

**The Master of Fine Arts Program  
in Science and Natural History Filmmaking**

# Handbook

Cohort 24



This handbook applies only to the 2024 Cohort whose MFA studies began in Academic Year 2024-2025. The effective date of this Handbook is August 15, 2024.

version 24.0

## **Mission Statement**

The School of Film and Photography (SFP) is dedicated to providing quality education in film production for one graduate program, the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Science and Natural History Filmmaking (SNHF).

The mission of the MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking program is to train aspiring filmmakers with an interest and background in scientific disciplines to develop the creative, technical, and critical skills needed to create work that will contribute to the public understanding of science.

The mission statement conveys the Program's emphasis on finding creative ways of expressing scientific information in a broad sense, primarily through nonfiction filmmaking and related media. Scientific research is often based on innovation, and the faculty believe that media about science and natural history topics can and should challenge and transform traditional media models to work on more profoundly creative levels.

## **Introduction**

This MFA Handbook contains the requirements and guidelines for the curriculum leading to your Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree in Science and Natural History Filmmaking (SNHF). The Handbook will also inform you about the overall philosophy of the program as well as the procedural process for registration, equipment use, comprehensive examinations, and thesis work. Over three years, there may be changes and adjustments to the curriculum and procedures, so please be attentive to emails, website postings, and class announcements. The handbook is a school publication and subject to the respective rules of the SFP, the College of Art and Architecture (CAA), the Graduate School, and Montana State University-Bozeman, and the Montana Board of Regents. Additional information can be found on the MSU website ([www.montana.edu](http://www.montana.edu))

and the MFA in SNHF website  
(<http://sfp.montana.edu/sciencenaturefilm/>).

In addition, there are many rules, regulations, and deadlines set by the Graduate School. It is the responsibility of the graduate student to follow the policies of the Graduate School. For the latest deadlines, forms, and policy updates, please refer to the Graduate School's website: [www.montana.edu/gradschool/](http://www.montana.edu/gradschool/).

As you enter this program, the SNHF program is entering its 24th year. As such there has been ample time to reflect, revise, and refine the curriculum to offer a dynamic course of study that provides the skills needed for crafting a career in nonfiction film production, which includes thoughtful reflection on the historical and contemporary landscape of documentary filmmaking.

## **MFA Program**

You enter the program alongside a cohort of other individuals who share similar values and have made a similar commitment. As a community of artists and scholars you gain access to experienced faculty and up-to-date facilities, training in a desirable and continually challenging profession, opportunities for self-expression and self-improvement, admission to an ever-expanding alumni network, internship advantages with major production companies and organizations, and relationships that will last throughout your career. The faculty considers you colleagues-in-training.

## **Program Support**

A limited number of SFP Graduate Teaching Assistant positions are open to you beginning in your second year of the program, and on occasion, in your first year; they are distributed through a competitive selection process. These positions offer a stipend, in-state tuition rates, and up to twelve credits tuition waivers. There are also work opportunities in the school and productions related to grant work and professional filming.

## **Laptop Requirements**

It is required that all students have their own laptop computer. All MSU School of Film and Photography digital labs are in the MAC universe which means all of your instruction will be taught on high end MAC stations regardless of what platform you have traditionally worked on or may bring with you.

One full license of the Adobe Creative Cloud suite will be available to each of you as students to download on your personal computer. This license will work if you are an enrolled student, including the summer period.

Please research the specs for the Adobe suite and editing 4 k video footage in terms of ram and memory space as you decide on what kind of laptop you may want.

As of this writing, we recommend purchasing a *M-Series Apple MacBook Pro Laptop* with a minimum of 16GB of RAM/Unified Memory.

## **MFA List-Serve, Facebook Page, and Other Services**

The SNHF program maintains an active email list-serve. During the year we send important notices and information via the list-serve. Please keep your contact information current with the MFA Coordinator. The SNHF Facebook group page is an invaluable resource that links you to program alumni and fellow MFA students. This is a private group, maintained by alumni. You will receive instructions on how to join during orientation. Please consider joining this group as it becomes a great resource for networking and employment opportunities.

