

# MFA in Design Studies Program Handbook 2015 - 2016

MFA in Design Studies  
Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar  
P.O. Box 8095  
Doha, Qatar



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For MFA program use only

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## Academic Calendar | 2015 - 2016

### Fall 2015

<b>July</b>	19-21	Eid al Fitr – offices closed
<b>August</b>	11-13	New faculty orientation & immigration processing
	16	Opening faculty and staff meeting
	17-20	New student orientation & registration
	23	Fall Classes Begin
	23-27	Add/drop and late registration
<b>September</b>	20-24	Eid Al Adha – no classes held
	22-24	Eid Al Adha – offices closed
	27	Last day for undergraduate grades of incomplete to be converted from spring semester or summer sessions
<b>October</b>	22	Mid-semester grades due
	25-29	Spring semester advising
	29	Last day to withdraw from a course with a mark of “W”
<b>November</b>	2	Spring semester advance registration begins
<b>December</b>	3	Last Day of Classes
	6-10	Final examinations
	20	Recognizing National Day – offices closed
	xx	Final grades due - TBC
	21-Jan. 2	Semester break – offices closed

### Spring 2016

<b>January</b>	3	Offices re-open
	5 (Tues.)	Spring classes begin
	5-11	Add/drop and late registration
<b>February</b>	9	Sports Day – no classes / offices closed
	11	Last day for undergraduate grades of incomplete to be converted from spring semester or summer sessions
	28-3 Mar.	Spring break
<b>March</b>	17	Mid-semester grades due
	24	Last day to withdraw from a course with a mark of “W”
	20-14	Summer and fall semester advising
	28	Summer semester advance registration begins
<b>April</b>	4	Fall semester advance registration begins
	19	Last day of classes
	24-28	Final examinations for spring semester
<b>May</b>	1	Final grades due
	2	Commencement
	3	Education City convocation

### Summer 2016

May 15-June 2	Three-week session one
June 5-June 23	Three-week session two
May 15-June 16	Five-week session
May 15	Last day to add/drop for summer
June xx	Grades due for summer - TBC

## Graduate programs - Bulletin

In-depth descriptions of all graduate programs at VCU are provided in the individual school and program sections of this bulletin. The Graduate School Website ([www.graduate.vcu.edu](http://www.graduate.vcu.edu)) provides links and contact information for all graduate programs offered at VCU. The Web site also provides updates that occur throughout the academic year, as well as the Application to Graduate Study and complete instructions for applying to all graduate programs.

Refer to the Program Search feature of this Website for a complete listing of all graduate programs, as well as application deadline dates, and special admission requirements and contact information. Applicants are encouraged to contact the school/department sponsoring the intended program of study at the telephone numbers and/or e-mail addresses provided. Other important contact information is provided on the Graduate School (<http://www.vcu.edu/graduate>) Website as well.

General academic regulations for all graduate students – VCU Graduate Bulletin (catalog)

The VCU Graduate Bulletin (catalog) website documents the official admission and academic rules and regulations that govern graduate education for all graduate programs at the university. These policies are established by the graduate faculty of the university through their elected representatives to the University Graduate Council.

It is the responsibility of all graduate students, both on- and off-campus, to be familiar with the Graduate Bulletin (catalog) as well as the academic regulations in individual school and department publications and on program websites; however, in all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University Graduate Council, as published on this Graduate Bulletin website and on the Graduate School website, take precedent over individual program policies and guidelines.

The archived (<http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/archives.aspx>) copies of current and past bulletins (catalogs) reflect all policies and procedures in effect at the beginning of the stated academic year. The online Bulletin is updated regularly to reflect changes that occur throughout the academic year.

Students who maintain continuous enrollment are subject to the curricular requirements of the Graduate Bulletin (catalog) in effect at the time of admission, and to subsequent policy changes approved by the University Graduate Council for immediate implementation.

Students who do not maintain continuous enrollment must reapply for admission and will be subject to the requirements of the Graduate Bulletin (catalog) in effect at the time of readmission, and to subsequent policy changes approved by the University Graduate Council for immediate implementation. (See policy on Exceptions. <http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/graduate/?uid=10045&&iid=30070>)

Graduate students should contact the Graduate School at any time regarding questions relating to graduate study at VCU.

*Revised 4/8/2014 by University Graduate Council  
(text from Graduate and Professional Bulletins 2014-15)*

## MFA in Design Studies

### Program Overview

The MFA in Design Studies defines and inhabits an area between design disciplines. The purpose of our program is to produce designers who are experts at negotiating and utilizing elements of many different fields to construct new tailored experiences.

Tomorrow's designers must be able to understand their audiences, collaborators and patrons in original and authentic ways. Global cultures already experience design in a singular fashion. Our practices combine graphics, interaction, engineering, systems, architecture, fashion and product design into a merged experience. Designers who are able to work outside their individual discipline will be at an advantage. The designers of the future will need to navigate between forms of practice, combining elements and skills to create new products, visuals, environments and interactions.

We are looking for creative, motivated, hardworking, self-directed individuals, willing to engage with challenging topics. The program sets high demands on its students, requiring them to familiarize and grasp the myriad of variables involved in meaningful design, while simultaneously having the discipline and rigor to formulate their own assessment of what being a designer - in all its guises - entails today. Our students should be able to question; be open to explore and experiment; stay true to ethical foundations; lead and be bold, while being open and flexible to adjust to shifting paradigms. We strive to expose them to a variety of tools, materials and methods, while providing the theoretical background and research methodologies that will allow each student to develop their own unique ideas.

The MFA in Design Studies celebrates the amorphous notion of what we call 'Empirical Vagueness', a term that encapsulates the simultaneously analytical, yet intuitive, fashion in which a design endeavor is developed. Our students, alumni and faculty all play a role in exploring and fostering this as an essential, if inherently open ended, calling.

