas of interest, career trajectory, or work style.

By the semester in which a student takes MDST 8004: Master's Thesis Development, students will need to formalize a relationship with a thesis advisor who will take over all course and research advising duties. This usually involves at least one meeting and serious conversation about a student's proposed project, may involve sharing an initial thesis proposal, and requires the completion of the Advisor Form. **The Advisor Form must be submitted by the 7th week of the semester before the semester in which the student plans to defend their thesis and graduate.**

Master's Promotion (4+1)

The Department of Media Studies offers an expedited admission process for UVA undergraduates seeking the MA degree. This process both eases the admissions process and allows students to take courses that will count toward the MA while still enrolled as undergraduates. In some cases, this allows for the completion of the BA and the MA in a total of five years.

Students interested in Master's Promotion usually apply by May 1 of their third year. Students may also apply by November 1 of their fourth year, but admission is contingent upon availability in the cohort at that time. [Information about the application materials is on the department website.](#)

Those students accepted into the program will take two graduate-level courses (5000 or above) in their final year of undergraduate study, which will be credited toward their MA degree. They should [formally apply](#) to the MA by the January 15 deadline during their final undergraduate year: as accepted Master's Promotion students, they should select that option in the application to submit a free, streamlined application. The purpose of this process is to enable the students to be moved to graduate status in SIS after they complete their undergraduate degrees. Students will receive acceptance letters from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and will need to indicate their intention to accept that offer of enrollment in the application portal.

In the following year, they will continue at the University as MA students and fulfill the degree requirements for the MA in Media, Culture, & Technology. Students must complete their BA at the end of their fourth year and must remain in residence at the University for their fifth year.

Master's Promotion students who were also in the undergraduate Distinguished Major Program and took MDST 3000 and MDST 4000 may petition the Director of Graduate Studies to have some of their required courses waived. They will still need to complete 30 graduate-level credits to finish their degree, but will have more flexibility.

Master's Promotion (4+1) students are welcomed as graduate students even as they are completing their fourth year of undergraduate. This means that they are encouraged to attend departmental and graduate student events, seek advising from the Director of Graduate

Studies, and are expected to produce graduate-level work and held to graduate-level standards in those courses.

Forms for MA Students

6000 Form

Students participating in the Master's Promotion program must complete [a 6000 form](#) for every graduate-level course they take during their fourth year of undergraduate study. These should be completed (at latest) during add-drop periods of the relevant semesters.

Advisor Form

As students work towards their Master's Thesis, they will need to identify an advisor with relevant expertise who will serve as a resource and guide in the research process. While enrolled in MDST 8966: Master's Thesis Development, students will be asked to meet with faculty of interest and secure agreement from a faculty member to serve as a thesis advisor. **The Advisor Form must be submitted by the 7th week of the semester before the semester in which the student plans to defend their thesis and graduate.**

We are currently revising the Advisor Form; when complete, it will be accessible from the department website.

Final Examination Form

During the semester after which MA students intend to graduate, they will need to follow the procedures laid out by the Graduate School - <https://graduate.as.virginia.edu/thesis-submission-and-graduation>.

One key part of this process is circulating the [Final Examination Form](#) to your advisor and committee at the conclusion of the thesis defense. Julie Gronlund can assist with this process, and often reaches out to graduating students to ensure their Forms are ready in DocuSign.

Affiliate (Doctoral/Thesis Completion) Status

An advanced student who is actively completing a dissertation/thesis may petition for [Affiliate Doctoral/Thesis Completion status](#) for up to two terms for \$211/term. This status provides continued NetBadge computer system privileges, including access to UVA e-mail and electronic library resources but does not defer student loans or provide access to healthcare. International students should contact the International Studies Office before petitioning for this status.

MA Milestone Tables (Samples)

The tables below illustrate *possible* paths through the degree; they are not exhaustive of all possibilities, nor are they intended as inflexible orders.

Sample Schedule 1

This schedule reflects an incoming student with a completed bachelor's degree who enrolls for a full 12-credit course load each semester and completes a Digital Humanities certificate (see Electives) alongside their MA in Media, Culture and Technology. Note: this student could have completed their fourth semester with one less MDST course and applied for part-time status.

