Otis Graduate Design Program is an LA-Based student, faculty and research collective of designers investigating the issues of our day. We blend design exploration, critical inquiry, and applied projects to interrogate and better our world. We partner with organizations to foster deep impact beyond the classroom. The MFA program in Graphic Design provides a rigorous and challenging academic and studio environment for conscientious candidates who recognize the value of design and its role in society.

During the course of studies, students learn to work across media and platforms through studio projects, visiting artist workshops, courses in design theory, history and round table discussions. The coursework engages research, critical thinking, and iterative process with the goal of discovering many possible applications of design thinking and making. In so doing, the program supports students in taking on the challenges and opportunities in contemporary graphic design practice.

Projects completed during the course of study (assigned and self-directed) culminate in a set of final studio projects that chronicle the candidate’s body of work and locate their future practice. The department provides students with instruction by core faculty and visiting faculty who are recognized nationally and internationally in their design and art practices.

Otis Graduate Design Program offers unique opportunities, with intense summer semesters, a robust visiting artist program, international travel, internships, teaching assistantships, and independent studies. Each student is able to map out the appropriate schedule and academic plan to suit their objectives.
selected from various projects courses

STUDIO TOPICS: ADVANCING DISCIPLINE
Students cultivate personal working methodologies, and develop and test them throughout the course. Careful examinations of current/previous design vanguards with particular attention to the relationship between method and form drive the course.

PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES. Students in Graduate Graphic Design will:
— Conceive, design, and execute a successful body of work that reflects candidate’s interests, agendas, and values
— Conduct a robust and sustained inquiry into graphic design practice and its artifacts, with deep examination of current issues and ideas
— Develop a critical iterative process
— Develop criteria for assessing research, information and design outcomes
— Build media, cultural and visual literacy and research skills
— Cultivate working methodologies and formal agility across media and platforms
— Actively engage with contemporary design culture
— Articulate a set of ideological and aesthetic agendas as foundation for future practice
— Develop a sense of agency to successfully navigate contemporary design landscape in response to technological, social and economic conditions.
A series of posters, visual research and form-making about a future where there are no feelings.
A series of posters, visual research and form-making about the future where human senses are enhanced with animal qualities.

A series of posters, visual research and form-making about a future where human architecture and nature have a symbiotic relationship.
A series of posters, visual research and form-making that investigate graphic design as a tool for managing massive amounts of information in the future.

Vanisara Anthony

STUDIO TOPICS

A series of posters, visual research and form-making about the cyclical nature of time.

MJ Balvanera

STUDIO TOPICS
A series of posters, visual research and form-making about a future community that refuses technological progress in order to preserve the essentials of human nature.
How do you know what you think?
And why think what you think?
As designers we spend a lot of time looking, a lot of time making and a lot of time thinking.
What happens at the intersection of these three things?
Could that be the space for what we talk about as design thinking?[1]

And how is design thinking different from just regular old thinking?
We also talk a lot about critical thinking[2]...but is there such a thing as critical looking?
Or critical making?… what do you think?

We live in a world that requires a lot of processing of information just to get through the day. Ours is a world where the fundamental ways of understanding the world around us are increasingly disrupted: traditional structures of identity, authority, agency, expertise, and authorship have been overturned by technology and social change; information is available instantly and simultaneously in infinite quantity; technology constantly challenges current aesthetics and modes of communication. And this is just the tip of iceberg.

In such a context, it is often easier to understand things in terms of generalizations and assumptions. The generalization in the previous paragraph is a good example. All of those statements seem true, but none have been tested against opposing viewpoints and none are supported by data or references. Though there may be truth to them, they are still simply observations based on lots of assumptions.

In many ways, this habitual editing and simplification is a basic survival tactic in response to information overload. But a design process based on generalization and unexamined information will likely yield the little more than the familiar (also known as the generic, the obvious, and the cliche). To discover the unexpected, the surprising or the revolutionary requires a process of critical thinking and making.

