

Film and Visual Studies General Examination Policy

December 2013

Preparing for the examination: The general examination tests students' knowledge of film, media, and visual culture in three areas: history, theory and aesthetics, and a special topic of the student's choice (e. g., performance, animation, sound art). By mid-March of their second year, students select a faculty reader to supervise preparation in each of these areas. Ordinarily, history and theory readers will be members of the Standing Committee; the special topic reader may but need not be. The three readers constitute the committee, and will administer the written and oral components of the examination. One of them will serve as chair of the committee. This will be often, but not necessarily, the student's dissertation adviser. In addition to the reading lists (which must be approved in advance by the three readers), students are expected to be familiar with a wide range of films as well as the history of film and audio-visual media generally. Suggested viewing lists are available on the Film and Visual Studies website (http://www.ves.fas.harvard.edu/fvs_readings.html).

Scheduling the examination: Students are required to select their three readers and finalize the theory and history lists by May 30th of the second year. The special topic list should be finalized with the special topic adviser by September 30th of the third year. Ordinarily, the written examination takes place in mid-March, the week after spring break of the third year, and the oral examination a week after the written examination in late March, early April.

The written examination (three days): Students will be asked to respond to questions prepared by the readers; they are ordinarily given at least three essay questions for each section from which they choose one. The first day of the written exam covers the history section of the exam. The second day of the written exam covers the theory and aesthetics sections of the exam. The third day is devoted to the special topics section. Students will receive the questions each day at 9 a.m. in Sever Hall and will be given a quiet place in which to work, submitting their essay by noon on each day. Normal standards regarding originality and citation apply; please see the following link for information regarding these standards:

(http://www.gsas.harvard.edu/handbook/regulations_and_standards_of_conduct.php).

Oral examination (two hours): Students will be asked to review, clarify, and defend arguments presented in the written examinations. Candidates should also expect to present and discuss preliminary ideas and research for their proposed thesis topic. Students whose performance on the examination is not satisfactory will be given one opportunity to repeat all or a portion of the examinations.