### Curriculum Goals

**The Design Studies Track in the MFA in Design degree program is designed to:**

- Develop creative leaders with the skills and knowledge needed to achieve success as design professionals and practitioners, entrepreneurs and researchers.
- Develop leaders able to creatively engage with the broad design community to bring added value to the regional economy, society and culture.
- Develop graduates with high levels of creativity, literacy and knowledge across the design disciplines.
- Provide a program that integrates practice and theory to ensure the highest level of critical knowledge on the part of the participants.
- Provide increased focus and visibility for individual and collaborative research activity that has an applied focus.
- Develop graduates with skills and knowledge to make meaningful contributions to pedagogy and teaching in the design disciplines.
- Provide a program with a studio component that enables the student to produce a final project of high professional quality.
- Provide opportunities that encourage students to engage and present their work in connection with the professional world.
- Develop graduates that are able to apply sustainability principles to all aspects of their work.

**The program will focus on the following learning outcomes for graduate students:**

- Students will increase their capabilities in a chosen discipline and be able to collaborate across disciplines.
- Students will adapt to new opportunities and be ready to deal with new and currently unforeseen forms of design practice as well as respond to changes in direction within the discipline.
- Students will explore and integrate ideas from cultural movements, cultural policies, cultural theories and the dynamics of cultural change.
- Students will be able to use the technologies related to their respective fields and be able to innovate in their application to practical projects and outcomes.
- Student will manage their own careers and rely on their own entrepreneurial skills.

# MFA Curriculum Map

Program courses	Required or Elective	Outcomes				
		A	B	C	D	E
DESI 510 Material and Methods	R	2A	2	2	3A	2A
DESI 511 Studio in Digital Design and Fabrication Technology	R	2	2A	2	1A	2
DESI 512 Studio in Visual Communication	R	2A	2A	2	2A	2
DESI 520 Design Research Methodologies	R	2A	1	2	2A	2
DESI 601 Design Culture: Interdisciplinary Design Seminar	R	2A	2	3A	0	0
DESI 605 Design Strategies and Ethics for Business	R	2A	2	2A	2	3A
DESI 611 Design Studio: 1	R	2	2	2	1	3A
DESI 612 Design Studio: 2	R	2	3	3	2	3A
DESI 613 Design Studio: 3	R	2	3	3	2	3A
DESI 620 Thesis Formulation: Design Research Studio	R	2A	2A	2A	2	2
DESI 621 Leadership and Entrepreneurship	R	2A	2	0	2	2A
DESI 630 Teaching Practicum	E	2	2	2	0	0
DESI 631 Design Internship	E	2	2	2	0	3
DESI 690 Thesis Design Studio	R	3A	2	2A	2	3A

## Learning Outcome A

Students will demonstrate the ability to effectively communicate in speech and writing about their research and studio activities.

## Learning Outcome B

Students will demonstrate the ability to practice lifelong learning by dealing with new forms of design practice and other changes in the discipline.

## Learning Outcome C

Students will demonstrate the ability to integrate ideas from historical, social, and cultural movements; from policies and theories; and from the dynamics of historical, social, and cultural change.

## Learning Outcome D

Students will demonstrate the ability to apply appropriate technologies to projects in their field.

## Learning Outcome E

Students will demonstrate the ability to synthesize knowledge from different disciplines to solve design problems.

**A - Data to assess student learning are collected.**

**0 - Does not teach this outcome.**

**1 - Introduces students to this outcome.**

**2 - Give students opportunities to practice this outcome.**

**3 - Provides students opportunities to demonstrate mastery of this outcomes.**

**E - Counts toward the degree but is an elective.**

**R - Required.**

## Program Plan – Design Studies Track

### Probationary course work

Probationary course work may be required prior to gaining full admission to the program. The amount and type of undergraduate course work will be determined at the time of application, and no graduate credit will be awarded for this probationary course work. The decision to grant full admission will be based upon successful completion of the required course work.

Typical program pattern	credit
<b>First semester</b>	
DESI 511 Studio in Digital Design and Fabrication Technology	3
DESI 520 Design Research Methodologies	3
DESI 601 Interdisciplinary Design Seminar	3
DESI 611 Design Studio One	6
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<b>Second semester</b>	
DESI 510 Materials and Methods Studio	3
DESI 512 Studio in Visual Communications	3
DESI 612 Design Studio Two	6
Approved studio elective*	3
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<b>Third semester</b>	
DESI 605 Design Strategies and Ethics for Business	3
DESI 613 Design Studio Three	6
DESI 620 Design Thesis Research and Formulation	3
Approved studio elective*	3
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<b>Fourth semester</b>	
DESI 621 Design Research Studio: Leadership and Entrepreneurship	3
DESI 630 Teaching Practicum in Design or	
DESI 631 Design Internship	3
DESI 690 Thesis Studio	9
Total credits	60
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\* The 6 credits of approved electives can be selected from a variety of 500- to 600-level courses offered at VCUQatar, VCU in Richmond, another Education City university or another internationally accredited university anywhere in the world.



## MFA in Design Studies Course Description:

### **DESI 510 Materials and Methods Studio**

Semester course; 6 studio hours. 3 credits.

Prerequisite: permission of program director.

Studio course that develops skills in the use of materials, methods and technologies relevant to a broad range of activities pertaining to design.

### **DESI 511 Studio in Digital Design and Fabrication Technology**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits.

Prerequisite: permission of program director.

A studio-based examination of design research methods with emphasis placed on new technology of three-dimensional digital design and fabrication. The studio will utilize recently installed and existing facilities, faculty and resources at Digital Fabrication Lab at VCUQatar.

### **DESI 512 Studio in Visual Communications**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits.

Prerequisite: permission of program director.

A studio-based examination of design research methods with emphasis placed on time-based media production. The course is designed to provide a lab/studio opportunity for students to develop media skills while focusing on individual production, collaborative projects and critical discussion. The studio will utilize recently installed and existing facilities, faculty, and resources at Media Lab at VCUQatar.

### **DESI 520 Design Research Methodologies**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits.

Prerequisite: permission of program director.