## **Program Organization**

The SFP is fortunate to have an experienced and skilled administrative staff and faculty who work together to keep all the department programs running smoothly. Key people who you will interact with regularly are listed below.

You will find that the administrators, faculty, staff, and the MFA student

representative are open to discussion about virtually any subject and are willing to work with you to resolve problems you may face. If you have a question or problem related to a specific class, please discuss the matter first with the instructor. If the matter is not resolved, discuss the issue with the SNHF Program Director. Finally, if these avenues are exhausted, make an appointment with the SFP Director. You may also discuss a wide range of issues with the Graduate Student Representative, who is a fellow MFA student. The Graduate Student Representative will then bring this forward to administration.

**Colette Campbell** is the SFP Program Coordinator, which includes the SNHF. She manages the administrative part of the SNHF program in direct consultation with the SNHF program director. She will coordinate your scheduling, course requirement questions, registration, graduate teaching assistantship assignments, and thesis-related paperwork, including your application for graduation.

**Shelley Fleming** is the Business Operations Manager and Assistant to the SFP Director; she coordinates graduate teaching assistantships (GTAs) including wages, scholarships, grants, and financial questions.

**Professor Cindy Stillwell** is the SNHF program Director on sabbatical for the 2024-2025 school year. She manages the overall workings of the SNHF program, overseeing curriculum development with SFP faculty, budget and expenditures for SNHF, and the Director of the SFP. Cindy also fields internship opportunities and coordination, admissions coordination, and comp exam coordination and GTA/ GSA coordination and advising. An interim program director will be in place for the 24-25 academic year.

**Professor Alexis Pike** is the SFP Director. She oversees all programs in the school, undergraduate and graduate programs. She interfaces with the Dean of the College on a regular basis.

**Graduate Student Representative-** a graduate student, chosen by the current students, usually from the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students, who represents the SNHF students in all matters.

**Grad School Assistant-** a graduate student who is selected, sometimes each semester, to assist in special projects related to the

management of the SNHF including social media, maintaining website updates, and special research projects relating to supporting and developing the SNHF community. This position is chosen from a pool of applicants, similar to the GTA process.

## Equipment Checkout

Equipment Checkout will be the source of most of your gear, especially during the first year of production. There are very specific rules about borrowing and using the SFP film and video equipment. You will be instructed in these procedures as you begin production and during your orientation. You are expected to adhere to the rules as is every student in SFP. The equipment is a common resource for everyone in the MFA, BFA and BA programs. The gear needs to be used carefully and safely. **Tony Purpura**, is the Technology Coordinator, a full time staff position who oversees all equipment checkout and labs in the building for all our SFP programs. Many student employees assist him in this work.

The checkout reservation program is called **Connect2** (<https://sfpcheckout.msu.montana.edu/>)

This program requires you to create an account before you can reserve any equipment or rooms. To create this account, you will need your NetID and student ID at your initial orientation, these can be found in your [MyInfo](#) account.

## MFA Program Curriculum and Timeline

A minimum of 60 credits are required to complete the MFA degree in Science and Natural History Filmmaking.

Science and Natural History Filmmaking Curriculum Table 24/25

### **First year**

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#### Fall

510 FUNDAMENTALS OF FILMMAKING	3 CR
519 POST PRODUCTION	3 CR
581. 002 SOUND	3 CR

504 FILM AND DOCUMENTARY THEORY	4 CR
<u>Spring</u>	
515 SCIENCE AND NAT HISTORY FILM PROD	4 CR
518 WRITING FOR NONFICTION	3 CR
505 CRITICAL APPROACHES TO SCI AND NAT HIST	4 CR
517 PRODUCTION MGMT	3 CR
	<b>27 TOTAL 1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR</b>
<b>Second Year</b>	
<hr/>	
<u>Fall</u>	
526 ALTERNATIVE NON FICTION	3 CR
513 ADVANCED CINEMATOGRAPHY	3 CR
523 2 <sup>ND</sup> YEAR FILM PREP	2 CR
598 PROFESSIONAL INTERNSHIP	
<u>or</u> 592 INDEPENDENT STUDY	1 CR
<u>Spring</u>	
560 INFO DESIGN	3 CR
528_ Non-Fiction Film Performance	3 CR
<u>525 2<sup>ND</sup> YEAR FILM PROD</u>	<u>3 CR</u>
	<b>18 TOTAL 2<sup>ND</sup> YEAR</b>
	<b>45 TOTAL 1<sup>ST</sup> AND 2<sup>ND</sup> YEAR</b>
	<b>45 PRE-THESIS</b>
<hr/>	
<b><u>Third year</u></b>	
Fall 590 THESIS CREDITS	6 CR
Spring 590 Thesis Credits	9 CR
Total 590 Thesis credits required	15 CR
	<b><u>60 CREDIT TOTAL MFA</u></b>