Academic Year 1, Fall	Academic Year 1, Spring
MDST 8000: Media, Culture & Technology	MDST 8001: Methods of Media Research
MDST 8003: Histories of Media Technologies	MDST 8XXX <i>Elective</i>
MDST 8XXX <i>Elective</i>	MDST 8XXX <i>Elective</i>
DH 8991: History and Theory of Digital Humanities	DS 5001 Exploratory Text Analytics
Academic Year 2, Fall	Academic Year 2, Spring
MDST 8004: Master's Thesis Development <i>Advisor form must be completed</i>	MDST 8005: Master's Thesis Research & Writing <i>Thesis defense completed late spring</i>
MDST 8XXX <i>Elective</i>	MDST 8XXX <i>Elective</i>
MDST 8900: Graduate Independent Study	MDST 8XXX <i>Elective</i>
SARC 5400: Data Visualization	DH 8000: Practicum of the DH Certificate

Courses in *yellow* are required for the MA.

Courses in *green* count toward the 30 credits needed for the degree. Courses in *pink* are DH certificate requirements

Sample Schedule 2

This schedule reflects a student who enters as a Master's Promotion (4+1) student and completes the MA in their fifth year at UVA. Note that this timetable leaves little room for electives or non-departmental courses.

Academic Year 1, Fall (UG 4 th Year)	Academic Year 1, Spring (UG 4 th Year)
MDST 8000: Media, Culture & Technology	MDST 8001: Methods of Media Research
Academic Year 2, Fall	Academic Year 2, Spring
MDST 8004: Master's Thesis Development <i>Advisor form must be completed</i>	MDST 8005: Master's Thesis Research & Writing <i>Thesis defense completed late spring</i>
MDST 8003: Histories of Media Technologies	MDST 8XXX <i>Elective</i>
MDST 8900: Graduate Independent Study	MDST 8XXX <i>Elective</i>
MDST 8XXX: <i>Elective</i>	MDST 8XXX <i>Elective</i>

Courses in *yellow* are required for the MA.

Courses in *green* count toward the 30 credits needed for the degree.

PhD in Media Studies

The PhD in Media Studies at the University of Virginia is based in the interdisciplinary field of critical media studies, which emphasizes understanding the role of media texts, audiences, industries, and technologies in relation to economic, political, and social systems of power. Our curriculum draws on literatures in communication, cultural studies, film studies, sociology, media history, political economy, science and technology studies, and allied disciplines to provide students with theoretical and methodological fluency and familiarize them with core concerns within media studies. By exposing students to the diverse and interdisciplinary strands of critical media studies, we offer them a rich foundation from which to conduct novel research, contribute to theoretical debates, and teach various courses in media studies.

Our department is committed to forms of media studies that interrogate arrangements of power, historicize and critique narratives of media change or “newness,” tackle questions of policy and equity, interrogate international and global forms of media circulation, and explore race, gender, sexuality, and disability as axes of oppression. In short, we conduct media studies research through grounded analysis and theoretical intervention, with transformative goals.

This is a research degree primarily aimed at students who wish to pursue academic employment. As such, opportunities for professional development are central to the degree in the form of a pedagogy requirement and teaching assistantships, regular colloquia that provide professionalization opportunities, and close mentorship from faculty advisors. We also encourage students to pursue resources for academic and alternative career development offered elsewhere in the University of Virginia community.

All students in the proposed PhD in Media Studies will be required to attend full-time and in-person. All students will be required to complete a minimum of 12 credits per semester. For students taking 12 credits per semester, the program will take a minimum of three years to complete.

All requirements for the PhD must be completed within 7 years of the date of matriculation to the degree program.

Application Procedures

[Applications](#) for the PhD in Media Studies open in on October 1 and close on December 15th annually, for matriculation in the following fall. Applicants for the PhD in Media Studies must have completed an undergraduate degree in an accredited college or university.

Admission to the PhD depends not only on the achievement and promise of the applicant as attested through transcripts, writing sample, and two letters of recommendation but also on the clarity of the applicant's personal statement and research interests and on the compatibility of the applicant's interests with the resources of the department. All applications are evaluated by a subcommittee of the Graduate Curriculum Committee, and the full committee confers

before offering interviews, making admission offers, and hosting a recruitment event in February. Students offered admission to the PhD must indicate their decision by April 15.

Students in the MA in Media, Culture & Technology may petition the department for an internal “promotion” to the PhD, which can save students the application fee. However, such promotions are relatively rare, as candidates will be considered alongside all external applicants in that cycle. Petitions should be made in the September of a student’s final year in the MA, before PhD applications open in October.