A studio-based examination of design research methods with emphasis placed on linking knowledge, comprehension and application of historic and emerging methods of experimentation to generative and iterative studies.

### **DESI 601 Interdisciplinary Design Seminar**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits.

A seminar to examine the theories and practices related to the contemporary designer's role in the technological, psychological, cultural and aesthetic environment. The seminar will include exploration of historical and contemporary art, architecture, communications, cultural theory and design criticism. The course involves intensive professional debate of various aspects of interdisciplinary design practice, ongoing group discussion, and exercises in critical writing. Professionals at the university and outside of the university will be invited for participation.

### **DESI 605 Design Strategies and Ethics for Business**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits.

An investigation of precedents and potentials for application of design methods and processes to the development of business strategies and ethics.

### **DESI 611 Design Studio One**

Semester course; 12 studio hours. 6 credits.

A topical studio focusing on research, experimentation and problem-solving methods from a cross section of design disciplines.

### **DESI 612 Design Studio Two**

Semester course; 12 studio hours. 6 credits. Studio course focusing on interdisciplinary, team-based approaches to identifying and solving advanced design problems.

### **DESI 613 Design Studio Three**

Semester course; 12 studio hours. 6 credits.

Prerequisites: successful completion of 30 credits of graduate study and permission of the program director.

Studio course focusing on experimentation, analysis and development of creative projects that directly contribute to a design brief to be used as a basis for the final thesis.

### **DESI 620 Design Thesis Research and Formulation**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits.

Prerequisites: successful completion of 30 credit hours of graduate study and permission of the program director.

Students examine applied research methods with emphasis placed on comprehension and analysis of case studies and then apply design research methods to test original proposals in a studio environment.

Through development of design processes, students define an individual or team project of complex scope and intensity.

**DESI 621 Design Research Studio: Leadership and Entrepreneurship**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 3 credits.

Prerequisites: successful completion of 30 credit hours of graduate study and permission of the program director.

Students evaluate emerging leadership methodologies by applying lessons from case studies and emerging fields of knowledge. Course provides collaborative and presentation opportunities.

**DESI 630 Teaching Practicum in Design**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 practicum hours. 3 credits.

Prerequisite: completion of 18 credit hours of graduate study.

Exploration of philosophical, informational and technical aspects of design education. Observation, instruction and practice in teaching. Topics include effective teaching strategies, curriculum development, learning styles and evaluation techniques. Graded as P/F.

**DESI 631 Design Internship**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 3 credits.

Prerequisites: successful completion of 30 credit hours of graduate study and permission of the program director.

Provides supervised practical work experience that is coordinated with professional designers under the guidance of the design faculty. Internship placement is based upon research interest. Graded as P/F.

**DESI 690 Thesis Studio**

Semester course; variable hours (2 studio hours per credit; 1 seminar hour per 3 credits). 1, 3, 6 or 9 credits.

Prerequisites: successful completion of 30 credit hours of graduate study and permission of the program director.

This course will support and assist the student in the development and completion of the final thesis project. Executed under the supervision of a graduate adviser and review committee. Graded as S/U/F.

**DESI 692 Interdisciplinary Design Research/Individual Study**

Semester course; 3-9 studio hours. 1-3 credits. May be repeated.

The structuring, research, execution and presentation of an independent project in interdisciplinary design under the guidance of a faculty member.

## Residency

It is preferred that all students accepted into the program be full-time and enroll in 15 credits per semester.

Candidates for all master's degrees in the School of the Arts have six years to complete all degree requirements. The above limitations apply to both full-time and part-time students. A petition for an extension is initiated with the academic or thesis adviser.

### Continuous enrollment – Pre-candidate

Once admitted to a degree program, a graduate student is expected to comply with minimum enrollment of one course per 12-month period from the beginning of his/her program.

### Continuous enrollment – Candidate

A graduate student who has completed course requirements for a degree must register for at least one credit at VCU each fall and spring semester until the degree is awarded. Students must be enrolled during their graduation semesters.

Revised 5/8/2012

University Graduate Council

## Three formal reviews of graduate students in the MFA Design Studies Program

### 1. Candidacy Review

Graduate students are subject to a candidacy review upon completion of 15-30 credits of graduate work. The purpose of the candidacy review is to assess the progress of the graduate student and determine whether the appropriate level of skills and knowledge has been achieved to proceed to the thesis stage.

The graduate student applying for candidacy assembles their work to date. All projects completed by the student should be represented. The faculty will assess the work and vote on the student's admission to candidacy. Assessment of the work will be based upon knowledge, skills, insight, originality, scope, depth, completeness, quality, and organization. The student cannot proceed to the thesis phase without achieving candidacy.

The faculty review will result in one of the following decisions:

- The student meets the program requirements, is recommended for candidacy, and continues in the program.
- The student does not meet program requirements, is recommended for additional study, and has candidacy deferred until the next semester.
- The student does not meet program requirements, is not recommended for candidacy, and does not continue in the program.

### 2. Thesis Review & Proposal

Upon completion of the first year course requirements and admission to candidacy, each student will present an initial proposal for his/her thesis project for faculty review.

The initial proposal should include:

- A description of the area of focus and the design problem
- Ideas about an appropriate research methodology
- A review of the research to date on the problem
- The faculty will review the initial proposal. The initial proposal can be approved, recommended for revision, or rejected. Upon approval of the initial proposal, the student will develop a full proposal under the guidance of the director of the graduate program.
- The thesis project must test an original design question synthesized through the development of a design process, investigative research and an individual project of complex scale and scope.
- It is a requirement that the student exhibit his/her thesis/creative project. The final product must be in a format that can be presented for an extended period without the student present.