## Coursework

You must be in the Bozeman area during your first two consecutive academic years of instruction. The first-year coursework is designed to be foundational in film and media production and builds rapidly on each course and the exercises, papers, and films created. The curriculum is designed to be 'lockstep' and therefore each student must complete the courses in order with their co-hort. We feel this builds community and a shared experience, while also ensuring that the basics are covered in all production aspects: image creation, ideation and research, camera, sound, editing, post

workflows, documentary history and theory, and problems specific to the science and natural history subject area.

Students are not required to be enrolled in credits during the summer semesters. When you are pursuing internships or independent study courses, you will need to enroll for those credits during the semester in which they take place. We recommend students do this work after their first year, during the summer or during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year if possible.

## **First Year Review**

Towards the end of the first year in the program, you may be asked to meet individually with the MFA Program Director to discuss an assessment of your performance and the prospects for success in the program. This review is based on notes from first-year instructors in which they share their experiences of your academic performance. The intention is to offer you an in-depth evaluation at a critical juncture in the MFA degree process. If a performance review is heavily negative, the faculty may recommend that you leave the Program.

## **Comprehensive Exam**

All degree candidates must take and pass the comprehensive examination prior to enrolling in thesis credits. The exam is administered during the early part of the spring semester of your second year.

A small group of your faculty will write, administer, and grade the exam. The exam will contain questions covering documentary history, theory, and production. These questions will relate to all coursework done up to the date of the exam including films screened, articles and books assigned, productions and exercises conducted. There may be a practical portion to the exam, as determined by the current faculty.

The exam is marked **high pass, pass, or fail** and is graded by the faculty. If a student receives a failing evaluation from any faculty



member on any portion of the exam, the student will fail the exam. If a student fails the comp exam, they will be required to leave the program. There are no exceptions to the schedule or location of the exam.

## **Thesis Year**

All students begin thesis work, with a committee chair in place, at the beginning of the third year and defend their MFA thesis film and paper at the end of the spring semester, third year.

Students work with the chair of their committee to craft a plan for research, pre-production, production and post-production and completion of the paper requirements over the course of the third year, the 'thesis year.' Students will enroll in 6 thesis credits in the Fall Semester of the third year and 9 credits in the spring, the semester of thesis defense.

Any student who does not complete thesis work by the end of their third year, or 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive semester will be in danger of not receiving their degree. Only in extreme health or family-related health circumstances will this timeline be altered.

Once you begin this SNHF program a momentum is built, working toward your thesis film project. The curriculum and faculty support are designed to help you take advantage of this creative and intellectual momentum.

Exceptions to this timeline are granted only in extraordinary circumstances, requires an application, statement from the chair and joint approval from the Program Director of the SNHF, the SFP Director.

## **Production Work**

The **first year** of the program is considered foundational. Film production goals will include several production exercises designed to build towards a short final film in the first semester. The second semester will build and expand the skills gained, and students will each produce and complete a more complex short film, called their 'first year

film.'

