

Master of Fine Arts in Design

The Rutgers MFA in Design combines critical inquiry with creative output. This two-year, full-time program focuses on the innovative use of technology and interdisciplinary research in the creation of publications, experiences, exhibitions, information and interfaces — preparing designers for a contemporary design studio practice that contributes to the future of arts, science, humanities and culture.

The Rutgers MFA in Design values experimentation and criticality. Studio work is paired with the study of historical, theoretical, and cultural contexts. Rutgers University provides opportunities for collaboration with experts in a wide range of fields. The program emphasizes research-driven work, empowering designers to identify, question, and synthesize quantitative and qualitative data and material from primary sources, to underpin their creative projects. Design becomes a tool for inquiry and investigation as well as communication and expression.

This program is ideal for active visual designers and other makers who seek to deepen their skills, in order to initiate their own projects and contribute to and lead collaborative project teams. Graduates will find career opportunities in various creative, technological, media, and educational fields, in a wide range of roles such as information designer, interface designer, design researcher, graphic and/or digital producer, coordinator of digital laboratories, coordinator of collaborative design projects and more.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through seminars, studio courses and independent work, MFA Design graduate students develop skills and experience to:

- Identify meaningful and appropriate subjects for design investigation
- Collaborate with research partners on complex projects that address cross-disciplinary concerns
- Visualize, design, prototype, and produce ambitious, innovative projects
- Situate their work within current scientific, social, and political contexts

CURRICULUM

Each semester, the Design Studio course is the program's core, providing the support

and environment needed to develop work driven by the student's interests. Additional required courses cover production methods, publication, and display of the student's thesis work.

Research Methods, based in epistemology, introduces useful methods for design practice, such as qualitative and quantitative research, ethnography, cultural diversity, scientific reasoning, and techno-cultural criticism. Students engage with a wide range of hands-on practices such as visualization, digital humanities, crowdsourcing, field studies, interviews, physical sensing, polls, cartography and mapping.

Production is a survey of contemporary high-end visualization and image-production techniques. Students visit real-world facilities as well as create their own projects, gaining experience with various techniques and the ability to analyze and choose among them in design practice.

Design Seminars cover design history and theory and perspectives on the wide range of contemporary design practices.

In the first year, each student may choose two university elective courses outside of Art & Design. Electives enable designers to engage more deeply with potential topics in the sciences, social sciences and humanities, which will serve as springboards for their creative work.

In the second year, design courses address the development, production, display, and publication of the student's thesis work. Each MFA in Design student participates in a group exhibition of their thesis work, in the Mason Gross Galleries.

Courses Offered

Research Methods in Design

Design Studios I, II, III, IV

Design Seminars I, II, III

Production

Publication and Display

Thesis I, II

Special Topics

=====

SEMESTER 1 OF 4

Research Methods

08:208:516

Credits: 4

Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Design Studio 1

08:208:517

Credits: 4

Contact Hours Per Week: 4.5

Design Seminar 1: Theory

08:208:518

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Elective

Credits: 3

=====

SEMESTER 2 OF 4

Special Web Projects

08:208:532

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Design Studio 2

08:208:533

Credits: 4

Contact Hours Per Week: 4.5

Design Seminar 2: Contemporary Practice

08:208:534

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Elective

Credits: 3

=====

SEMESTER 3 OF 4

Thesis 1

08:208:616

Credits: 4

Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Design Studio 3

08:208:617

Credits: 4

Contact Hours Per Week: 4.5

Publication and Display

08:208:619

Credits: 4

Contact Hours Per Week: 3

=====

SEMESTER 4 OF 4

Thesis 2

08:208:632

Credits: 4

Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Design Studio 4

08:208:633

Credits: 6

Contact Hours Per Week: 3

SEMESTER 1 OF 4

Research Methods: Epistemological Inquiry for Design Practice

08:208:516

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Introduces various research methods for informing and stimulating the design process. Case studies cover qualitative and quantitative methods, ethnography, cultural diversity, scientific reasoning, and techno-cultural criticism. Familiarizes students with a wide range of hands-on practices such as visualization, digital humanities, crowdsourcing, field studies, interviews, physical sensing, polls, cartography and mapping. Readings and references will shed light on major debates in epistemology, including those over the structure of knowledge, genealogy, classification, and meta-epistemological issues in the age of digital communication.