### 3. Thesis Defense

The student will meet with the members of his/her committee at an appointed time to defend his/her thesis. The student will present the project then answer any questions put forward by the reviewers. The committee will vote to either pass

the candidate, pass with revisions, or fail the project. Passing the defense is a necessary requirement for the successful completion of the degree.

format:

1. Brief Overview by Thesis Defendant: Candidate summarizes the thesis and its importance
2. Committee Member Question and Answer Period: we each ask thesis-related questions in turn
3. Committee Deliberation Period: Candidate leaves the defense room while we deliberate and vote on the thesis

verdict:

- a. Pass without Revisions
  - b. Pass with Minor Revisions
  - c. Pass with Major Revisions
  - d. Fail
4. Delivery of Verdict: Candidate re-enters the defense room and receives the Committee's verdict on the thesis.

## Phases and Requirements

### First Year, Fall Semester

#### 1. Pre-Thesis preparation

During the first semester of study, the graduate student begins discussion with the MFA Program Director and faculty on possible topics and directions for a thesis. A student may research and explore ideas for independent study or choose an appropriate elective. Students may take graduate elective courses outside of the department as a means of developing interests related to possible thesis topics, and to make contact with potential external advisors.

The Graduate Seminar is another opportunity to explore topics.

### First Year, Spring Semester

#### 2. Candidacy Review Forms

Candidacy Review Forms are due to the MFA Program Director by Week 17 (TBA).

How to begin: Starting the second week of classes this spring, you should begin to identify your topic interests and begin to schedule meetings with department faculty, during their office hours, to discuss your ideas. You are strongly encouraged to research and visually explore topic ideas on your own. "Essentialize" aspects of your topic and integrate these aspects whenever possible in your course work this spring.

Near the end of February, you should be working on a single topic proposal and seek advice from only a few faculty for formulation of your Thesis/Creative Project Topic Proposal and visual presentation.

#### 3. Thesis/Creative Project Topic Proposal

A Thesis/Creative Project proposal is made during the 10th week of the semester. The proposal should reflect research (relevant historical and informational references) as well as visual exploration. The Design Studio II and Workshop may include opportunities to support work related to the project.

##### **3.1 Preliminary Thesis/Creative Project Proposal.**

The preliminary graduate thesis or creative project proposal is submitted two weeks before the student's candidacy review presentation, normally in the second semester of study. Below are questions that should be answered in the preliminary thesis proposal. The student will be required to submit a formal proposal in the fall semester of the final year (See 5.1 Formal Graduate Thesis/Creative Project Proposal Format) after supplemental search and research during the summer after the first year. Students will also conduct a literature search to determine the originality of the proposal. Students are reminded that the thesis must represent an original contribution to the information base of the discipline and not a retrieval exercise. Students must demonstrate the significance of their topic, generate the sub-problems, develop parameters, and determine the methodology. You are encouraged to see the "problem" areas within a topic... by identifying problematic or that which needs to be understood, you get a head start on forming a statement or argument.

The following must be prepared in the form of a written preliminary thesis proposal and distributed to the Graduate Committee two weeks prior to the candidacy review presentation:

- a. Student's name, date, Department.
- b. Planned date of graduation.
- c. Degree sought.
- d. Title of the thesis/creative project.
- e. An abstract with a maximum of 150 words (see examples).

#### Abstract Examples

*Our contemporary digital, fast paced, fast-food, information now culture is running the risk of losing the meanings of individualism, innovation, invention and discovery. In this darkness, a subversion of normative (reality) and an expansion of perception are necessary. My thesis addresses the effects of de-contextualization on the interpreting and learning processes. My framework will be the concept of the electronic (moving) book—hypertext and what I have termed hypertypography— as object and as body of knowledge.*

*The content of this thesis project involved the translation and interpretation of a preexisting literary narrative (in this case George Orwell's 1984) into a multi-media exhibit space. On a personal level the project evolved out of my desire as a visual communicator musician and literary enthusiast to bring the novel into a life-size interactive multimedia format. On a professional level the project served as an experiment to help form an interdisciplinary teaching methodology for use in the design classroom.*

**f. A statement of intent that addresses the objectives and the basis and the directions for the work by answering the following questions:**

**Why is this a worthwhile design problem?**

- for yourself?
- for the field?

**Where do you see this topic proposal leading you after VCU? Describe the current state of the art regarding these problems.**

- give visual examples.
- who is doing what.
- what is wrong.
- what are the opportunities (where can contributions be made).

**Identify your strength and weaknesses regarding the above problems.**

- where do you come from? (such as a technical, philosophic, or cultural point of view).
- what do you need to read, learn?
- what new skills do you need?
- what do you already know?
- what can you already do?

**Who and where are possible resources (people, information, equipment).**

- at VCU?
- beyond VCU?

**What will determine the success of your study?** Note that, at this point, this is only speculation.

- the validity of any statement or argument you make?
- the validity of any solution you create?

**g. A bibliography.**

Preliminary proposals must be made in writing and delivered to the Graduate Committee faculty, participating external critics, and the department chairman by the tenth week (two weeks prior to the visual presentation). The MFA Program Director will send copies you have prepared to the external critic(s). The review will be cancelled if this deadline is missed.

Your written proposal should be reasonable in length. Anything between 1000-2000 words is an appropriate range.

It is recommended that you seek assistance with writing a draft of your proposal from the VCUQ Writing Center <[writingcenter@qatar.vcu.edu](mailto:writingcenter@qatar.vcu.edu)>. They offer appointments. This is not an editing service per se. They would read your work, discuss it, point out problems and instruct you regarding how to correct those problems. They can see students multiple times and frequently the tutors in the center see "regulars" with whom they work throughout the semester. There is currently not a fee for this.

### **3.2 Candidacy Review Presentation.**

Candidacy review is one of three formal reviews of graduate students in the MFA Design Studies Program. Degree-seeking graduate students who have completed at least fifteen but fewer than thirty graduate credits, are required by the School of Graduate Studies to be reviewed for candidacy by the Graduate Committee of the MFA in Design Studies. The purpose of this review is to inform the graduate faculty regarding the knowledge, skills, and insight of the student. While the granting of candidate status is not a guarantee of graduation, it is confirmation from the faculty to the student that his/her current level of performance is a strong indicator for successful completion of degree requirements.

The review consists of a visual presentation and discussion of the written preliminary proposal for thesis/creative project study.