Students or graduates of the MA in Media, Culture & Technology are always welcome to apply to the PhD through conventional processes.

The PhD in Media Studies has adequate funding from GSAS for a limited number of students each year; we do not usually admit unfunded or self-funded students. Our funding package funds five years, through six semesters of Graduate Teaching Assistantships and four semesters of Fellowship.

Incoming Students with Master’s Degrees

Students who enter the program with an MA may ask the department to consider counting this some or all of the coursework from that degree in their progress towards the PhD. They should make this request of the DGS in writing, to be discussed in their first meeting at the start of the fall semester. Any transfer credits must be made in the first year of the PhD.

Students should be prepared to share their transcript as well as syllabi and any seminar papers or similar work for consideration. Only courses in which a student earned a B or better may be considered for transfer. Some courses may be considered to fulfill PhD core requirements if they are sufficiently close in learning outcomes; others may be used to fulfill elective requirements. Students will be notified of decisions regarding transfer credits no later than the start of Spring semester in their first year.

In deciding whether and how many prior credits to transfer in, students should be aware of the following:

- Transferring 3-8 credits will not accelerate a student’s graduation timetable, which requires students complete their PhD within 7 years of first enrollment.
- Transferring 9-20 credits will accelerate a student’s timeline by 1 term (semester).
- Transferring 21-24 credits will accelerate a student’s timeline by 2 terms (1 year). This will also **affect and reduce a student’s years of funding**.

Students who have completed the MA in Media, Culture & Technology may have their courses automatically applied to the PhD; this will result in a 5 year timeline to the PhD (instead of 7) and may affect funding guarantees. Students should discuss their individual circumstances with the DGS during the PhD application and offer stages.

Coursework Requirements

The PhD in Media Studies requires students to complete 72 graded credits. The degree must be completed within 7 years of initial enrollment, barring exceptions stated by GSAS.

The requirements for the PhD in Media Studies are as follows:

Course work (graded credits)

- Required courses/credits in the core curriculum include:
 - o **Core Courses (no substitutions; 21 credits)**
 - MDST 8000: Media, Culture & Technology (3 credits)
 - MDST 8500: Media Studies Pedagogy (3 credits)
 - MDST 9000: Colloquium (6 credits)
 - Students should enroll in one credit of Colloquium each semester from the beginning of their PhD, as this is an important space for learning professional norms, networking within and beyond UVA, and practicing key skills in an academic workplace.
 - Students may enroll in Colloquium beyond six semesters, though not beyond nine. Alternately, once six semesters have been completed, students are welcome to attend Colloquium without being formally enrolled. Such attendance is particularly valuable for advanced students who can use Colloquium to rehearse job talks, demonstrate successful presentations, and serve as mentors to upcoming students.
 - MDST 8900 – Developing Media Research (3 credits)
 - This course will prepare students to write, revise, and submit academic scholarship for publication. Students should emerge from this course with a polished work of original research that can be submitted to the GCC for consideration as the **Major Research Project**. Publication of a student’s work by a reputable journal in the field will also fulfill the Major Research Project benchmark.
 - MDST 9100: Qualifying Preparation (3 credits)
 - This course is offered individually, under supervision of a student’s advisor, in order to develop areas and lists for each of three comprehensive exams, establish a committee, schedule the exams, and complete preparation.
 - MDST 9200 – Prospectus Development (3 credits)
 - This course is a cohort-based class in which students prepare their dissertation proposal for defense before their research committee.
 - o **3 credits (1 course) of media history**
 - MDST 8001: Histories of Media Technologies.
 - Other courses that fulfill this requirement will be added over time. Students may also petition the DGS to count MDST electives toward this requirement. This decision will be made based on the degree of historical information and methods present in a given course.

- **6 credits (2 courses) of media methods**
 MDST 8003: Methods of Media Studies
 MDST 7704: Political Economy of Media
 Other courses that fulfill this requirement will be added over time. Students may also petition the DGS to count courses from other departments, including statistics, qualitative/quantitative methods courses, language courses, or computer science or data science courses, toward this requirement.
- **Electives (30 credits)**
 Students may take electives within MDST, and may take courses outside the department in consultation with their advisor. Ensuring that courses taken outside of MDST count towards this total may require petitioning the DGS, sharing a syllabus, and explaining the relevance of a course to a student's plan of study.
 Incoming students who have completed an MA at UVA or elsewhere may transfer in elective credits.
 Independent Studies (MDST 8900) with faculty in the department count as electives; students may take up to two independent studies, which must be on distinct topics.
- **Research credits (minimum of 12 credits)**
 MDST 9999: Non-Topical Research

Degree Benchmarks

Progress in the PhD is measured not only through time or courses, but through completion of key benchmarks that demonstrate a student's growth as a researcher.