Design Studio 1: Initiation

08:208:517

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 4.5

Each semester, MFA Design students take a different Studio, the primary locus for developing visual work. Design Studio 1 launches the process of engaging the tools, methods and materials of research-driven design to create self-initiated work. This course guides the student through a sequence of sketch problems followed by a student-initiated project. Examination of working models and methods and hands-on experimentation situate students for a contemporary studio practice as a designer.

Design Seminar 1: Theory

08:208:518

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Design Seminar 1 is a topics-driven seminar focused on critical issues in design theory. For students working in all media, this course includes readings, case studies, and screenings. Departing from basic semiotic studies, this seminar examines a series of design discourses that are the direct outgrowth of related social, economic and technological histories. Students develop writing skills in the seminar courses, in preparation for their thesis writing.

Elective

Credits: 3

SEMESTER 2 OF 4

Special Web Projects

08:208:532

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Through readings, field trips, and individual tutorials, this class introduces an expansive view of publishing online for artists interested in making work for, of, and about the internet. In addition to a deep dive into browser-based work, this course will emphasize how physicality is an innate part of web publishing and production.

Design Studio 2: Visualization

08:208:533

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 4.5

In this second course in the Studio sequence, students make work that explores visualization, through supplied prompts spanning media that operate on different scales: web browser, architectural space and print. Students are responsible for making a research connection within Rutgers University to support their own semester-long research-driven design project.

Design Seminar 2: Contemporary Practice

08:208:534

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Proposes a range of models for contemporary design practice. Contemporary designers present their practices and how they see the future design. Talks and readings will address the pragmatics of design, the role of the designer as a social agent, and design and politics. Helps students understand the challenges that designers are engaging with and situate their own research. Class discussion is a major element of the seminar. Over the course of the semester students will develop a critical design language through these discussions and through writing enabling them to analyze the field more productively.

Elective

Credits: 3

SEMESTER 3 OF 4

Thesis 1

08:208:616

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Thesis 1 is a methodical analysis of a series of research questions by each individual student, based in the domains of art, design or technology. It requires identification of a realm, researching its history and precedents, explaining the significance and potentials in social or scientific contexts. This class is the environment that establishes the process and method for proposing solutions, creating prototypes, and offering a conclusion through production of a series of works.

Design Studio 3: Collaboration

08:208:617

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 4.5

This studio course guides students in undertaking a self-initiated research-driven design project in collaboration with another academic department or unit at Rutgers University or in the wider community. Students will explore and apply various visual communication techniques to realize their collaborative projects. Alongside their peers, they will compare the impact of their work in different fields of knowledge.

Publication and Display

08:208:619

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 3

This is a studio class on display and publication strategies. Using their own projects from the first MFA year, students formulate varied ways in which their design ideas and artifacts can be presented in a public setting. The course focuses on the modalities of display in online and print media as well as installation in public or gallery/museum spaces.

SEMESTER 4 OF 4

Thesis 2

08:208:632

Credits: 4 Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Thesis 2 is the class in which students reflect on, frame critically and write about their work, further hone their individual design approach. This course supports the development of the Thesis work exhibition, for panel presentation and for continuing the work beyond graduation. The finished Thesis Project goes public, evidencing originality, experimentation, critical and independent thinking, effective display and thorough documentation.

Design Studio 4

08:208:633

Credits: 6 Contact Hours Per Week: 3

Design Studio 4 provides a studio environment and production guidance for students to develop, actualize and complete the individual Thesis Project, a large-scale research-driven work emerging from collaboration with another academic unit at Rutgers University or larger Rutgers community. This course challenges and develops the student's advanced design studio skills. The work completed in Design Studio 4 shapes the Thesis Project, which is displayed in the Mason Gross Annual Design Exhibition and presented to a Design Panel with guest critics.