The preliminary proposal should be complete, and should present a focusing of interests toward a manageable research problem. It should reflect research (relevant historical and information references) as well as visual exploration. The objective is to develop an informed perspective on the topic selected enabling the student to define the basis and/or direction of his/her exploration.

As a document which will be weighed by the Graduate Committee for recommendation of a candidate's continuance in the program, it should focus on the student's development as a interdisciplinary designer and researcher; on areas of interest for further study; on the ability to apply critical analysis to their own work and its precedents; on the ability to articulate concepts in verbal as well as visual terms; and on a plan for meeting personal goals.

The visual presentation must articulate the major aspect of your proposal. The audience includes the Graduate Committee, but more importantly it must communicate well to the entire MFA community. Communication must be clear and concise, and generally prepared in a professional manner. The presentation will include up to half an hour for each student to verbally articulate the proposal and discuss any questions regarding a thesis proposal.

Your audience must very clearly understand what your proposed topic area is and that you have a grasp on an issue or the issues involved. This is a interdisciplinary design challenge to clearly and concisely visualize a major aspect of your proposal. The venue of the presentations is expected to be the graduate studio, Room 380. Appropriate alternative venues may be approved by the MFA Program Director.

### **3.3 Critique of the presentations.**

On week 1 (TBA), we will have an open critique of the presentations, involving all of the first year students, the visiting critic(s), graduate faculty, the MFA Program Director as well as any interested faculty. Presentations will include up to half an hour for each student to verbally articulate the proposal and discuss any questions regarding a thesis proposal.

### **3.4 Approval of Thesis/Creative Project proposals.**

After reading the preliminary proposal and viewing the visual presentation, the graduate faculty will independently comment on and ultimately vote on each candidacy. The MFA Program Director will be responsible for informing each candidate of the graduate faculty's review and relaying additional comments regarding the proposal.

**The faculty may reach one of three conclusions:**

1. The student meets departmental requirements for candidacy and is recommended for continuation in the program.
2. The student has not shown sufficient development at this time, but the faculty believes additional study will most likely result in such development. Candidacy status is deferred, and the student will be reviewed again the following semester. Additional provisional coursework may be assigned.
3. The student does not meet departmental requirements for candidacy and is not recommended for continuation in the program. Upon granting candidacy, faculty may also request a revised thesis proposal should the initial proposal require further articulation or development. Confirmation of candidate status will be deferred until all outstanding Incomplete grades are resolved. Students with less than a 3.0 academic average will not be granted candidacy. The student will be informed in writing of the faculty's decision regarding candidacy by the School of the Arts Office of Graduate Studies. Comments will be forwarded by the main thesis advisor or the MFA Program Director.

The main thesis advisor will work with the student to revise the proposal into its final form, due the following semester (see appendix a.1, Formal Graduate Thesis Proposal Format). The final proposal is submitted to the main thesis advisor, Program Director prior to the end of study in the third semester. Following the submission of this proposal, the student will make arrangements for regular meetings with the advisor and will develop a more detailed calendar for the completion of thesis work.

Students are expected to take advantage of the summer months to further their thesis work (e.g. do critical reading, collect information and data) on their own or possibly with more coursework). Students should not expect to be in contact over the summer with 9 month – faculty advisors, however the Graduate Coordinator remains available for the entire year.

### **4. Reading, Data Collection (Summer)**

Students are expected to take advantage of the summer months to further their thesis work (e.g. do critical reading, collect information and data) on their own or possibly with more coursework). Students should not expect to be in contact over the summer with 9 month – faculty advisors, however the MFA Program Director remains available for the entire year.

### **5. Thesis Project Development (Second Year, Fall Semester)**

The Fall semester of the second year is a critical stage for the thesis project development. Students are required to file an abstract, confirm main thesis advisor and commitments from other advisor(s) and a reader to the MFA Program Director before the third week of the semester. The Graduate Committee meets by the fourth week to approve advisors and reader, and make committee assignments if needed.

Most critical reading and research should be done by the mid-semester. However, emphasis of coursework should be on preliminary visual search and development in order to generate insight and original visual samples (versus merely collecting available samples). During this semester second year students are encouraged to work with faculty within DESI 690 Thesis Studio to research for this purpose, especially the main thesis advisor. Note that independent studies should be

arranged at the end of the previous semester if possible. The DESI 620 Design Research and Formulation course may aid to further develop research material. Students are responsible to seek regular consultation with advisors.

### 5.1 Formal Graduate Thesis Project Proposal Format

The formal graduate thesis project proposal is due prior to the end of the fall semester. While the following is a suggested format for proposals, and other alternatives may be more appropriate for the student's study, this format does guarantee that primary issues of concern are covered. Should students have questions regarding the proposal, they should contact the main thesis advisor or another graduate faculty with thesis advising experience. Copies of theses completed by graduate students in This proposal is required.

## VCUQatar

# MFA in Design Studies Thesis Documentation Guidelines

The VCUQatar MFA thesis documentation is one of the two artifacts resulting from the course of a MFA student's thesis research (the other being the thesis exhibition). Because the VCUQatar's MFA program is interdisciplinary, it is difficult to craft a one-size-fits-all outline for format of the thesis documentation. The vagueness of the following outline is intentional to allow the student and his or her thesis committee the flexibility necessary to adequately document the all the various courses of study possible under the department's interdisciplinary framework.

### The Role of the Thesis Committee

The student's thesis committee is the arbiter of the final format of the student's thesis documentation. As long as the concepts in the following outline are included, the student may expand, combine, rename or eliminate the specific sections with the committee's approval. The following outline should be thought of as the standard but with the understanding that alterations may be necessary to accommodate the various courses of research possible in an interdisciplinary program.

