

Art Center College of Design
Graduate Media Design Program
Curriculum Grid and Course Descriptions
2011–12

Master of Fine Arts

MDP: Media Design Projects Track

MDM: Media Design Matters Track

Development Year (3-year students)

Grad Media Design Program Curriculum 2011–12

MDP Track: Media Design Projects (starts FALL term)

FALL 1: concepts		SPRING 1: concepts		SUMMER: x-term	
Authoring Critical Media	6	Media Histories and Theories	3	Collaborative Research Studio (on-campus research internship)	6
People-Knowing	3	TOPIC STUDIO elective	3	Art Center Lite (other department courses approved by mentor)	6
Productive Interaction	3	TOPIC STUDIO elective	3	Internship (off campus)	6
Design Research Practices 1	1	TOPIC STUDIO elective	3		
Colloquium 2A	3	Colloquium 2B	3		
TOTAL REQUIRED UNITS	16	TOTAL REQUIRED UNITS	15	TOTAL REQUIRED UNITS	6
FALL 2: thesis		SPRING 2: thesis			
MDP Thesis Workshop 1	6	MDP Thesis Workshop 2	9		
Histories of the Future (or other grad seminar)	3				
Design Research Practices 2	2	Knowledge-Sharing Workshop	3		
Colloquium 3A	3	Colloquium 3B	3		
TOTAL REQUIRED UNITS	14	TOTAL REQUIRED UNITS	15		

FALL 1: concept studios and seminars

Media History and Theory

Knowing the history of a medium offers designers inspiration, and saves them from reinventing the wheel. Crafting a timeline of media development from the medieval manuscript to ubiquitous computing, this seminar grounds the insights of theory in the constraints of practice. In this seminar which is a combination of readings, lectures, and screenings, history and theory become powerful tools to create meaningful and engaged work.

Design Research Practices I

Design Research is an emerging and greatly contested set of practices. The goals of research (the generation of new knowledge) combined with the skills of the designer (making things) can reorient design practice away from problem-solving and toward design for discovery – whether about people, materials, methods, practice, or forms. This class is a 5-week seminar that gives students an introduction to the field: a broad array of research traditions as well as recent developments in both project-based and human-centered work.

People-Knowing

People have been theorized variably as users, audiences, viewers, readers, markets, visitors, etc. This course will expose students to a range of approaches that allow designers to engage creatively with people, as people, to inform and inspire new design.

Productive Interaction

Whether getting things done, biding time, following serendipity, or being entertained, users are readers, viewers, thinkers, and—in well-designed interactions—active participants who build their own experiences and meaning spaces. This is what is meant by Productive Interaction and it requires that interaction designers considers themselves to be co-creators of meaning. Students will learn various approaches to Interaction Design and explore design strategies for achieving these goals through readings, discussion, design projects and critique.

Authoring Critical Media

In this course students will create responses to the bi-weekly visiting lecturers of Design Dialogues using media forms that are appropriate to their message. An emphasis will be placed on understanding contemporary issues, developing a critical voice, and deploying media intelligently.

MDP Track course descriptions (cont'd)

SPRING 1: topic studios

Led by Grad Media Core Faculty and visiting lecturers. Topics vary from year to year—examples below.

The New Ecology of Things (Van Allen)

Starting with a deep dive into the design implications of pervasive networks, embedded and embodied technologies, and a world where every object and space has a life of its own, this class explores The New Ecology of Things. Students will build working prototypes in the physical world, using sensors, effectors and computation to create objects and spaces that take advantage of this new ecology. In particular, students will work beyond the efficiencies of task-oriented applications, and explore meaning-making through productive, mythological and embodied interactions.

New Modes of Reading and Writing (Burdick)

Text-based communications take place in diverse situations and across different devices. Working at the intersection of technology, culture, design, and language, students will be encouraged to develop rich new modes of engagement between writers and readers across space and time. Students will learn transmedia typography and methods for “content-diving”—deep interpretation that gets inside the structure of texts from the literary to the ordinary—to develop inventive approaches to the navigation and display of text-based content across media.

Past Topic Studios have included:

- Ubiquitous Moving Image
- Community Sensing
- Data Stories
- Material Worlds
- Good Living in Mixed Reality

SUMMER: X-term

Students are required to take a 6-unit “lite” term. Students can choose between three options designed to provide exposure to ways of working within Media Design.

Specialized Study – Art Center Lite Term

Students take a minimum of 2 courses within another department at Art Center. This option allows students to go deep within a particular field, such as Environmental Design, Product Design, or Film.

Field Exposure – Off-campus Internship

Students can apply for internships with partners of the Media Design Program or other companies or non-profits with approval. MDP partners include companies such as Nokia, or Inking; research facilities such as Intel Research, Kaiser Permanente, the Mayo Clinic; and fellowships within the United Nations and its affiliates such as UNICEF and UNESCO.