You are officially on notice: proceed with skepticism and get in the habit of asking “why”!

In the Eames’ seminal film Powers of 10 [http://www.eamesoffice.com/the-work/powers-of-ten/] the designers use the structure of exponentially increasing and decreasing scale to explore similarities and relationships that reveal themselves at the extreme ends of the spectrum. The film demonstrates that the micro and the macro share fundamental structuring principles yet at the same time encompass formal variety. The film is also an excellent example of an outcome or application of the process of critical thinking. The process of making such a film requires the designer to marshal both critical thinking and critical making skills. This class will argue that in a rigorous design process, critical thinking and making are so intertwined as to become inseparable.
A visual essay in the form of a board-game, looking at the function of emoji as language.
A visual essay as an atlas, investigating cultural contributions that Mexican immigrants make by studying the impact of their physical journey.
selected projects from various courses

PUBLICATION
Expanding on the fundamental principles and theories of typography, students will further explore the formal and conceptual articulation of systems and structures as they relate specifically to content driven sequential and narrative design. Students will design publications, websites, videos and environmental graphics using thorough visual research, rigorous formal explorations, and a critical point of view.

VISUAL LANGUAGE
Students participate in a focused investigation, both historical and personal, of the links between visual motif and meaning. Coursework explores visual literacy and the use of traditional and experimental visual methodologies to illustrate and communicate while developing an effective personal style.

SYSTEMS AND IDENTITY DESIGN
Students learn how to create a visually distinct identity through structured and innovative methodology generating many ideas and designs in a short amount of time. They develop a rich visual language, the basis for a system that promotes an expansive development of the visual language beyond a logotype and its applications.

STUDIO TOPICS
SEMINAR
STUDIO ELECTIVES
WORKSHOP
MENTORSHIPS
TRAVEL
THEORY & CRITICISM
FINAL STUDIO

A video essay and a public service announcement about the dangers of instant gratification and culture of entitlement online, delivered as a pop-up ad virus.
Type 3 focuses on building content-driven typographic systems and structures and understanding their relationship to concept, content and narrative. You will curate, design, and produce a conceptually-driven typographic book. Heavy emphasis will be placed on curating and organizing material based on a strong idea and then translating that idea to a form that is represented in both macro- and micro- typography. In other words, a systematic application of the appropriate grid as well as typographic detailing and refinement (typographic craft). You will also be expected to expand your visual literacy with respect to both contemporary and historical publication typography through research and design presentations.

**OVERVIEW OF ASSIGNMENT**

1. Ideate a country and develop its brand guidelines
2. Create a future document
3. Document digitally

**BRAND GUIDELINES**

The brand guidelines will be contained in a book documenting all stages of the project, including project brief, constitution, sketches/sketches, research, applications, and any other in between iterations that demonstrate the development of your project. The brand guidelines summarize your country and its visual parameters; they will be an extension of the identity you develop. This book is to be designed which means you will use skills learned in typography and communicaton studio courses to create a piece that is driven by concept, content, and form. (Note: Your project might dictate a reinterpretation and questioning of traditional book forms. Feel free to explore, discuss, and propose alternative formats as your project develops.)

**VISUAL LANGUAGE:**

**POP-UP STUDIO**

What if graphic design is not what you think it is?
What if the process of graphic design is not a formal process, but rather about a process of inquiry?
What if visual languages are not about developing color and material palettes, but rather about strategy: considering the context in which something lives, its audience, the means of production and distribution?

And how is this class a pop-up studio?

In this class, you will address these questions by creating a multi-modal campaign (series of related components in different media) whose format and visual language are built in response to a concept, audience, and context determined by you. The outcomes can be in any format, medium or scale.