Major Research Project

Students will be required to complete a major independent research project of publishable quality before advancing to candidacy. They will submit this work (roughly 25 pages, formatted as an academic paper) to the Director of Graduate Studies. If the work has already been accepted for publication by a reputable journal in the field, it may be submitted with evidence of such and will automatically fulfill the major research project requirement. If the work has not been accepted for publication, the Graduate Curriculum Committee will assess whether it satisfies norms of research design, methodology, argumentation, conceptualization and writing.

It is expected that many students will pursue the major research project during the semester in which they take MDST 8900 – Developing Media Research; however, students may choose to submit an alternative seminar paper, or may want to spend time revising their work prior to submission in fulfillment of the requirement. **It is recommended that the project be submitted no later than March of the student's second year (fourth semester) in the degree program**, so that progress towards comprehensive exams and the dissertation may be made. If a project submitted for this requirement is not acceptable to the Graduate Curriculum Committee, the student and their research advisor will be informed, and given actionable feedback and a three-

month window in which to address concerns and resubmit. Failure to secure approval upon resubmission will result in dismissal from the degree program.

Comprehensive Exams

The comprehensive exams will consist of three area exams that will be supervised by a research advisory committee of faculty with expertise in those areas. It will be customary for two of these exams to be in areas of topical relevance of the student's choice, according to bibliographies drawn up by the faculty who specialize in each area. These faculty will craft questions to which the student must respond by drawing upon and synthesizing the literature in the bibliography. A third exam will address a more general theory/method topic, determined by the student's research needs and interests. For the third exam, the student and their research advisor will construct a bibliography aimed at comprehensive mastery of the theoretical and methodological competencies necessary for the student's research interests. The research advisor will then craft questions to which the student must respond by drawing upon and synthesizing this literature. Assessment of the exams will be based on demonstrated mastery of the literature and the quality of the answer to the question.

Shortly before the semester in which a student enrolls in MDST 9100: Qualifying Preparation, **typically in the fifth semester**, they should schedule their exams with their research advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies and contact additional faculty members to serve on the research advisory committee for their exams. Students who fail to pass on their first attempt will be given the opportunity to retake the exams. Failure to pass on the second attempt will result in dismissal from the degree program.

Dissertation Proposal & Advancing to Candidacy

Before advancing to candidacy and **typically during the third year (sixth semester)**, students will be required to prepare a proposal for their dissertation project and defend it in an oral examination. During the semester in which a student is nearing completion of their dissertation proposal, they may contact additional faculty members to serve on the advisory committee for their dissertation proposal defense, including a fourth committee member from outside the Department of Media Studies (University representative). The dissertation proposal will be submitted to the student's research advisor and the research advisory committee convened for their proposal defense.

The oral defense of the proposal will be directed by the student's research advisor and all advisory committee members will participate to assess the quality of the proposal, including the importance of the research, the research design, conceptualization, plan of work, and the feasibility of the project. Students must address the committee's concerns, make required revisions to the proposal, and resubmit it to the committee for approval before advancing to candidacy. If the dissertation proposal is not approved, the student will be given the opportunity to revise and resubmit. Failure to secure approval upon resubmission will result in dismissal from the degree program.

Advancement to doctoral candidacy is based on the student's successful completion of all required coursework and the major research project, passing the comprehensive exams, and successful defense of their dissertation proposal. Once the required coursework, research project, comprehensive exams, and dissertation proposal defense have been successfully completed, the student can advance to candidacy.

Advancement to candidacy is expected to happen in the sixth semester. The summer is available as a grace period if necessary. This grace period must be coordinated with the DGS and Graduate Registrar.

Dissertation Defense & Graduation Procedures

Students will be required to write a dissertation based on their original research and defend it in an oral examination. Upon completion of their research, students shall prepare a written dissertation that fully communicates the original research, situates it within a larger literature, and explores larger implications. The final dissertation will be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies, the student's research advisor, and the research advisory committee convened for their dissertation defense. The oral defense of the dissertation will be directed by the student's research advisor and all committee members will participate. Other participants, including faculty, fellow students, and faculty members, may be invited at the student's request.