The **second-year** pivots around the research and production of the 'second year film.' Students will also be expanding their understanding of image creation, film form, performance in the nonfiction space, and more advanced digital work in After Effects. The first semester of the second-year, pre-production of the second-year film begins. Each student may develop a topic of their choosing for their film in consultation and mentorship with the instructor of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year film prep course. Your second-year film may either be agenda-based (i.e., produced for a client or agency) or a project you research, develop and produce independently. The student shall be the sole creative decision-maker on their 2<sup>nd</sup> year film, regardless of which route you take. Traditionally, the fall semester of the second year is spent in pre-production on the film and the spring is spent in production and post-production. The faculty member in your spring second-year workshop class (**FILM 525 2<sup>nd</sup> YEAR FILM**) will be responsible for overseeing the production and completion of the second-year film. The film must be completed by finals week of the second year. "Completed" means that the film is ready for public or commercial exhibition; the final sound mix has been completed, the color grading is finished, titles, captioning, and credit sequences are completed, and all rights have been officially secured.

Note: All productions that you complete as final projects in each course are owned entirely by you as the producer. Each film shall include an acknowledgment in the end credits that the film was completed as part of your MSU MFA degree work using the following language:

*Produced as part of the degree requirements for the MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking Program in the School of Film and Photography, Montana State University-Bozeman*

# Thesis Work

You must pass your Comprehensive Examination, successfully complete your second-year film, and have successfully completed a total of at least 45 credits before moving on to your thesis work. There are no exceptions to these pre REQs, please plan accordingly.

**Thesis Credits** - Completed 15 thesis credits.  
Totals to 60 credits to complete the MFA degree.

**Thesis Film** - Completed, 10m minimum, nonfiction film on a topic and style of your choosing.

**Thesis Paper**- ~20-page paper that reflects your artistic identity as a filmmaker, your research into the making of the thesis film, the film approaches you are studying by example and how your own approach is informed by current and historical documentary filmmaking.

**Thesis Defense** - A thesis defense is the final step toward degree completion. Thesis defenses will be held in the spring of your third year. Thesis defenses are scheduled for three hours. The defense will begin with the film screened in a public forum usually followed by a question-and-answer period from the invited public. Following the public portion, there will be a private portion that includes the candidate and the thesis committee to discuss the film and the paper.

MFA candidates spend their third year in research, production, and post-production on their thesis films and papers. This work is done in consultation with your committee chair, outlined below. The graduate school has specific deadlines as to the last date to defend thesis and complete all paperwork. Thesis defenses will be scheduled in compliance with these deadlines.

## **Thesis Film**

Thesis films will be original productions, 10-15 minutes, that reflect ideas generated by you. The thesis film is an independent production, not made for an agency or non-profit or any other entity desiring creative control of the film. MFA candidates are encouraged to choose topics that they are passionate about, have ample access to, and therefore can visit repeatedly for production purposes.

The film should express your own ideas about and artistic approaches to science and natural history filmmaking through a production that pushes the boundaries of nonfiction filmmaking through content and form.

## **Thesis Paper**

The thesis film will be accompanied by a thesis paper. Your chair will provide you with the current thesis paper guidelines to follow. In general thesis students will be expected to include, a link to your website, an artist statement and bio, a logline and synopsis of the film, and a detailed written section that demonstrates your personal connection to the material, the research you did to understand your topic and the way your film is informed by or in dialog with the field of documentary filmmaking and scholarship.

## **Thesis Committee**

The Thesis Committee must include at least three full time SFP faculty members, either tenured, or tenure-track. The Committee Chair must be a tenured or tenured-track faculty member. The committee in full will be present at the thesis defense and have the final decision on granting the MFA degree.

Students may be required to conduct a formal presentation of their

current production work and research ideas for their thesis as early as mid-way through the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, to aid in the formation of MFA thesis committees. It is never too early to begin forming ideas and conducting research for a solid thesis film!

The primary universal guideline is that both the written thesis and the thesis film should be completed within the required period of time and in accordance with accepted academic standards of intellectual rigor, professionalism, accuracy, and excellence.