The class is structured as a pop-up studio. Class time will be used for work, discussion, and visual research with your classmates. One of your components must be produced in a limited edition for the class.
A visual identity for an imaginary country in the Arctic Ocean that has a distinct weather pattern and geological features that set it apart from the rest of the world.
Visual Identity and multi-media fiction about an alternative and parallel history of the Caribbean region, its islands, and the surrounding coasts.
STUDIO TOPICS
SEMINAR
STUDIO ELECTIVES
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MENTORSHIPS
TRAVEL
THEORY & CRITICISM
FINAL STUDIO

Invited design practitioners will host theme-based workshops. Students are introduced to a variety of working methodologies and approaches to contemporary design thinking and making. This course will always be conceptual with a commitment to experimental form making. Outcomes will vary in media and no two semesters will be alike allowing students to take the course more than once.

selected from various projects

A game and a mobile app, designed to encourage face-to-face communication by combining on-line gaming elements with off-line interaction.

Molly Jin

VISUAL LANGUAGE
WEEK 1: INQUIRY — LINKED BY AIR / HANDBUILT
WEEK 2: PROCESS/IDEATION — WORKSHOP PROJECTS
WEEK 3: RESEARCH — URGENT AGENCY
WEEK 4: BEHAVIOR — JESSICA KAO AND ALEX PINES
WEEK 5: SPECULATION — JANNA ULRICH
WEEK 6: COLLABORATION — JAN AND RANDOALD
Workshop Projects.
embuddyment

A script to a script

CAST

Pilar Castillo as Rules
Ahad Ali as Privacy
Ariana J (Ari) as Fear
Vanisara Nicole Anthony as Ownership
Theresa Liu as Hospitality
Frankie Hammerman as Surveillance
Hector Torres as Immeasurable
Ahad Ali as Privacy
Jingyi (Icy) Leng as Responsibility
Maryam Gandeel as Forbidden
Stephanie Esquivel as Bureaucracy
Yali Yang as Fear
Jessica Yu as Commemoration
MJ Balvanera as Fiction
Lixuan Qiao as Doubt
Shaonan Zhou as Symptom

Jessica Kao & Alex Pines.
In this self-directed project-based study, students work with faculty of their choice in a one-on-one capacity. They propose and develop a project that helps them to narrow their interest and begin to establish a body of work that contributes to contemporary design discourse.

Selected projects from various courses include:

- Studio Topics
- Seminar
- Studio Electives
- Workshop
- Mentorships
- Travel
- Theory & Criticism
- Final Studio

p.36
MENTORSHIP IN THE MFA GRAPHIC DESIGN PROGRAM AT OTIS COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

Mentorship is a core component of the MFA Graphic Design program. Students work with mentors two times during their studies:
#1. Spring semester between Summer Session 1 and 2
#2. Spring semester between Summer Session 2 and 3

Mentorships can be conducted face-to-face or long distance via Skype and email, and through travel programs offered in the MFA GD department.

There are three types of mentorship available in our program:

- Studio Project (4 credits):
  Writing critical, theoretical, or historical texts on graphic design for publication and/or public presentation (4 credits);

- International travel (4 credits):
  Study at an international institution
  Participate in study abroad curriculum that is Otis faculty or visiting artist lead
  Minimum contact time to credit
  4 credit = 8 contact hours per student total.
  I.E. One hour a week for 8 weeks.

  Contact time can take place one-on-one and/or in a group setting.

Learning Outcomes
With all mentorships, students are learning to be self-reflective, critical, and articulate. They should be working towards narrowing their interest as a designer so that when they return to the program in the summer, they have more focus and direction.

The outcomes are contingent upon the projects done during the mentorship. Examples of outcomes include but are not limited to: developing and completing one or more projects that contribute significantly to the MFA experience; writing a text good enough to deliver at a conference or post to a blog or publish.

This is an independent study at the graduate level. You are responsible for your development during your mentorship. We suggest that you begin the mentor/mentee relationship by presenting the work you have done at Otis thus far and discuss the following:
- Why you are in graduate school;
- What you have accomplished up to this point as an Otis student;
- Why did you choose them as a mentor;
- What do you hope to accomplish in the 2 or 4 months; A proposal
- Submit a time-line for the proposed project.