Following the defense, all committee members will vote on the acceptability of the dissertation. A student can pass the oral defense, signifying that the committee has accepted the dissertation project, with no more than one negative vote. A student who passes may still be asked to make minor revisions prior to submitting the dissertation to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. A student who does not receive a passing vote will be provided with significant feedback, and offered the opportunity to revise and have a second examination within the following year. Upon successful completion of the defense and dissertation, the student may apply for graduation from UVA with the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Media Studies.

As students approach completion of their degree, they should be aware of the procedures put in place by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences: <https://graduate.as.virginia.edu/thesis-submission-and-graduation>.

Most crucially, students should be aware that they need to have passed a thesis defense, submitted a Final Examination Form (see below), and submitted their thesis to the University Library by the following deadlines:

- Fall - November 30
- Spring - April 30
- Summer - July 31

Leaving the PhD

There are several points during the pursuit of the PhD at which students may not meet benchmarks or at which students may realize that a PhD no longer aligns with their goals. Students are encouraged to regularly discuss their progress and goals with their advisor, the DGS, and other faculty mentors to determine the best path for their academic or professional future.

Students who leave having completed MDST 8000, their history and methods courses, MDST 8900, a minimum of six MDST electives and the Major Research Project may be eligible for graduation with an MA. Students should meet with the DGS as soon as possible if this is of interest.

PhD Advising

Incoming PhD students are assigned the DGS as a formal advisor. During the second year, students should begin forming relationships with potential advisors.

The PhD advisor has the following responsibilities:

- Supervising a student's enrollment in MDST 9100: Qualifying Preparations
- Overseeing the questions, committee, and completion of the Comprehensive Exams
- Working with a student to develop their dissertation proposal
- Overseeing the committee and defense of the dissertation proposal
- Providing guidance and feedback during the research and writing of the dissertation
- Overseeing the committee and defense of the dissertation.

It is also expected that a PhD advisor be engaged in the mentoring and professionalization of advisees, offering them research experience, introductions in the field, conference mentorship and advice, and writing letters of recommendation.

Students should submit an Advisor Form no later than **April 30 of their second year** in the program; this ensures an advisor is prepared to work with the student for MDST 9100, comprehensive exams, and development of a dissertation proposal in the following year. Students may change advisors (and committee members) between the major benchmarks. Any change of advisor requires a new Advisor Form be submitted.

Finally, students should think carefully about choosing an advisor. While many choose an advisor based primarily on research foci, there are many styles of advising and mentorship and students should think carefully about the kinds of working relationships that enable them to thrive.

Forms for PhD Students

Advisor Form

When a faculty member agrees to advise a student's comprehensive exams and/or dissertation, we ask that an Advisor Form be completed for departmental records. Students should submit

an Advisor Form no later than **April 30 of their second year in the program**; this ensures an advisor is prepared to work with the student for MDST 9100, comprehensive exams, and development of a dissertation proposal in the following year.

Should a student change advisors, a new form should be submitted.

We are currently revising the Advisor Form; when complete, it will be accessible from the department website.

Final Examination Form

During the semester after which PhD students intend to graduate, they will need to follow the procedures laid out by the Graduate School - <https://graduate.as.virginia.edu/thesis-submission-and-graduation>.

One key part of this process is circulating the [Final Examination Form](#) to your advisor and committee at the conclusion of the thesis defense. Julie Gronlund can assist with this process, and often reaches out to graduating students to ensure their Forms are ready in DocuSign.

Affiliate (Doctoral/Thesis Completion) Status

An advanced PhD student who is actively completing a dissertation/thesis may petition for [Affiliate Doctoral/Thesis Completion status](#) for up to four terms for \$211/term. This status provides continued NetBadge computer system privileges, including access to UVA e-mail and electronic library resources but does not defer student loans or provide access to healthcare. International students should contact the International Studies Office before petitioning for this status.

PhD Milestone Table (Sample)

The following lays out a sample course of study that would enable a student to advance to candidacy after three years, subsequently enrolling in MDST 9999: Non-Topical Research or Affiliate (Doctoral/Thesis Completion) Status while writing the dissertation.

Required courses/credits are in yellow, electives needed to reach 72 credits are in green.

