

PhD in Visual Studies

The PhD program in Visual Studies blends disciplinary training in the history of art, material culture, and media studies with a commitment to public humanities. Graduate training in Visual Studies offers a combination of coursework; outreach, research, and teaching opportunities; and interdisciplinary collaboration with other professional programs, to prepare students for careers in educational institution, cultural organizations, and the broader creative economy.

Degree Requirements

The successful completion of the PhD requires a minimum of 72 hours of coursework. At least 42 of those hours must be completed at the University of Missouri. Students with an MA from another institution can apply up to 30 hours of previous coursework to the PhD program of study, while students with an MA from MU can apply all the hours they accumulated to it.

The 72 hours must include:

- Nine hours of visual studies foundation coursework (ART_VS 9010, ARH_VS 8120, and ART_VS 8010)
- Nine hours of Art History courses distributed across three different chronological or media history areas.
- 27 hours (9 courses) in a major field (defined as a geographical and chronological area of study conforming to contemporary professional practice).
- 15 hours (5 courses) in a minor field (defined as a geographical, chronological, or thematic area of study distinct from the major field that compliments the student's career objectives).

Courses for an interdisciplinary minor will be in addition to these minimums.

The student's program of study is determined in consultation with the Doctoral Program Committee, which consists of at least four people: the student's advisor; two additional scholars from within the School; and an outside committee member. The committee:

1. Accepts any transfer of credit from previous institutions (up to 30 hours)
2. Approves the plan of study
3. Determines the major and minor fields
4. Approves the student's dissertation topic
5. Examines the student's dissertation

Languages

All students are required to demonstrate reading knowledge of at least one foreign language consistent with their program of study, either through an SVS language exam or a grade of B or better in a course approved by the Director of Graduate Studies. Students may be required to demonstrate reading knowledge of more than one foreign language if it is necessary for their dissertation, as determined by the student's doctoral committee.

Comprehensive Exam Process

The comprehensive examination comprises both the major and minor fields. Particular emphases within the major and minor fields are determined by the Doctoral Program Committee. The examination is taken after the plan of study (D-2) and language requirements are

complete, and must be passed at least seven months before the final defense of the dissertation. When students pass their comprehensive exams, they become official candidates for the doctoral degree (ABD) and may register for continuous enrollment.

The purpose of the comprehensive examinations is to demonstrate knowledge and intellectual engagement with the chosen field of study and to lay a broad foundation for future teaching, research, and engagement in the profession. They are retrospective, encouraging the student to integrate their coursework into a coherent narrative, and prospective, inviting the student to assemble different fields of study, theoretical models, and methods of inquiry into a unique vision and approach to visual studies.

Students spend one semester preparing exclusively for the examinations by registering for up to 9 hours of 9080. Since the form and content of the exam are determined by the student's Doctoral Program Committee, students are expected to be in close contact with members throughout the preparation process in order to set goals and determine progress.

Dissertation Requirements

The dissertation is expected to be an original, scholarly contribution to the discipline. The topic must be approved by the advisor and the Doctoral Program Committee. A dissertation proposal should be filed with members of the committee within two months of passing the comprehensive exams. A proposal for a dissertation fellowship will satisfy this requirement.

Individual chapters are generally submitted to the advisor as they are written. Other members of the Doctoral Program Committee may also review them in draft form. A complete, revised draft of the dissertation must be approved by the advisor before the student distributes the final draft to each member of the committee at least one month before the defense.

Students maintain continuous enrollment after passing their comprehensive exams by registering for 9080 or 9090 and by submitting a progress report to their Doctoral Program Committee each term. Dissertation advising is not normally available during the summer unless previous arrangements have been made.

The final examination will be in the form of an oral defense of the dissertation. Any changes recommended by the committee during the defense must be made and approved before the finished thesis can be submitted to the Graduate School. Students are responsible for ensuring they meet the deadlines and guidelines established by the Graduate School for dissertation submission and graduation.

Funding

Incoming students are considered for funding when they apply to the program. Returning students submit applications for continued funding in the spring semester.

Admissions

Admission to the PhD program in the School of Visual Studies is granted yearly to a small number of candidates who hold a recognized MA degree in art history, media studies, or a related field in the humanities and social sciences. Applicants are required to meet two sets of minimum qualifications for admission: the requirements of the PhD in Visual Studies (<https://gradschool.missouri.edu/degreecategory/visual-studies/>) and the minimum requirements of the graduate faculty, enforced by the Graduate School (<https://gradschool.missouri.edu/admissions/>)

eligibility-process/). Before official admission to the University of Missouri, application materials will be reviewed by both the Graduate School and the degree program to which the applicant has applied.

Students completing an MA degree in Visual Studies in the School of Visual Studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia who want to continue for the Ph.D. must be accepted for advising by a faculty member who is a member of the doctoral faculty. Such students should submit a statement of purpose and a current CV to the department by the application deadline. After they are accepted for advising, they need to submit a "Change of Program, Degree, Emphasis or Advisor Form" to the Graduate School.

Required Application Materials

All application materials must be submitted directly to the Graduate School through its online application system. Applications will not be considered complete until we receive the following:

- Three letters of recommendation concerning the applicant's academic qualifications to undertake graduate work
- Official transcript from all colleges or universities attended.
- CV
- Statement of purpose: A substantial personal statement (or intellectual biography) addresses an applicant's academic interests, including specific papers and projects they have worked on, as well as what they hope to accomplish as a graduate student. It explains, too, why the applicant wishes to pursue a graduate degree in History, Theory, and Criticism in the School of Visual Studies.
- Writing Sample: One 15 to 20-page scholarly paper that demonstrates the applicant's scholarship and writing.

GRE scores are not required for admission to the PhD program, but are necessary for consideration for some internal SVS fellowships.

Contact Information

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More Information

Further guidelines are included in the school's graduate programs website.