### The Visual Nature of the Thesis Documentation

The VCUQatar MFA thesis should be seen as a visual document. As a standard, it should be seen more as a book about the thesis investigation rather than a purely academic account of a study (although the latter would be acceptable if the thesis committee feels it is the best way of documenting the course of study). Images, information graphics, diagrams, process sketches, and other visual representations are expected to be included as part of the documentation. The ratio of images to written text will depend on the nature of each student's thesis – with some topics requiring more visual representation and others requiring more textual explanation. The student will need to work closely with the members of his or her committee to determine the proper balance between visual and textual information.

### Length of Thesis

The length of the thesis documentation will depend on the decisions made by the student and his or her committee. Essentially the document should be long enough to cover all the concepts in the thesis outline below, but the nature of the topic, the use of visual materials, and the format will affect the length of the finished the final document. Although there is no official minimum word count, the MFA faculty believe that it would be extremely difficult to adequately cover the outlined concepts in less than 5,000 words (not counting lists of works cited, acknowledgements, or appendices). The standard length is approximately 10,000 words. The percentages referenced in the outline below are reference standards, but students and their graduate committees may find that they need to be altered to adequately document each specific course of study.

### Textual Format

The format of the thesis documentation text should follow the Chicago Manual of Style 16th edition. Within this format there are two citation systems – either “note-bibliography” (NB) or “author-date”. Although either is acceptable for purposes of the thesis documentation, only one should be used consistently throughout the document. In other words, a mixture of the two systems is not acceptable. Of the two systems, the NB format is preferable due to the flexibility it allows in citing non-standard source material. Either footnotes or endnotes are acceptable when using the NB system. For more information, see the Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition, or visit <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/>

# Thesis Documentation Outlines

## 4. Abstract

- 4.1. This section summarizes the entirety of the thesis research and must be entirely textual. It should not exceed 300 words.

## 5. Table of Contents

- 5.1. This section is a simple outline of all thesis sections and subsections that indicate corresponding page numbers.

## 6. Acknowledgements

- 6.1. This section is an area to acknowledge the people who have helped with the completion of the student's course of research. Assistance or support from foundations or institutions should also be mentioned here.

## 7. Introduction

- 7.1. This section is to introduce the reader to the student's course of research. This section should explain the scope and purpose of the entire thesis project.
- 7.2. The introduction should include the following information. This information can either be included as formal subsections or simply as elements of the section as a whole. Nevertheless, the following information must be represented:
  - 7.2.1. **Problem Statement** – This is a clear explanation of the problem that defines the thesis exploration.
  - 7.2.2. **Justification** – This is the rationale for the study and why the study is important in the field of design and the greater societal or cultural sphere.
  - 7.2.3. **Delimitations** – This is an explanation of the limits of the course of research. Essentially this is an explanation of what the research isn't. For example, if a student's course of research included a survey of opinions regarding a particular design, the delimitations section may indicate that the research is only intended to summarize opinions as they are relevant to the design problem and not intended to add to a generalizable, scientific body of research.
- 7.3. This section should constitute approximately 20 percent of the entire thesis paper.
- 7.4. It should be primarily textual, but may also include images and graphic representations of information.

## 8. Background

- 8.1. This section is to provide the reader with the background information necessary to understand the context of the research problem being investigated in the thesis. Throughout this section, the student should explain what other research has been done that relates to his or her investigation.
- 8.2. The background section should include the following information intergraded into the greater section or set within subsections:
  - 8.2.1. **Historical/theoretical (literature review)** – This section provides context to the thesis problem by outlining relevant historical or theoretical precedents. Essentially, this is the information that contextualizes the problem within the history of design or culture. This section could also cite studies or research that provide evidence contextualizing the research problem. Traditionally, this is a textual analysis, but it could also include images and graphic representations of information.
  - 8.2.2. **Precedents/antecedents** – This section outlines other investigations into the problem or similar problems. Essentially, this section should provide context to the research problem by providing examples and critique of the ways other designers, artists, researchers, etc. have addressed the same or analogous problems. Although this section should include a textual discussion, images and other visual references should also be included.
- 8.3. The background section should include a mix of textual argument and images.
- 8.4. As a whole, the background section should constitute approximately 30 percent of the entire thesis document.

## 9. Investigation

- 9.1. The investigation section is the documentation of exploration throughout the thesis process as well as the presentation of the final outcome.
- 9.2. The structure documentation in the investigation section is largely up to the student, but it should include the following concepts - either set into subsections or incorporated into the larger section:
  - 9.2.1. **Methodology** – This section is an explanation of the student's exploration over the course of researching the thesis. The format is largely up to the student, but the explanation should include visual representations of the experimentation, processes and developments undertaken during the thesis research process.
  - 9.2.2. **Outcome** – This section is a presentation of the final outcome arrived at through the course of the thesis research. Generally, this section should simply present the final product of the thesis research. Comments and criticism as to the effectiveness of the outcome (the contextualized outcome) should be reserved for the following Conclusions section. Like the Methodology section, a significant portion of this section will most likely include visual representations.
- 9.3. The entire Investigation section should constitute approximately 30 percent of the entire thesis document.



## 10. Conclusions

- 10.1. The Conclusions section should be an analysis of how the thesis exploration (outlined in the Investigation section) relates to the contextual information (outlined in the Background section).
- 10.2. The Conclusions section should include the following information either integrated into the discussion or set out in subsections:
  - 10.2.1. Findings – this is a detailed discussion of what was discovered through the course of research. The section should also be a discussion of what was not discovered throughout the research process and why.
  - 10.2.2. Evaluation - this section is a discussion relating what was discovered through the course of research to the historical, theoretical, precedents and/or antecedent studies outlined in the Background section.
  - 10.2.3. Further Directions – This section outlines what could have been done differently throughout the course of research. This section may also outline what may be done if this research was continued into the future and plans for the use of the current research beyond the requirements of the MFA program.
- 10.3. This section should be primarily textual but can include images and other graphic representations of information as appropriate.
- 10.4. The conclusions section should be approximately 20 percent of the entire thesis document.

## 11. List of Works Cited.

- 11.1. This section is a list of all cited works in Chicago Manual of Style citation format (either note/bib or author/date, depending on the style used in the document).