In this sample schedule, there are credits of MDST 9999: Non-Topical Research throughout all three years. This is not always necessary, as the minimum number of research credits (12) would be met in one semester of Year 4. As GTAs need to be fulltime students, research credits enable dissertating students to access that funding. Thus, it is quite possible to take additional electives or pursue a [Graduate Certificate](#) alongside required coursework by eliminating some or all research credits in the first three years.

Student should consult with their advisor and/or the DGS about individualized plans of study. This is only a guide.

Academic Year 1, Fall	Academic Year 1, Spring
MDST 8000: Media, Culture & Technology	MDST 8001: Methods of Media Research
MDST 8003: Histories of Media Technologies	XXXX XXXX <i>Elective</i>
XXXX XXXX: <i>Elective</i>	XXXX XXXX <i>Elective</i>
MDST 9000: Colloquium (1 cr)	MDST 9000: Colloquium (1 cr)
MDST 9999: Non-Topical Research (2 cr)	MDST 9999: Non-Topical Research (2 cr)
Academic Year 2, Fall	Academic Year 2, Spring
MDST 8500: Media Studies Pedagogy	MDST XXXX: <i>Second Methods Requirement</i>
MDST 8900: Developing Media Research	MDST 9999: Non-Topical Research (2 cr)
MDST 9999: Non-Topical Research (2 cr)	XXXX XXXX <i>Elective</i>
XXXX XXXX: <i>Elective</i>	XXXX XXXX <i>Elective</i>
MDST 9000: Colloquium (1 cr)	MDST 9000: Colloquium (1 cr)
<i>Benchmark: Complete Major Research Project</i>	
Academic Year 3, Fall	Academic Year 3, Spring
MDST 9100: Qualifying Prep	MDST 9200: Prospectus Development
MDST 9000: Colloquium (1 cr)	MDST 9000: Colloquium (1 cr)
MDST 9999: Non-Topical Research (2 cr)	MDST 9999: Non-Topical Research (2 cr)
XXXX XXXX: <i>Elective</i>	XXXX XXXX: <i>Elective</i>
XXXX XXXX: <i>Elective</i>	XXXX XXXX: <i>Elective</i>
<i>Benchmark: Qualifying Exams</i>	<i>Benchmark: Dissertation Proposal</i>
Academic Year 4: Dissertation (PhD Candidate)	
<i>May enroll in MDST 9999: Non-Topical Research credits to retain fulltime status (12 cr)</i>	
Academic Year 5: Dissertation (PhD Candidate)	
<i>May enroll in MDST 9999: Non-Topical Research credits to retain fulltime status (12 cr); may choose to move to Affiliate Status</i>	
<i>Benchmark: Dissertation Defense</i>	

Departmental Policies and Expectations

Departmental Events

Every semester, the Department of Media Studies sponsors a range of events, including workshops, invited speakers, Colloquium guests, film screenings, and more. **Graduate students are always welcome to attend these events and are *expected* to attend Media Studies speaker events.**

Workshops

The Department of Media Studies hosts occasional workshops, usually on the second Wednesday of the month (following the faculty meeting). These workshops involve a faculty member presenting on their current research, often a chapter from a book-in-progress, and soliciting feedback from the group. The work is circulated via email in advance, and participants (including students) are expected to have read the work in advance of the brief presentation. This ensures that presenters have time to receive ample feedback.

Graduate students are highly encouraged to attend at least a few lunch workshops during their time in the department, as a window into the process of research and the practice of giving and receiving constructive scholarly criticism.

Lunch is often served at these workshops; if you plan to attend, you should also RSVP to the relevant emails to be sure there is adequate catering and seating.

Invited Speakers

Invited speakers are usually scholars or professionals from outside of UVA who are brought in to give a talk about their area of expertise. Media Studies sponsors some of its own invited speakers, and also often contributes to support speakers brought in by the Institute for the Global Humanities, the School of Data Science, the Mellon Foundation, or other departments and programs on Grounds. A typical invited speaker event involves a roughly 45-minute talk and time for questions and answers from the audience.

In some cases, there will be time set aside for graduate students to meet with invited speakers, either individually or as a group. Students may need to sign up for such events, due to limited space or time, but all students are welcome and encouraged to do so. Students can expect to speak with invited speakers about research interests, career trajectories, teaching practices, and other matters of professional concern.

Often, there may not be dedicated time for graduate students to engage with a speaker. Students are still encouraged to attend events, participate in Q&A sessions, and introduce themselves to speakers who are of interest.