Thesis experience is usually a mentoring situation, and as such, the chair of the committee has a great deal of discretion in terms of how the thesis process will proceed. The student works closely with the Chair to decide on a plan of work, a timeline with benchmarks, and gives the final approval to schedule the defense. The Chair will be responsible for reviewing drafts of your written thesis, rough and fine cuts of your film, and the general administration of your thesis work. The student and chair together work toward the best timing to show work to the Committee. You want the Committee members to see the paper and film with ample time to make suggestions, notes, comments, and critiques before the defense. The final delivery of your finished film and finished paper will be submitted to the Committee **AT LEAST TWO WEEKS PRIOR** to the defense. No exceptions

## **Thesis Committee Formation and Timeline**

MFA thesis committees are formed in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year as per the Graduate School guidelines. Current students will begin to seek their chair and committee members during this time. Ideally each MFA candidate will spend time researching the current faculty to seek the best fit for their thesis project. Often this timeline is in the middle of 2<sup>nd</sup> year film production, which is less than ideal. However, keep in mind that committee chairs can change, and often do, once the student has zeroed in on their thesis film topic.

## **Formation of Thesis Committee Paperwork**

As soon as you confirm your Committee Chair and members complete the *Graduate Committee Request* form in the Student Services tab in [MyInfo](#). When you receive the email confirmation from the Graduate School that your Graduate Committee Request has been successfully completed, you then complete the *Program of Study* form, also in the Student Services tab in [MyInfo](#). Read the instructions carefully to avoid your forms being rejected by the Graduate School. If you have any questions on how to fill out these forms, contact the MFA Coordinator. These must be submitted by the end of your second year.

## **Changing your committee**

At any time during the thesis process, a faculty member may resign as Chair or as a committee member. You may also decide to change chairs or Committee members. If you wish to make these changes, please speak with Colette Campbell for instructions on this process. These procedures are subject to change, so Colette Campbell will be able to find the most current procedures for changing chairs or committees when/ if the time comes.

## **Thesis Defense**

Thesis defenses will be scheduled for a three-hour block. The MFA candidate will work with the Chair and the Committee to choose a three-hour block of time that works with everyone's schedule and that is in line with final submission dates established by the Graduate School for the relevant defense semester.

## **Thesis Paperwork**

The responsibility for completing forms and meeting deadlines falls entirely upon the MFA candidate, so please be diligent about completing what is required.

## **Rights Clearances and MFA Acknowledgment**

You and your Chair will ensure that all music, literary, material, location, and personal release rights are cleared before the thesis defense. If there are any rights encumbrances, the thesis may be rejected by The Graduate School or SFP, even if successfully defended.

All thesis films **MUST** have the MFA acknowledgment provided in this handbook in the final credits of the thesis film, preferably at the conclusion of the film's credits right above or before the copyright notice. If the exact wording is not included, the film is considered incomplete and can be challenged even after its submission to the Graduate School. The acknowledgment must appear on all copies and versions of the film. An MSU logo is not required.

The thesis title, date, time, location of the defense must be announced publicly at least two weeks prior to the defense date through normal University media channels, including emails. You must email Colette Campbell at [Colette@montana.edu](mailto:Colette@montana.edu) with a professional PHOTO or head shot and all thesis information.

At least two weeks before the defense, you must submit the written thesis draft to the Electronic Theses and Dissertations Formatting Information in the Submission Portal to have the thesis formatting approved. The Submission Portal can be found on The Graduate School site at [https:// www.montana.edu/etd/](https://www.montana.edu/etd/)

Friends, colleagues, faculty, and the general public may be invited to attend the first hour of the defense. You will give a formal presentation about the thesis as determined with your chair. This usually involves a brief intro to your research, your film, and then screening the thesis film and conducting a Q&A with the gathered group. After the first hour or before, the guests will be asked to leave, and you will then defend the thesis work before your thesis committee. The defense may be completed in fewer than three hours if the Committee agrees.

Your committee will deliberate privately, and the candidate is asked to depart the room for a short period. The decision of a "pass" or "fail"

judgment will be made. You do not have to have an unanimously positive vote of the Committee to pass, but a majority of members must vote in favor of passing. If one or more members abstain and there is a tie, the decision would then have to go to the Graduate School for consultation.

You are then asked to return to the room and the committee delivers their decision. If you pass, the Committee may request changes to the film and/or written thesis to be made prior to submission. Traditionally, only the Chair needs to verify that the changes have been carried out before the film and thesis are submitted to the SFP and Graduate School.