## 12. Appendices

- 12.1. Required appendices include:
  - 12.1.1. Thesis exhibition documentation.
    - 12.1.1.1. This is photographic documentation and associated information of the Master's Thesis Exhibition. This information should include the title, date and location of the exhibition, as well as captions for exhibition photos.
  - 12.1.2. Institutional Review Board approval/exception documents (if applicable).
- 12.2. At the discretion of the thesis committee, additional appendices may be necessary if a topic needs clarification beyond which was provided in the above sections. These appendices may include, but are not limited to:
  - 12.2.1. Glossary
  - 12.2.2. Translations of key phrases or words
  - 12.2.3. Topical clarifications
  - 12.2.4. Tangential research.

## **6. Directed Research, Thesis/Creative Project**

The spring semester requires students to enroll in DESI 690 Thesis Studio. Work on the Creative Project or formal Thesis, as well as preparation for all of the the following, is to be done within the context of the course.

Students enrolled in DESI 690 Thesis Studio are required to attend the weekly joint workshop class sessions and to make one or more presentations. Each presentation will review work relevant to and completed in the graduate program to that date and should include a presentation of any thesis/creative project study. The thesis/creative project review (section 6.1), the MFA Thesis/Creative Project Exhibit (section 6.2), and the first draft of the thesis or creative project documentation (described above) will be evaluated to establish the grade for DESI 690 Thesis Studio.

### **6.1 Thesis/Creative Project Review**

Thesis review is the second of three formal reviews. The review is required of all graduate students during the last semester of study and should be completed by the fourth week of classes at the latest. Reviews will not be scheduled after this. The purpose of the review is to give the student substantive comments on the progress of his/her thesis study. It is an opportunity for the student to acquaint faculty, who ultimately make evaluative decisions regarding the success of the thesis/creative project, with the details of the student's study. Furthermore, the review permits discussion that might influence the final direction of the study at a time when change in direction or pursuit of resources is still feasible. Nine credits of DESI 690 will be based on this review. This grade will be assigned by the Graduate Committee.

The student is responsible for presenting written and visual documentation of the problem under research, organization of the study, methodology used, bibliography of resources upon which current work is based, and progress to date. Presentation of content beyond a reiteration of the formal thesis proposal is required.

Documentation of research content is expected. These studies are to have been started by the beginning of the fourth semester and must be documented in high quality digital format. In addition, the faculty expects a student projection and timetable for the remaining work.

The presentation and discussion should not exceed one hour. Because time is limited, candidates must submit an up-to-date thesis/creative project outline to the committee at least one week prior to the review. Students failing to do so will not be reviewed. This will eliminate time necessary to explain the nature of the study and will allow faculty to prepare questions in advance. The student can expect questions from the faculty in their effort to clarify information and to determine the student's depth of understanding of the subject. Faculty may make suggestions as to alternate approaches, cite additional resources, or recommend a shift in the scope of the study. The student should view this as an opportunity to engage the faculty in dialogue about the topic and not as a "pass-or-fail" review.

### **6.2 MFA Thesis/Creative Project Exhibit**

All students are required to make a retrospective public presentation (exhibition, lecture, performance, etc.) of their graduate work in their last full semester of study. The thesis/creative project must be thoroughly represented in this presentation, visually and with written documentation. Two credits of the nine credits for DESI 690 will be based on this exhibit. This grade will be assigned by the Graduate Committee. Students are expected to consider content, appropriateness of the exhibition format and space, and the design of the exhibit itself. Students engaged in the Creative Project Option are required to have completed an appropriate number of additional studio projects prior to the exhibition and after the thesis review. These quantitative requirements will allow a curatorial process to ensue for the purpose of exhibition. The exhibition must reflect this curatorial process. Students who have elected a written format for the thesis will be expected to include a visual presentation; those in the visual track will be expected to include a written description. An announcement detailing time and place is required and should be delivered to all faculty mailboxes at least one week prior to the event. The Graduate Committee is required to attend and review all presentations and exhibitions.

### **6.3 Oral Review**

The Oral Review is the last review of work toward the MFA in Design Studies. It is scheduled by the student through the main thesis advisor at a time that is convenient for the student and all members of the thesis committee and the department chairman. The purpose of this review is to summarize work in the graduate program and on the thesis, and for the committee to sign off on the student's preparation to enter the profession. Students should expect questions from faculty regarding these issues.

The deadline for informing committee members of the Oral Review date is **one month before the review**. The advisor will recommend when the student is ready to schedule orals. The advisor will do so only when he/she is confident that all problems in the study and its documentation have been resolved and after all members of the committee have read a substantive draft. The first draft of the thesis is reviewed by the main thesis advisor. Subsequent drafts are submitted to associate advisor(s) and readers. Readers' comments are submitted to the main thesis advisor. The student should submit the final draft (inclusive of design) to the advisor, readers, and the department chairman no later than two weeks prior to the date of orals. **Each semester there is a date past which no orals will be given for graduation that semester. This date, typically in final exam week of spring semester, and prior to final exams in the fall semester, may be obtained from The Director of Graduate Studies.**

The student should bring to the Oral Review **two final copies of the thesis documentation and a digital portfolio documenting performance in the graduate program** (see Appendix a.2). This portfolio should be submitted to the Program Director no later than one week following the oral review.

Signatures of the thesis committee are due at the Oral Review on the University's approved form. All additional signatures are obtained via the SOTA Dean's office. Final documents must be uploaded to the VCU Library's Digital archives, <http://digarchive.library.vcu.edu/handle/10156/820>.

#### **6.4 Summer Semester Graduation, Graduation in Subsequent Semesters**

Students expecting to extend their graduate thesis work through into the summer session must have submitted and discussed with their main thesis advisor and Graduate Committee a first draft of their thesis documentation prior to the end of the previous spring semester. The main thesis advisor also must submit a graduation application by the due date in the previous spring semester. Finally, the student must have a commitment from his/her advisors and readers that the advisors will be available during the summer months. Only if these conditions exist, and if the Oral Review is completed before the close of the summer session, will students be allowed to retroactively graduate the previous spring. If these conditions do not exist, the student will be required to enroll in one credit of DESI 690 during the fall semester to complete the thesis or creative project.