Graduate students in Media Studies are, similarly, encouraged to pay attention to announcements about talks happening elsewhere on Grounds, and to attend any public talks or other events that speak to their individual interests.

Departmental Staff

The administrative staff in the department support the graduate programs in several capacities.

Julie Gronlund

Administrative Coordinator

jlg2r@virginia.edu

Julie Gronlund controls the graduate email listservs, aids in course planning, and can assist with enrollment, degree requirements/SIS, and similar questions.

TBA

Department Manager

The department manager oversees financial matters, including hiring of hourly workers and GTAs, reimbursements, and similar issues.

Director of Graduate Studies & Graduate Curriculum Committee

Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)

The Director of Graduate Studies is a faculty member in Media Studies who oversees the graduate program curriculum, outreach, and admissions and works with GSAS on issues of program assessment and development. The DGS often is the first person to speak with prospective students and remains a resource for student needs and questions throughout their course of study.

Specific situations that might require DGS involvement include:

- Transferring credit from a previous institution
- Petitioning for departmental credit for courses taught elsewhere in the University
- Questions about courses, requirements, and degree progress
- Questions about graduation timelines, contingency plans, and changes in plans
- Questions about funding opportunities, employment, and related finances or benefits
- Serving as a resource or mediator in interpersonal dynamics

The DGS can be reached at dgs_mdst@virginia.edu. This is a three-year service position, meaning that multiple faculty may fill this role during your time in Media Studies.

The DGS may advise students and serve on committees; however, they are not a “default” advisor and may decline such service, as may any other faculty member.

The Graduate Curriculum Committee (GCC)

The Graduate Curriculum Committee is a group of faculty who contribute to the operations of the graduate programs. They participate in admissions evaluations and decisions, aid in course planning, and address emergent program needs. Committee members serve one-year terms, which may be repeated.

Subcommittees or areas of interest in the GCC include:

- MA program development & admissions
- PhD admissions
- Evaluation of PhD Major Research Projects
- Course development
- Program assessment
- Departmental funding decisions

Departmental Funding

Graduate Research Positions

Graduate Research positions include hourly work and Graduate Research Assistantships. Both types of position are normally sponsored by a faculty member, institute, or other organization on Grounds. Those seeking graduate research assistants may post job openings on Handshake, to which students can apply. Faculty in Media Studies will always make paid positions known to our own graduate students when available.

Hourly graduate research positions usually involve approximately 10 hours/week of work, and wages of \$15-25 per hour. Students may hold more than one hourly position, provided they do not exceed 20 hours/week of expected work.

Graduate research assistantships are less common. These include tuition remission and a health insurance subsidy, and may also include tuition adjustment (for out-of-state students). They are waged positions, paid biweekly.

Note: Graduate students may not exceed 20 hours/week of paid work in any role without making a request and receiving approval from GSAS (<https://graduate.as.virginia.edu/graduate-student-financial-support>). International students may not exceed 20 hours/week.

Graduate Teaching Assistantships

PhD students in Media Studies are funded through a combination of GTA appointments and fellowships. Each incoming student is offered 10 funded semesters, 6 as a GTA and 4 on fellowship. PhD students receive a combination of wages and stipend funding to bring them to the current GSAS level of funding. More information about doctoral support is available from GSAS: <https://graduate.as.virginia.edu/graduate-student-financial-support>.

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences permits students to be hired as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) once they have taken 18 credit hours of graduate-level work. The Department of Media Studies hires GTAs for one-year positions, in consultation with GSAS, with preference given to department PhD students within their funding years, then to other funded doctoral students. On rare occasions, the department may hire second-year MA students as GTAs.

Graduate teaching assistantships require 10 hours of work per week and pay wages as well as offering tuition remission and a health insurance subsidy and may also include tuition adjustment (for out-of-state students). They are waged positions, paid biweekly. Students who are interested in serving as GTAs must commit to being enrolled and on-Grounds for a full academic year.

Hourly Grader Positions

Courses with an undergraduate enrollment of at least 60 are eligible for a grader. The faculty member teaching the course in question may solicit applications for graders or may reach out to student/s directly.

Grader positions pay hourly, at a maximum of 10 hours per week. They do not carry other benefits. Graders can expect that their working hours may vary within this limit, as weeks around midterms or finals customarily involve more grading work than other weeks.

Shelton Award

The Shelton Award recognizes the work of BA or MA students in the department of Media Studies (a portion of the Shelton Award is also administered separately, by Politics). This award, which stems from an alumni donation, can be applied only to tuition and fees.