The New Form of the News News is a project in which I use illustration, typography, and graphic elements to visually editorialize daily news. The original format was screen-based—I built a Tumblr site and posted my daily making, beginning in January. So far, I have done forty-five pieces and feel I should keep developing the project as my long-term personal practice. I am doing this project because couple reasons.

First, I wanted to do a quick daily project because I have an issue of over-thinking in one project and even one idea. This often hindered my production.

Second, I was a news editor in China, which has heavy censorship. In the country, the major news is censored by the government and so doing the time the most audience can only get so called only truth from the government. But, I don’t believe news should be the only truth, so I wanted to raise my voice by doing this project. China is a country with massive antediluvian ideas, and I believe the best way to break up these antediluvian ideas/parochialisms is to give the audience a voice, and evoke the social system to turn the table.

Third, I fell I choose doing it to get rid of antediluvian ideas from I remember reading an essay by Rose’s I just wanna be Average.” In the environment restricted him, so he felt to be average. Hi teacher, Jack Mac F. help to break the fence of the I felt his confidence with English and have to do what his parents did: go and begin working. In my life, I believe in China, being average is always an ordinary person. In China, the didn’t give me much perspective. I see monkey do.” The school wanted mainstream by passing the entrance into a so-called “good school” and a “good job.” In this ideology, even arranged, and I was just supposed than changing anything.

Hence, graduate school gave me truly develop who I am. I realized...
A daily project that visually editorializes the news. The images are documented on Tumblr along with links to the original news sources.
In the Spring of 2016, I sought to investigate my surroundings...my existence, my ability to occupy space, my perception and my influences. I paid attention for the first time. I noticed ordinary and everyday occurrences, and questioned them. I looked for situations in which I felt an inexplicable connection to, an emotional response, or meaning, and relished. I explored through making without direction or desired outcome with the intention of stepping away from everything I was used to and comfortable with. It started to become very apparent that everything I have understood to be true up to this point was a construct conditioned by my environment — and suddenly nothing really made sense anymore.

This project is a collection of explorations, notes and thoughts created over the course of 16 weeks between January and May of 2016. It started with a series of obstructions and a desire to establish my genuine interests, while pushing the boundaries of pre-existing formal skills. I feel that this is a reflection of my current state of mind and consider this final publication to be the beginning of something greater, not the end.
The final essays in this section include a message of hope and an excerpt from an activist handbook regarding organizing strategies. These tools go hand in hand with the issue. Rather than feel defeated in a world of overwhelming disregard it is important to remain focused on the change you can make in your life, your community, your country and your world. This ripple effect is critical for a more sustainable future.

There remains much to be learned from the water defenders at Standing Rock. They are our teachers and inspiration for what can be possible.
MENTORSHIP IN THE MFA GRAPHIC DESIGN PROGRAM AT OTIS COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

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Contact
Learning
With a designer focus
The couple of or more text get

Workshops with LAVA & Marijke Cobbenhagen/Nuankhanit Phromchanya
Studio Visits,
Belgium and Netherlands.

2016
HOLLAND
AND BELGIUM
MFA GD
STUDY ABROAD TRIP:
2 COUNTRIES
7 CITIES
2 WORKSHOPS
15 STUDIO VISITS

Studio Mirror Mirror
Sara de Bondt
Ines Cox
Stephanie Specht
We Became Aware
Ine Meganck
Open Source Publishing
Hansje van Halem
Moniker
Florian Pfeffer
The Rodina
75B
Team Thursday
Peter Bilak
M HKA

p.48
Codex is about a day on Columbia street in Mexico City, focusing on how the past is still the present: instead of gods there is government. There are sacrifices of money instead of blood. Aztec priests have a new form as street leaders and personalities. With connection to Aztec roots, this codex will show in the future what it was like to live on Columbia street today.