Collaborative Research Project

Students work as research associates on a Grad Media Design summer research project. Students work side-by-side with Grad Media Design faculty and visiting researchers. The mix of projects varies from year-to-year.

FALL 2–SPRING 2: thesis

Histories of the Future

How many ways has the future been imagined? Even an initial list triggers many options for media designers: Parallel Worlds; Los Worlds; the Body in the Future; “imaginary mega-cities”; utopian and dystopian phantasmagorias; environmental imaginaries; science-fiction cyburbias. By examining these built and unbuildable futures, we can integrate many fields, to discover tools from architecture, literature, cinema, animation, games.

Design Research Practices II

This 5-week seminar/studio runs concurrently with students’ early thesis development. Students will be asked to locate their work within the field identified in DRP I.

Knowledge-Sharing Workshop

This course will examine an array of strategies for the production and dissemination of “knowledge,” from the Wunderkammers to YouTube videos. Students will be encouraged to develop their own approach to contextualizing, analyzing, reflecting, and sharing the work of their master’s project/s in their final exhibition, presentation, and web publication.

Thesis Project Workshop 1

In the Fall term, faculty mentors will guide small groups of up to 5 students each in the development of their thesis projects in weeks 1-7. From weeks 8-14, students will meet with a team of thesis advisors individually and as a group.

Thesis Project Workshop 2

In the Spring term, Students work independently on the development of their thesis project/s with guidance from their team of thesis advisors. Students will engage in individual and group meetings with thesis advisors throughout the term.

Grad Media life

MDP Core: Colloquium 1A – 3B

Colloquium is a steady flow of people, ideas, methods, and provocations. As the sole space and time that the entire Grad Media community gathers together, Colloquium is one of the prime program-wide knowledge sharing opportunities. All program business is discussed here, announcements are made, and faculty and students give reports from the field. Design Dialogues with distinguished guests and off-site visits are interspersed with departmental pecha kuchas (a 6:40 performance lecture format limited to 20 slides, at 20 seconds each) and alumni updates. Grades for Colloquium are based on attendance, contribution, and quality of project documentation and reflection on student websites.

Making Labs

Making Labs are scheduled as needed to help students to figure out how to make the things they wish to make. Labs include scheduled workshops on a range of construction tools, materials, and techniques for activities such as bookbinding, electronics, sewing, rapid prototyping, and action scripting. T.A.’s, experts, and vendors will be brought in from time to time to work with students individually on their projects. The Lab is not a class but a resource.

Grad Media Design Curriculum 2011–12

MDM Track: Media Design Matters (starts SUMMER term)

(tentative)

SUMMER 1: critical methods	
Theory, Method, Research	3
Technology for Social Change	3
Media Design, People, and Publics	3
Design and/as Research	6
Colloquium MDM 1	3
TOTAL REQUIRED UNITS	18

FALL: MDM Project/s		SPRING: MDM Project/s		SUMMER 2: thesis	
MDM Seminar: frameworks	3	MDM Thesis Workshop 1	3	MDM Thesis Workshop 2	15
MDM Project/s: community engagement	12	MDM Project/s: interventions and field tests	12		
Colloquium 2A	2	Colloquium 2B	2	Colloquium MDM 2	1
TOTAL REQUIRED UNITS	17	TOTAL REQUIRED UNITS	17	TOTAL REQUIRED UNITS	16

SUMMER 1: critical methods

Theory, Method, Research

What is the role (or even, responsibility) of the designer in working toward social change? Exploring the mutually inflected relationships between theory, method and design research—as gleaned from anthropology and the social sciences—students will work toward developing a research-based, critically reflexive, and socially-engaged design practice. What are the problematics and possibilities of design with regard to: regimes of knowledge, social and cultural difference, and forms of inequality? Students will develop skills in formulation of research problems; qualitative research tools and methods, secondary research strategies, and implementation of a range of research models including PI lead, collaborative, participatory, action research.

Technology for Social Change

An introduction to information and communications systems for the global networked public sphere. Designed to leave students with a core competency in programming, network communication, and community information analysis, this course is a mixture of theory and practical learning and experimentation. Students will explore the relationship of technology to social change, and experiment with de novo social networks,

non-standard communication systems, and other forms of culture hacking. Technical elements include programming, free software techniques and version control, data management and analysis, mobile telephony, and other systems for communication and data processing, while readings will range from network theory to the sociology of scientific knowledge.

Media Design, People, and Publics

Students learn the unique capacities of design as a mode of inquiry and point of engagement with people and publics. The course will host a critical dialogue about media design in a cross-cultural context and how can it be used to foster relationships. Students will learn about design's historical role in social environments and explore the design of new frameworks for social engagement, with a critical rethinking of standard communication and interaction design terms such as media, interface, branding, information, visualization, usability, and narrative.