The remit of the Shelton Award is as follows:

The award is used to recognize a major engaged in the scholarly pursuit of the cultural and political influence on media communications shaping the modern world. Recipients shall possess the qualities of integrity, fortitude, and conscience. If possible, preference shall be given to individuals involved in Russian and East European affairs and/or to those who aspire to diplomatic or media careers.

Applications for the Shelton are solicited by the DGS and Director of Undergraduate Programs during the spring semester. The Shelton award is not available to incoming students prior to their enrollment in the department.

Other Funding Sources

Students are welcome to apply for positions in other departments or campus offices, many of which are posted on [Handshake](#).

GSAS maintains a list of Fellowships & Grants, most of which are aimed at doctoral students: <https://graduate.as.virginia.edu/fellowships-grants>

Research & Travel Funding

As students progress in their degrees, they may find themselves in need of funds for one or more of the following purposes:

- Travel to an archive, field site, or other location for research purposes
- Payment of human subjects
- Specialized resources, subscription services, or equipment for research purposes
- Travel to academic conferences to present research

The department has limited funding to support students' research and travel. Requests should be sent to the DGS, and will be considered by a subcommittee of the GCC. Any updates to this process will be posted to our website.

Communication

Professional communication in graduate school may take place in a variety of formats and styles. However, you should expect that **all official information from the graduate program will be sent via email**. You are expected to check your email regularly and are responsible for information disseminated over email from department staff, the DGS, Chair, or your advisor. Other means may also be used, but email will be sent regardless.

Much information will come to you through the departmental graduate student listserv: mdst_gradstudents@virginia.edu.

University Resources for Graduate Students

Graduate School of Arts & Sciences (GSAS)

The GSAS website offers a wealth of information about policies and procedures for all students enrolled in GSAS programs. The policies set by GSAS supersede departmental policies.

<https://graduate.as.virginia.edu/>

GSAS offers exhaustive resources, policy documentation, and other information including material related to parental leave, emergency financial support, and funding opportunities.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

CAPS is available to all students for support, referral assistance and crisis services. They offer individual and group counseling, emergency and crisis services, and drop-in consults.

<https://studenthealth.virginia.edu/caps>

Call 434-243-5150 or email sth-caps@virginia.edu to access services

Student Disability Access Center (SDAC)

SDAC provides support for students seeking disability accommodations, offering space, technologies, and other resources to facilitate accessible learning environments. Graduate students are entitled to disability accommodations in their capacity as learners.

<https://www.studenthealth.virginia.edu/student-disability-access-center>

SDAC does not, however, address accessibility needs that graduate students may face in their roles as teaching or research assistants. For these needs, you may wish to reach out to the office of the ADA Coordinator.

UVA Accessibility Resources: <https://accessibility.virginia.edu/>

SDAC Contact Info: sdac@virginia.edu, call 434-243-5180

Office of the ADA Coordinator: <https://eocr.virginia.edu/ada-coordinator>

Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE)

CTE offers a variety of programs, workshops, events, and resources to help with teaching and pedagogy. They offer teaching consultations and in-class observations to help you excel in the classroom. They will meet with you one-on-one to help you design courses, develop syllabi and curriculum, engage students, and better use instructional technology.

CTE Website: <https://cte.virginia.edu/>

Teaching Consultation Program: <https://cte.virginia.edu/programs-grants/teaching-consultation-program>

Complete List of programs and grants: <https://cte.virginia.edu/programs-grants>

Library Services for Graduate Students

The Library offers a range of services specifically designed to help graduate students with research, class instruction, publication, and teaching.

To learn about these services visit: <https://www.library.virginia.edu/services/graduate-students/>

International Students & Scholars Program

The International Students & Scholars Program assists with practical support with visas, immigration, or documentation, as well as mentorship programs.

To learn about these services, visit: <https://issp.virginia.edu/>

Graduate Diversity Programs

This website offers information about academic development services, mentorship opportunities, student affinity groups, retreats, and more.

To learn about these services visit: <https://graddiversity.virginia.edu/>

Funding, Grants, and Fellowships

For a list of internal and external fellowship opportunities visit:

<https://gradstudies.virginia.edu/funding-and-opportunities>

For a list of resources to help you search for all forms of funding visit:

<https://gradstudies.virginia.edu/funding/looking-funding>