## **Other forms and paperwork**

### **Application to Graduate**

Early in the final SPRING semester of your thesis year, within the first three weeks, you need to initiate your **Application to Graduate**.

#### **Steps:**

- You must contact your thesis Committee Chair to confirm the Application to Graduate.
- The Chair must then set up a meeting with you to go over your Degree Works/ curriculum review.
- If there are any missing documents or errors with your paperwork (i.e., Program of Study, Graduate Committee Request, Not Enough Credits, etc.), those must be corrected before proceeding.
- If there are no error warnings, then the Chair must make a note in Degree Works specifying you are ready to graduate. This will open the portal to the document below:
- In [MyInfo](#) under the Student Services section select [Apply to Graduate](#) and fill out the form. This form is due early in the semester in which you intend to graduate (usually, the third week or so), please check the Graduate School's [Dates and Deadlines page](#) for the most current schedule.



The form should be signed by the appropriate faculty members and then submitted by you to the Graduate School.

## Paperwork for Defense

Immediately following the successful completion of the defense, Committee members will complete the *Report on Comprehensive Exam/Thesis Defense, Master's and Doctoral* form for the Graduate School. This is for faculty completion only. The Program Coordinator, Colette Campbell, initiates the form and forwards to the Chair of your committee

You will fill out and initiate the *SFP Film/Video/Digital File Submission* form, which can be found here on the [SNHF website](#). TRT= total running time of the film. This DocuSign only needs to be signed by the Committee Chair.

Please check the [Forms link](#) on the Graduate School's website for the most up-to-date submission information. All digital DocuSign forms will be submitted to Colette Campbell, SFP Program Coordinator and then submitted to the Graduate School.

## Film submissions

You will submit your thesis film as an **H.264 compressed mp4 with a WebVTT encoded in UTF-8 format subtitle file.**

Your thesis paper, and a paragraph description of the film are submitted directly to the Graduate School's Submission Portal immediately after a successful defense. In the event the final film submitted to the Graduate School is more than 5 GB, please contact the submission advisor at [gradformatting@montana.edu](mailto:gradformatting@montana.edu).

H.264 compressed mp4 file, a high-resolution Apple ProRes QuickTime uncompressed file, the thesis paper, the SFP Film/Video/ Digital File Submission form, and the paragraph description of the film must be submitted to the SNHF Graduate Student Assistant (GSA) for archiving

in the SFP database and the Electronic Thesis Film Database (ETFD), accessible through the MFA website. Captions are not required for these submissions. It is your responsibility to submit the final film to the Graduate School.

During the global pandemic, the Graduate School changed or suspended the rules relating to defenses; we do NOT anticipate this happening again, but if it does, the procedures for the defense will be determined by both your Committee Chair and the SNHF Program Director with approval of the Graduate School. Make sure to read all messages from the Graduate School and the Provost to keep updated on defense developments and rule changes.

## **Summer work and faculty**

MFA defenses do not occur during the summer months.

Note that most faculty are "off contract" during the summer months and are typically involved in their own production and research work, often away from campus. As a rule, we do not do defenses in the summer. No exceptions.

## **MFA Archiving and Web Access Policy**

The official MFA site includes a searchable database of the SNHF thesis films that permits on-line access to the productions. This database mirrors the written thesis accessibility involving all graduate degree-granting departments on campus, available through the Graduate School. Please visit [MSU Library SNHF Archive](#) to see the electronic versions of the written theses.

The SFP and MSU may need or desire to make the thesis films accessible in whole or in part; You may indicate if you grant this permission in the Submission Portal during your final thesis submission and the SFP Film/Video/Digital File Submission form submitted to the Program Coordinator after a successful defense. The default action will be to make the thesis film accessible through the site.

If you do not wish to make the film immediately available through the site, you must request the one-year delay exception in the Submission Portal. If the delay is granted by the Committee, a one-year delay will go into effect before the film is available on the MFA website. The SNHF Thesis Film Database may be accessed at the link provided above.