Design and/as Research

This class includes both studio and field work that brings together the content of the other three classes in a set of context-specific design projects. Students will be challenged to articulate and apply approaches to research, technology, and design while addressing the realities of working in a diverse set

MDM Track course descriptions (cont'd)

of socially- and culturally-charged contexts. The first half of the class will involve local communities and organizations while the second half is oriented toward the MDM project context.

FALL–SPRING: MDM project/s

The MDM curriculum uses a project-based learning model in which students learn by working hands-on in a specific context. The context includes a community, a project partner and an opportunity for design students to learn by engaging directly with real-world conditions. For instance, our first project partner will be UNICEF's Innovation Lab in Kampala, Uganda.

Coursework is not broken apart into discrete classes rather students learn in a synthetic way by working together with their classmates and faculty to navigate the complexities of field work, negotiate cross-cultural relationships between people and organizations, and deal with the specificity of local communication technology resources. The faculty provide support by connecting the students' experiences with higher level learning objectives and contextualizing the field work to allow students to understand how methods and approaches can be applied across a range of situations and practices. The project allows students to have a long-term direct experience with partners and people that they may not have access to independently.

MDM Project/s 1: community engagement

This semester combines structured activities with time for individual exploration and reflection with a focus on assessment and experimentation, in the studio and the field. How does one enter a new situation (a very new situation) and begin to understand (or interpret) points for design interventions? How does one evaluate and work with (or willfully ignore) social and cultural dynamics, politics, and one's own position as a designer? How does one negotiate the needs and expectations of project partners, design team members, and the local community? Perhaps most importantly, how does each student find their own entry point and connect it to their own design and research interests? By the end of the semester, students should have a strong idea of what they hope to do in the coming two semesters, or even to have identified their topic. They should have a social network ('informants,' potential users, collaborators, fabricators, competitors) with which to effect their project. Finally, they should have an explicit understanding of their own responsibilities to the project in the near and long term, both ethical and logistical.

MDM Project/s 2: field tests and interventions

This semester combines structured activities with time for individual exploration and reflection with a focus on prototyping, testing, and building sustainable interventions, in the studio and the field. How can one create tools or communication elements that work with/in a community? How does one "test" the usability, viability, and effectiveness of different design interventions? What does one "leave behind" and how can long term impact be developed and assessed?

By the end of the semester, students will have created and deployed design interventions directly with the community, either independently or with classmates. They will have documentation of their project's impact, failures, and successes and a strong idea of their own position and future direction with this kind of work.

MDM Seminar: framing

Students consider issues from the project in the context of political/social theory, case studies from other fields, issues in development, the rhetoric of good, and cross-cultural design. Students learn project documentation practices, how to use writing as a tool for critical reflection, and how to connect individual experience with wider issues to develop individual research agendas.

SPRING–SUMMER 2: invention and knowledge

Thesis Workshop 1: connecting

Students identify a direction for their thesis work and develop their role on the MDM project with an eye toward their own individual development, including social entrepreneurship, design anthropology, open source tech development, media design, data and communication systems design.

Thesis Workshop 2: deepening

Students continue to develop their own research and design. Students can choose to continue their field work, test ideas in a new context, develop their designs further, create in-depth documentation, assessment, or reflective projects, or begin anew, building on what they learned from their field experience. Students graduate having created a "publishable" outcome whose form is specific to their project and career goals.

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Development Courses — 3-yr. path students only (starts FALL term)

FALL		SPRING	
GPK*: Communication Design 2	3	GPK: Information Design	3
GPK: Type 2 / 3	3	GPK: Motion Design 1 / Motion Design 2	3
GPK: Interactive Design 1 / Interactive Design 2	3	Grad Media: Visual Narrative	3
HDS: Design History / Intro. to Modernism or equivalent	3	Grad Media: Media Histories and Theories	3
Grad Media: Dev Core	3	Grad Media: Transmedia Design	3
Colloquium 1A	1	Colloquium 1B	1
TOTAL REQUIRED UNITS	16	TOTAL REQUIRED UNITS	16

* GPK = Graphic Design Department; GPK courses may be waived based on portfolio and substituted with more advanced classes or classes in other departments. Development Year Curriculum can be customized to account for individual student needs.

Development Courses

Development Year students take a combination of courses from Art Center's renowned undergraduate departments that are customized to each student's level of experience and exposure to media design. In addition, each Development Year student is required to take the following Grad Media Design courses:

Dev Core

Dev Core exposes students to a range of media design issues and ways of working, from the relationship between form and meaning to circuit bending and programming basics. The course is taught by Kevin Wingate, MDP Director, and consists of 3-week assignments with MDP Core Faculty.

Visual Narrative

Students explore a range of linear and non-linear story-telling strategies across a variety of media. Students will learn to combine filmic and graphic narrative strategies to create inventive scenarios and tell stories about media in people's lives.

Transmedia Design (required for 3-year students)

Students will learn to design in a "media-specific" manner that makes the most of the affordances of various media types from print to interaction. Students will be introduced to core concepts within media design