Film and Media Studies graduate seminar best practices
Approved January 2026

Workload

FMS graduate courses are each 4 units and meet 3 hours per week. Campus expectations stipulate an average weekly workload of 3 hours per unit; this amounts to 12 hours per week: **3 hours of class time and 9 hours of out-of-class work per week on average**. Faculty are advised to include a workload expectation statement in their course syllabi.

Faculty retain academic freedom and flexibility in designing their courses and assignments.

Readings: Faculty typically assign 4 or 5 articles/chapters *or* 1 monograph book per week. Some faculty assign a film or media text for home viewing, which may substitute for one article/chapter. (Faculty have the option of requesting a weekly screening time for their seminars when the class is being scheduled.) Faculty are advised to communicate to students that they are expected to complete assigned readings and come to class prepared to engage them rigorously. Faculty may want to train students on reading closely and/or reading efficiently, as appropriate. Faculty should provide access to course readings a minimum of one week before they are due.

Assignments: Faculty typically have one major writing assignment (term paper or conference paper, project proposal, annotated bibliography, literature review, or other) and some smaller assignments due across the term (such as weekly reading response, weekly illustrative clip/analysis, building-block small writing assignments such as an abstract, precis, book review, proposal, or presentation). There is flexibility in the number and type of assignments, including creative assignments, but overall course workload should remain reasonable.

Faculty are advised to communicate a clear Generative AI usage policy in the course syllabus.

Faculty are advised to encourage students to complete online course evaluations.

In-class Discussions

Faculty are advised to guide class discussions and to offer prefatory context where relevant; students cannot be assumed to have prior knowledge of disciplinary intellectual history, of disciplinary norms, nor of authors and texts assigned.

Faculty should communicate expectations for discussion and participation in the course syllabus and in class at the beginning of the term. This includes the expectation to have completed the assigned reading and being ready to discuss it substantively. Expectations can include advising students that critiques should take into account what an author is doing and what methods are engaged rather than de facto dismissal for what it is *not* doing or the author's identity categories. (For instance, if a student attempts to shut down discussion because a reading does not think about *x*, encourage a reframing, such as *how would it change the work if it did think about x*?) Expectations can also include emphasizing the importance of focusing on the text at hand rather than deflecting or detouring away from course readings.

Faculty may take qualitative grade deductions for student participation grades on the basis of unsatisfactory or disruptive contributions to class discussions.

Grades and Incompletes

Faculty are advised to communicate the expectations and meaning of letter grades in the course syllabus: A+, A, A-, B+, B and below.

Faculty are advised to communicate clear grading criteria, including each assignment's proportionate weight in determining final grades, in the course syllabus. Faculty may want to use rubrics in gradings assignments for grading transparency.

Faculty are advised to give feedback to students during the run of the course, prior to the deadline for the final assignment. This will most often happen via feedback and grades on smaller assignments in advance of the final assignment. It may also include written assessments and/or one-on-one meetings to proactively communicate feedback and any concerns.

Faculty are advised to have an attendance policy for the course, with minor flexibility for absences as appropriate. Students are generally excused from class if they have travel for a conference. Faculty may take final grade deductions for students with excessive absences.

In general, if a student is not meeting class expectations, does not produce work at an appropriate graduate level, is delinquent in submitting assignments, and/or is chronically late or absent, then the student *should not earn an A for the course*. The final grade for a course should reflect an accurate and fair assessment of the student's work and should not be inflated, nor punitive.

Students must earn a grade of B or higher for the course to count toward their degree requirements, according to campus policies. Grades of B- and below are considered failing in graduate school and automatically place the student on Academic Conditional Status; faculty may assign such grades when earned, but only when appropriate. Grades of B- and below indicate that a student has failed to meet the expectations of the class, has not completed the assigned work for a class, and/or has submitted work that is insufficient or at an unacceptable level for a graduate class. See the FMS Graduate Student Handbook for more information about grade policies.

Grades are determined by the instructor of record and cannot be overruled by the department administration.

If a student is not on track to pass a class (such as failing to meet course expectations, excessive absences, missing deadlines and/or not submitting work) faculty are advised to proactively contact the student's advisor and/or program director of graduate study in advance of the end of the term. This applies to students from other programs as well.

Incomplete (I) grades are permitted at the faculty's discretion. Students must make advance arrangements and have faculty approval for an incomplete well in advance of an assignment's due date and/or the term's end. There must be good cause for the student to be granted additional time to complete assignments, and a clear deadline to complete the assignments must also be communicated. Students with multiple incompletes are automatically recommended for Academic Conditional Status. Faculty are advised to clearly communicate Incomplete guidelines in the course syllabus.

Campus policy on Incompletes is as follows:

Incomplete Grade (I) Graduate

1. **Conditions**
   The grade Incomplete may be assigned when a student's work is of passing quality but is incomplete for good cause. The I grade may be replaced by a passing grade and receive unit credit provided the student completes the work of the course in a way authorized by the instructor.

2. **Time Limits**

a. Registered Students

The grade Incomplete may only be replaced by another grade or notation subject to the following:

i. The action must be taken prior to the end of the third quarter following the quarter in which the grade Incomplete was originally awarded, or prior to the end of the quarter immediately preceding award of the degree, whichever comes first (instructors, however, are not obligated to allow the maximum time period).

ii. Only quarters in which a student is enrolled will be counted in determining the time after which the grade Incomplete can no longer be replaced.