

DEGREE PROGRAMS

MFA IN GRAPHIC DESIGN

Our Mission

The Otis MFA in Graphic Design program is a community of students, faculty, and international and Los Angeles-based designers dedicated to visual research and discovery through making. We blend design exploration, critical inquiry, and applied projects to interrogate and better the field of graphic design. We partner with organizations and engage in studio visits and travel to foster impact beyond the classroom.

Students use curriculum to explore visual culture and critical thinking and making, while faculty develop curriculum in response to students and contemporary culture.

During the course of study, students work across platforms to complete a series of studio projects. Writing and discussions enrich in-class making; students and faculty learn from each other. Coursework engages research, discourse, and the iterative process with the goal of discovering many possible outcomes. In so doing, the program supports students in taking on the challenges and opportunities in contemporary graphic design practice.

Degree Requirements

All programs' curricula are developed in response to Program Learning Outcomes, which signify what students learn within a degree program or emphasis area. All program learning outcomes respond to overarching Institutional Learning Outcomes. View the MFA in Graphic Design program learning outcomes [here](#) or request information.

Course Descriptions

GRDS 601 - Seminar Studio I (3.00)

Students work in a collaborative learning environment on a theme-based project, focusing on inquiry, research, discourse. This four-term course encourages a wide range of opinions, with course outcomes exploring media literacy and critical form-making. Faculty will provide the opportunity for in-depth discussion and critique as well as to connect research to conceptual and formal investigation. Together students and faculty work collectively and individually to produce publishable outcomes that will contribute to design scholarship.

GRDS 655 - Seminar Round Table (3.00)

Students discuss issues pertaining to being an active designer in the world. Led by guests invited from various disciplines, students look at design from philosophic, historical, and theoretical positions. The course provides an opportunity to speak at length about the value of inquiry, research, and engagement in issues and disciplines outside graphic design. On occasion students will have the opportunity to engage with Visiting Artists in special events or meetings.

GRDS 670 - Graduate Studio (3.00)

Graduate Studio focuses on critical iterative processes. Throughout the course students cultivate working methodologies to discover varied outcomes through working fluidly across media. With guidance and mentorship from the faculty, students begin to develop a body of work reflecting their interests, agendas, and values.

AHCS 577 - Contemp. Graphic Design Issues (3.00)

This course is total immersion into the field of graphic design. Current and critically important figures will be covered; students will be given tools to use in their practice to ensure that they are informed on the discipline on a global scale. In addition, students will begin to engage visiting artists in dialogue during lectures.

GRDS 711 - Visiting Artists Projects (3.00)

Visiting Artist Projects consists of workshops where visiting artists from around the United States and abroad lead groups of students through a short-term, socially relevant themed projects. Outcomes fall somewhere between speculation and real-world design solutions with an aim to inspire all parties to apply design thinking in an innovative way.

AHCS 579 - Theory and Criticism (3.00)

A diversity of critical approaches to twentieth and twenty-first century design are situated historically while introducing current themes and debates in contemporary design practice and related disciplines.

GRDS 602 - Seminar Studio II (3.00)

Students work in a collaborative learning environment on a theme-based project, focusing on inquiry, research, discourse. This four-term course encourages a wide range of opinions, with course outcomes exploring media literacy and critical form-making. Faculty will provide the opportunity for in-depth discussion and critique as well as to connect research to conceptual and formal investigation. Together students and faculty work collectively and individually to produce publishable outcomes that will contribute to design scholarship.

GRDS 623 - Graduate Typography (3.00)

This course is a graduate level exploration to the fundamentals of typography and typographic systems and letterforms. Students will explore the theoretical and applied use of type as visual form and visible language by learning the nuances of type families, texture, hierarchy, grid, composition, and sequence.

ELEC 599 - Graduate Studio Elective (3.00)

Graduate level studio elective course. See department for specific courses.

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GRDS 665 - Entrepreneurship (3.00)

This course is designed for graduate students that are interested in starting their own business and or freelance business. Students will be introduced to all facets of running a business, such as writing a business plan, promotion, developing a client base, pricing, legal and financial aspects as well as ethical standards. Students will be exposed to guest lectures from a variety of business areas such as small business owners, a life coach, accountant/bookkeeper and an attorney, on the proper way to set-up and run a business.

AHCS 587 - Models of Practice (3.00)

In this course students will work to contextualize their future practice through close examination of their own body of work, research, and on and off-site visits with contemporary design practitioners. The course will provide opportunities to experience the many roles that designers can play today focusing on the way practice models continue to evolve in response to socio economic technological, cultural, economic and political conditions.

GRDS 701 - Seminar Studio III (3.00)

Students work in a collaborative learning environment on a theme-based project, focusing on inquiry, research, discourse. This four-term course encourages a wide range of opinions, with course outcomes exploring media literacy and critical form-making. Faculty will provide the opportunity for in-depth discussion and critique as well as to connect research to conceptual and formal investigation. Together students and faculty work collectively and individually to produce publishable outcomes that will contribute to design scholarship.

ELEC 599 - Graduate Studio Elective (3.00)

Graduate level studio elective course. See department for specific courses.

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Graduate level studio elective course. See department for specific courses.

GRDS 702 - Seminar Studio IV (3.00)

Students work in a collaborative learning environment on a theme-based project, focusing on inquiry, research, discourse. This four-term course encourages a wide range of opinions, with course outcomes exploring media literacy and critical form-making. Faculty will provide the opportunity for in-depth discussion and critique as well as to connect research to conceptual and formal investigation. Together students and faculty work collectively and individually to produce publishable outcomes that will contribute to design scholarship.

GRDS 655 - Seminar Round Table (3.00)

Students discuss issues pertaining to being an active designer in the world. Led by guests invited from various disciplines, students look at design from philosophic, historical, and theoretical positions. The course provides an opportunity to speak at length about the value of inquiry, research, and engagement in issues and disciplines outside graphic design. On occasion students will have the opportunity to engage with Visiting Artists in special events or meetings.

GRDS 770 - Final Studio (6.00)

Unlike a traditional thesis project our department recognizes the value of finishing the degree with a series of wide-ranging artifacts. Based on the work and research generated in the previous 3 semesters, students frame a position and a future practice that moves seamlessly through time and space.

GRDS 711 - Visiting Artists Projects (3.00)

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Electives

Course Title	Course Number	Credits
Printmaking Workshop	GRDS 621	3.00
Advanced Image Making	GRDS 621	3.00

Elective Descriptions

GRDS 621 - Printmaking Workshop (3.00)

In this graduate level elective, students will interrogate their design practice through the lens of printmaking. The course will be structured around technical demonstrations in the printmaking and letterpress lab with an emphasis on experimentation and tactility. Project parameters are largely open-ended, with the expectation that students will work independently to conceptualize and execute their projects using varied printmaking techniques. The course time will be split between the 6th floor, Lab Press, and the Printmaking Lab.

GRDS 621 - Advanced Image Making (3.00)

To create advanced images, we need advanced tools. In this class, we will explore various methods for developing these tools and examine our relationships with them.