A set of business cards produced by a letterpress master Señor Lalo, based both on real and fictitious places, events and characters. The project is an a visual identity proposal for Plaza Santo Domingo, a small town square in the heart of Mexico City, known for housing analogue printmaking artisans. The proposal challenges the notion of identity design by letting Plaza Santo Domingo "talk for itself".
The Battle of technological past and present, is a series of posters that highlights makers in Mexico City who still practice analog techniques, such as Letterpress and Sign Painting. These makers are constantly battling to keep their businesses alive and thriving despite technological prices and practices killing their businesses.
COURSE DESCRIPTION
This is a brief seminar on design criticism and theory. Each week we will interrogate one work. You will add to your theoretical and visual belief system in order to add power to your own work.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWS
» quality and accuracy more important than quantity
» never plagiarize
» include a bibliography with 3-5 secondary sources; it is valid to use sources from other fields such as psychology, philosophy, economics, and politics
» refer to at least 5 other primary sources — relate the work you are interrogating to other cultural artifacts such as graphic design, painting, film, performance, sculpture, architecture, etc.
» include images of the all of the work to which you refer
» design for legibility

RESOURCES
theories/schools of thought
relational aesthetics, post-modernism/modernism, new romanticism, minimalism, post-structuralism, formalism, evolution, feminism, marxism, semiotics, linguistics, monumentality v unmonumentality, metamodernism, post-colonialism, abstract expressionism, surrealism, parafiction and many other -isms

theorists/critics

links: design writing
wowhuh.com
underconsideration.com/brandnew
eyemagazine.com
designobserver.com
dcrit.sva.edu
hyperallergic.com
eastofborneo.org
experimentalJetSet.net/category/texts-interviews
servinglibrary.org
dismagazine

METHODS OF APPROACH
Select work will be posted to the tumblr, fb and elsewhere.

RESEARCH & COLLECTION. CREATING RICH CONTENT
As a graduate student, you are in a unique position to shape the future of design, you have a platform from which to be heard and to influence. We will discuss how to go beyond rote documentation.

DISCOURSE. PROVIDING CONTEXT
Schematics and diagrams will be employed to describe the field of graphic design. This is an opportunity to experiment and provoke. You may choose to be direct and linear or rhizomatic and generative.

ARGUMENT. WRITING ON DESIGN
01 Have a thesis/argument, structure the review around this idea.
02 Cover all your bases: Description, Interpretation, Judging
03 You will read your review aloud. You can have someone else read if you wish.
04 Have someone edit your review for grammar, spelling, clarity.
05 Get rid of any extraneous or redundant details.
06 If there are parts of your review that you find boring, know that we will too. Find a way to make your argument persuasive.
07 Establish your voice and position within the discourse, but do not neglect to back up your position with examples.
08 Familiarize yourself with prevalent theories of contemporary art and design. Film criticism can be a great starting point.
09 Understand the visual and cultural lineage of the work you are observing. What came before it? What is likely to come after it? Where does it fall in terms of quality? How do you determine what is high or low quality?
10 Wikipedia can help but should not be one of your sources.
11 Avoid second guessing yourself, do not begin sentences with ‘I think’ or ‘I believe’ or ‘Maybe’.
12 Keep the social contract with your classmates; engage with their argument via critique.
Schematics to describe points of interest in the field of graphic design.
Open House Studios

Completion Ceremony

MFA 3 Joshua Tree Retreat

Collaborative final publication by the graduating class Studio Life.
selected projects from various courses

STUDIO TOPICS
SEMINAR
STUDIO ELECTIVES
WORKSHOP
MENTORSHIPS
TRAVEL
THEORY & CRITICISM
FINAL STUDIO
Final Project...

This studio is intended to “contain” your chosen research, content and subject matter into a project that actively engages with the potential form of your content—from the functional to the speculative to the experimental. Every class you have taken while at Otis has been a space for you to develop your critical thinking and making processes. Use this time to connect the learning outcomes, research processes and making methodologies of the last two years into a single project that will frame your work and future practice. In this studio, you will reflect upon these methodologies and connect them to an investigation that is speculative and experimental, while deeply rooted in a point of view and context.