## **Registration and General Policies**

### **Registering for Course in the MFA Program**

This is a graduate lock-step curriculum so all courses in the SNHF curriculum are taken in order from the time you enter the program. The Science and Natural History Filmmaking courses are restricted entry, meaning that students must have special permission to take these courses. Therefore, the SFP/SNHF Program Coordinator registers you in all courses each semester. An e-mail is sent out to all MFA students each semester with a registration notification.

You must inform the Program Coordinator, Colette Campbell, if you intend to take an internship, or independent study, or a course outside the SNHF curriculum.

### **These are your responsibilities:**

Confirm your student account is free from any holds.

MyInfo > Student Services > Student Records > View Holds

Inform the Program Coordinator, Colette Campbell, of your coming semester's courses by the deadlines provided [here](#).

Check your MyInfo account regularly each semester. Verify that you are registered for the correct courses.

### **Confirming your bill confirms your attendance with MSU.**

This must be done by every student at the beginning of every semester. The Registrar will automatically drop you from classes any semester you fail to confirm your bill/attendance.

MyInfo > Student Services > Student Records > Electronic Billing and Payment > Select the Term > Confirm Bill

## **Schedule of Classes**

The Schedule of Classes can be found MyInfo > Schedule of Classes - find CRN (Course Registration Number) here.

## **Important Registration Concerns & Considerations**

Here are some additional items that may apply to your situation:

International Students need to be registered for nine credits each semester (excluding your final thesis semester).

Graduate Teaching Assistants and those receiving other Financial Aid must be registered for at least six credits each semester.

-- Students living in On-Campus Housing must be registered for at least seven credits each semester.

-- To be automatically covered by MSU's Health Insurance, you must be registered for a minimum of seven credits each semester.

-- All courses you register for must be at the 500 level or above.

Please review [MSU's Graduate Policies](#) or talk with the Division of Graduate Education for further information. Not all policies are listed here.

## **Absences and Incompletes**

**Absences:** Each instructor has her/his own guidelines regarding absences from class and you should consult the syllabus for a course to determine what that policy is.

The program does not allow students to exceed the normal number of absences allowed by the instructor under any circumstances.

The first year depends upon your ability to attend classes. If you feel you have an opportunity that you cannot resist, or other conflicts that prohibit you from attending class as required, please withdraw from the course. In a lock-step curriculum, withdrawing from one course means withdrawing from the program.

## **Incompletes**

An instructor may give a grade of "I" (Incomplete) when students have been unable to complete their academic obligations because of circumstances beyond their control. To receive an incomplete, you will have to petition the course instructor and submit the appropriate forms to the Registrar.

The Incomplete form requires two important pieces of information: what must be done to complete the requirements for the course and by what date this work must be completed. This information should be shared between the instructor and the student. Your instructor may require that you finish the work on a specific date or may give you until the end of the following semester.

Please note the following very carefully: All responsibility falls upon you to complete the coursework and to complete it on time. An Incomplete will automatically turn into an "F" on the expiration date. Once you have been given an "F" that grade then becomes a permanent part of your academic record.

Do not expect to be reminded by the instructor, the department, or the university that you have an incomplete or that your deadline for completion is approaching.

Extensions for Incompletes are given only in exceptional circumstances. All work is expected to be completed within the time allotted on the original incomplete form. The maximum amount of time anyone can have to complete an incomplete is one full semester. Forms for dropping, withdrawing, or requesting an incomplete can be found here: [Registrar Office Forms](#)

## **SFP Graduate Teaching Assistant Procedures and Protocols**

The following procedures and protocols must be observed by all graduate teaching assistants in the School of Film and Photography (SFP). A graduate teaching assistantship (GTA) is a paid position and each GTA is an employee of Montana State University (MSU). As with all other MSU employees GTA's have attendance and performance requirements that must be fulfilled. Failure to do so can result in a reduction of the stipend and/or fee waiver or, in the worst cases, dismissal.