The student must remain consistently enrolled in one credit of this course in every subsequent fall and spring, until the Oral Review is completed. Graduate students have a time limit of six years in which to complete their degree. Orals scheduled for a subsequent summer session require the enrollment in one credit as well. Students who require a leave of absence from this requirement may do so only after consulting with the Director of Graduate Studies.

It is the student's responsibility to schedule regular contact with the main thesis advisor during these subsequent semesters. Faculty are not obligated to undertake thesis advising or reading during the summer months, and it is erroneous to assume that an advisor will be available every semester. Additionally, graduate faculty will not approve off-campus thesis work for students who have not completed six credits of thesis study on campus. The formative stages of thesis development require a level of faculty-student collaboration not possible on a long-distance basis.

A student planning Oral Review in subsequent semesters must be aware of the requirement (detailed in Oral Review) to schedule this no later than one month before the review, and only on the advice of the main thesis advisor and in agreement with the rest of the thesis committee. In subsequent semester graduation, no thesis committee member should agree to an Oral Review without reviewing and returning with comments at least one draft of the documentation.

### **Appendix**

#### **a.1 Thesis Project Documentation Format**

Because the MFA of Design Studies was approved under the thesis rather than exhibition format, documentation of each student's course of study is required for graduation. Documentation must be in a format that can be retained by the university.

The MFA of Design Studies has approved thesis study that results in the generation of original visual solutions (creative project option), explorations to demonstrate research concepts, and thesis study that results in a written presentation of research. In either the Thesis or Creative Project option, written articulation of the nature of the research problem, the methodology employed, and an evaluation of the results is necessary to document the study.

Although, the traditional format for documentation is an A4 vertically bound book, alternative formats may be submitted with approval from the thesis advisor. Printed presentations may vary in size, binding, and paper stock, but two copies must be submitted regardless of style. If a thesis includes media presentations, copies should be submitted with the written documentation. Media presentations should be accompanied by instructions for proper exhibition.

#### **a.2 Digital Portfolio**

All students graduating with the MFA in Design Studies are required to archive digital documentation of their graduate work with the MFA Design Studies Program. This documentation consists of a CD containing at least 40 images of work completed during the course of study in the MFA program. The CD must also contain a document listing the image files and providing the following information for each: file name, title, semester and year completed, course and instructor, other collaborators (if any), and a general project description. The CD must be submitted prior to the student's Oral Review and may be a part of that discussion. With the approval of the student's thesis advisor, alternative formats may be submitted.

## Responsibilities of Thesis Committee Members

### Main Thesis Advisor

The person primarily responsible for:

- The regular advising of the student's thesis development for the duration of that project during the student's second year;
- The reviewing, and evaluating of progress reports. Meetings with the student should be held on a regular basis; i.e. weekly or as needed, but not fewer than 6-7 meetings in the third semester (about twice a month) and weekly during the last semester of study. This includes any group or formal reviews, but does not include independent study taken during the students' semester.
- The student's grading in DESI 690 in consultation and with the general consent of other advisors.
- Fills out and submits the graduation application for the student.
- Responsible for relaying Final Thesis documentation information to advisees.
- Initial and final reader for the students Thesis/Creative Project documentation drafts. The main thesis advisor must be a full-time VCUQatar faculty member.

### Associate Advisor(s)

- Responsible in a secondary capacity: to assist and contribute in the advising and evaluation process; The associate advisor should be capable to step into the role of main advisor should it be necessary (this is not applicable to external associate advisors).
- Meets in concert with other advisors and the student for at least the Final Review and Oral Review. Meetings with the student should be held on a regular basis, but not fewer than 4-5 meetings per regular semester (about once a month). This includes any group or formal reviews.
- Responsible for reading and commenting on Thesis documentation.

The associate advisor may be an external member, however, as such must agree to all of the responsibilities required for meeting and reading. In addition to one, or more, associate advisors, students are encouraged to have informal external advisors who are not formally part of the MFA Thesis committee (and are not required to read MFA Thesis documentation, nor need to attend the formal reviews, and consequently do not become official signers of the final MFA Thesis documentation). Students should properly acknowledge the contributions of all individuals outside of the formal thesis committee in their documentation.

### Reader

- Responsible for reading and commenting on Thesis documentation beginning after the student's Final Review.
- The reader would have primary responsibility for being an objective reviewer of the document, and therefore would not be a significant contributor to content development (but would not be strictly prevented from offering some advice along the way).
- The reader may be either internal or external faculty.

### Grammarian

- A grammarian reviews and comments on the students' MFA Thesis documentation during draft stage. The student's MFA Thesis committee will determine if a grammarian is required. If this is the case, the committee will also determine who among the Thesis committee members will serve this role, or if an outside grammarian should be utilized.
- An outside grammarian would not be a formal member of the Thesis committee and is not required to sign the final Thesis documentation.

### Director of Graduate Studies

The person may or may not be one of the advisors or readers, but remains at least an ex officio member during the second year of study.

- Is the advisor for first year students.
- Provides scheduling and requirements for candidacy review presentations.
- Attends candidacy, Final Review and Oral Review meetings.
- Schedules all departmental thesis reviews (e.g. the candidacy review in April, Final Reviews for second years) and assists in Oral Review scheduling).
- Responsible for relaying Final Thesis/Creative Project documentation information to main thesis advisor.
- Is the person to mediate disagreements that arise in the process of a student's thesis/performance evaluation.

Note: The MFA in Design Studies considers the time commitment required of faculty who participate as associate advisor to be roughly 1/2 that of the main thesis advisor. The teaching load of faculty who serve only as reader for any one student is considered 1/3 that of the main thesis advisor. However, faculty are not expected to serve as main thesis advisor for more than two students per year (or proportionately as associate advisor or reader for as many as 3-4 students