This should be a fearless investigation into concepts and design processes that will continue throughout your career as a designer/maker. We expect critical and bold investigations as well as a thoughtful point of view.

The focus of this studio should be about making furiously and thinking rigorously.

The results will be a representation of this investigation as well as an exploration into the formal application of your chosen research. It is a time for you to frame your current work and the future of your work and to create strategies for the rest of the summer and beyond.

Course Learning Outcomes
— Conceive, design, and execute a successful project that advances your practice and reflects a critical perspective on the discipline of graphic design.
— Frame questions, devise appropriate methodologies for answering them, and collect evidence of an ongoing critical perspective.
— Connect and articulate learning outcomes and methods of making and research from previous workshops, studios and classes and apply them to your current project and practice.
— Successfully assess the goals of the final project, including how it will relate to your future practice.
— Define a cohesive and critical methodology in content, process, structure, and materiality and articulate that concept in writing, presentation and form.

A video and a series of posters investigating construction of fictional personalities on social media, culminating in a proposal for a mock branding agency for life design.
A series of posters for Santa Monica Mountains investigating the relationship between humans and urban wildlife, particularly through the mediated gaze of the surveillance camera.
A series of posters, publications and installation looking at censorship in the news media and proposing new ways for audience participation.
Pattern studies, prints and fabric designs investigating the history of Dutch wax prints in West Africa, while reinventing them with a personal / political agenda.
FACULTY
CHAIR
Kali Nikitas  (UIC, CALARTS)
ASSISTANT CHAIR
Tanya Rubbak  (UPENN, CALARTS)
FACULTY
Julie Cho, COLUMBIA, YALE
Neil Doshi, CONCORDIA, CALARTS
Yasmin Khan, UCLA, ART CENTER, CALARTS
Silas Munro, RISD, CALARTS
Alex Pines, CORCORAN, MICA, CALARTS
Chris Svensson, UC URVINE, CENTRAL SAINT MARTINS, YALE
John White, ART CENTER

VISITING FACULTY
Riah Buchanan, CARLTON, MCAD, CRANBROOK
Ana Llorente, WASH U, SAIC, CALARTS
Jan en Randoald, SINT LUCAS GENT
Jessica Wexler, HAVERFORD, PARSONS, CALARTS
Davey Whitcraft, CCA, UCLA

— Conceive, design, and execute a successful body of work that reflects candidate's interests, agendas, and values
— Conduct a robust and sustained inquiry into graphic design practice and its artifacts, with deep examination of current issues and ideas
— Develop a critical iterative process
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— Actively engage with contemporary design culture
— Articulate a set of ideological and aesthetic agendas as foundation for future practice
— Develop a sense of agency to successfully navigate contemporary design landscape in response to technological, social and economic conditions.

PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES. Students in Graduate Graphic Design will:

AGENCY COLLECTIVE
ALL THE WAY TO PARIS
APRIL GREIMAN & LAURIE HAYCOCK MAKELA
CAMERON EWING
COX & GRUSENMEYER
DENISE GONZALES CRISP
DRAWWORDS
FIELD EXPERIMENTS
STUDIO FEIXEN
GAIL SWANLUND
HANSJE VAN HALEM
JAN EN RANOALD
LAVA
LINKED BY AIR
OUR POLITE SOCIETY
PROJECT PROJECTS
RICHARD NIETZSSEN
TYPE RADIO
TANIA PRILL
YASMIN KHAN & JESSICA WEXLER

select visiting artists:

p.70
SCHEDULE
(FULL-TIME = FT; PART-TIME = PT)

ACCELERATED: 1 YEAR & 2 MONTHS
- Summer (FT)
- Fall (PT)
- Spring (FT)
- Summer (FT)

LIMITED RESIDENCY: 2 YEARS + 2 MONTHS
- Summer (FT)
- Spring (PT, on- or off-site)
- Summer (FT)
- Spring (PT, on- or off-site)
- Summer (FT)