By signing your GTA contract and initialing this list of procedures and protocols, you agree to observe these requirements:

- Each GTA must work a total of 19 hours per week.
- Each GTA must remain an SFP graduate student in good standing, which, at minimum means maintaining a B average and making steady progress towards the MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking degree.
- Each GTA must register for at least six credits to be eligible for this position.
- Tuition will be waived for up to 12 credits for each semester taught.
- Before the start of each semester of a GTA appointment, the GTA must meet with the instructor or instructors with whom the GTA will be working. The GTA must ensure the meeting takes place and should take the initiative to contact the instructor(s). This may be reaching out by email, stopping by their office, and doing so until contact has been made!
- There are no unexcused absences for GTAs. If a GTA will miss a class for any reason, including illness or a death in the family, the GTA must make every effort to inform the instructor(s) as far ahead

of the date of the absence as possible and see if a replacement will be required.

- If the GTA knows that an absence is likely to occur during the upcoming semester (for example, to attend a festival or to work on a second-year or thesis film), the GTA must inform the instructor(s) at least one week before the semester begins.
- GTAs must make every effort in finding a replacement for their position during an absence. If no other GTA is available, the instructor(s) and the SNHF Program Director must be advised immediately so other arrangements may be made.
- GTAs may miss no more than one week of class during a semester for festival or academic commitments. The instructor(s) must be informed as far ahead of the absence dates as possible and may ask you to find a replacement.
- Any absence of more than one week must be approved in writing (e-mails are acceptable) before the dates of the absence take place. Please follow this protocol even in cases of illness or a death in the family: any absence of more than a week.
- Failure to observe the above procedures and protocols may be grounds for reduced pay or dismissal in accordance with university regulations and procedures.
- Email the MFA Program Director ([cindys@montana.edu](mailto:cindys@montana.edu)) about any prolonged absence as soon as practical, so that accommodation can be made in these emergency situations. Please note that documentation (a doctor's note) for medical excuses is not required. MSU University Health Partners - as part of their commitment to maintain patient confidentiality, to encourage more appropriate use of healthcare resources, and to support meaningful dialogue between instructors and students - does not provide such documentation.

## **Student Code of Conduct**

This policy is part of the instructional design of this program and is intended to create and sustain a dialogue concerning the professional, artistic, and personal standards of conduct in our community.

Everyone who moves through this program is expected to adhere to this professional standard.

I will treat everyone in this program with respect. At all times my behavior will reflect this respect for others both in their presence and outside their presence. This is to develop trust, which is the core of all meaningful relationships.

I understand that without trust, all progress and all work in this program will eventually fail.

I will speak and conduct myself in a way that always demonstrates respect for others.

I understand it is disrespectful and unethical to speak of others' talent, abilities, actions, or reputation outside their presence, and to complain about, demean, or degrade others in any way is inappropriate and unethical, and I will not tolerate it.

I pledge to speak directly [one-on-one and privately] to anyone who I perceive has wronged me or with whom I have a "conflict" and I promise not to speak about them to others outside of their presence.

I will actively engage in the workshop milieu of this program. I understand this is an atmosphere that encourages critique, which is defined as a healthy, supportive, and constructive dialogue with each other about our work.

I will do everything in my means to distinguish for myself and for others the vast difference between professional critique and personal criticism.

I will not get defensive or take personally critical input from others about my work, especially when it is offered in the spirit of professional



critique.

I will only grow if I have the integrity to be honest with others and with myself.

I understand this code of conduct is intended to help me hone the critical analysis skills necessary to achieve at the highest tier.

I also understand that this policy is meant to assist me in developing the integrity and honesty required to effectively critique the work of others, let alone be honest about my own work with myself.

I pledge to treat everyone with respect.

## **Faculty Contact Information**

Faculty and staff have offices in the VCB (Visual Communications Building) or the Black Box Theater, which is attached to the VCB.

All contact information is found on the SFP website:

<https://sfp.montana.edu/directory/faculty.html>

<https://sfp.montana.edu/directory/staff.html>

More Helpful Weblinks:

<https://sfp.montana.edu/sciencenaturefilm/>

<https://sfp.montana.edu/>

[Bounty of the Bridgers Campus emergency food pantry](#)

[International Student and Scholar Services](#)

[Professional Development: Grad Cat 360](#)

[Graduate School Dates and Deadlines](#)

[Office of the Registrar for students](#)