



***Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Design with a Concentration
in Innovation Studies***
(formerly known as the MFA in Communication Design)

This document exists to provide prospective applicants to this graduate-level degree program with vital information about it. The contents of this document are organized as follows:

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1. Program Overview

This program (henceforth in this document referred to as the MFA-DES-IS) has been designed to teach graduate students who have accrued professional experience in *communication design or a related discipline* to “discover the power of ideas” by immersing them in learning situations wherein they actually have to invent new methods that can potentially fuel the development of new processes, products and systems. What students learn during this experience will allow them to address the types of complex communications problems currently emerging in the world, and will prepare them to create or assume essential positions as leaders, collaborators, provocateurs, and empowered advocates for change within it.



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The active approach to learning that informs this curriculum emphasizes real-world problem identification and problem solving supported by empathy-building, select types of reasoning and iterative thinking. ***Students who emerge from this Masters of Fine Arts program will be prepared to pursue successful careers as communication design strategists, managers and project-based collaborators in the corporate world, the non-profit sector, or in the arena of communication design education at the post-secondary school level.*** Graduates from this program who wish to pursue academic careers will emerge from it well-equipped to function effectively in the university environment, and will have identified areas of design research that will be necessary for their growth and the attainment of tenure at the university level.

2. MFA-DES-IS Coursework

The MFA-DES-IS is geared toward professionals who have accrued experience in the discipline of Communication Design. Graduate students in the MFA-DES-IS program will develop and share knowledge of the iterative processes required to invent, make and disseminate effectively designed artifacts and systems as they gain new knowledge in areas such as ethnography, information management, strategic business planning, experience design, service design and a select variety of research methodologies that have evolved both within and outside of design.

The MFA-DES-IS program requires full-time enrollment (9 to 12 graduate-level credit hours per 15-week semester) and transpires over the course of three years. It has been designed to challenge the students enrolled in it to build on a sequential amalgam of discoveries they'll make as they immerse themselves in this unique curriculum.

The initial year of study is devoted to issues that involve the facilitation of university-level design education and research, and the responsibilities that a university-level design educator must assume. With that stated, applicants to the MFA-DES-IS program should understand that the knowledge they will gain during this first-year experience has broad applications that extend far beyond the confines of university settings, particularly for individuals who wish to pursue careers in design project management and design research in the private sector.



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Beyond their first year, students enrolled in the MFA-DES-IS program will be immersed in learning experiences designed to help them gain useful and usable knowledge about recent theoretical and practical developments in and around Communication Design as they are challenged to work within interdisciplinary teams to identify and resolve complex, community-based problems. The program culminates with a capstone project that must be proposed, researched, designed, and evaluated by the student that incorporates select theories and models of creative processes that he or she will have learned as a means to address and to attempt to improve a specific real-world social, technological, environmental or economic situation.

Those interested in pursuing the new MFA-DES-IS degree should bear in mind that the well-established strengths of the College of Visual Arts and Design's (CVAD's) former MFA program in Communication Design will be retained in the new MFA-DES-IS program.

3. Required Academic Background

It is expected that applicants to the MFA-DES-IS program hold an accredited Bachelor's degree (minimum 120 semester credit hours), and have earned a minimum undergraduate GPA of 3.0 (3.5 is preferred). It is also expected that applicants have accrued a minimum of 2-3 years of professional experience in communication design or in a closely related discipline.

4. Application Deadlines

*February 1 for **fall** or **summer** admission;*

*October 1 for **spring** admission*

These deadlines ensure adequate processing time and that enough qualified faculty are available to effectively facilitate the application review process. Applications that are not complete for review by the faculty prior to the deadline for the intended semester of admission may be held for review the following semester. The faculty strongly suggests that all MFA-DES-IS students begin their coursework in the fall semester to ensure proper course sequencing. Students who choose to begin their pursuit of a degree in this program in the spring semester will be unable to enroll in any of the Required Major or Minor



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Required Courses during that semester; only Art History and Interdisciplinary Elective Courses will be available to them.

5. Funding Opportunities

For current information regarding scholarships, fellowships and assistantships, please visit the CVAD website at www.art.unt.edu. *Please note that Innovation Studies degree candidates may not apply for teaching assistantships until after they have successfully completed 12 graduate-level credit hours.*

The Toulouse School of Graduate Studies grants all new MFA students entering UNT in the fall semester an Academic Achievement Scholarship of \$1,000 toward funding their tuition during their first year of study *as long as these students have not yet completed 12 graduate-level credit hours prior to being admitted to the university*. Students who qualify for this award must successfully complete (i.e., earn course grades of “C” or better) a minimum of 15 credit hours over the course of their first two semesters of enrollment. This scholarship may be renewed to fund additional years of study on behalf of particular MFA candidates at the discretion of the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies.

Students who are not residents of the State of Texas and who receive a minimum financial award of \$1,000 from the university (from either a scholarship, a fellowship or an assistantship) will be eligible to receive in-state tuition.

6. Application Procedures

The process of applying to the MFA-DES-IS is two-fold. An applicant must apply to *both* the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies *and* to the Department of Design, as detailed in Steps One and Two below:

Application Step One:

***Application to the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies
(phone 940.565.2636)***



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Send the items a through c to:

The University of North Texas
Graduate Admissions
1155 Union Circle, # 305459
Denton, TX 76203
gradsch@unt.edu

- a | *Completed application form and any fee required.* Applications are available from the Graduate School or its website at www.tsgs.unt.edu. (The printed application form is available by contacting the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies School directly and is significantly shorter and much easier to complete than the online version.)
- b | *Official transcripts that document the successful completion of a Bachelor's Degree from an accredited institution of higher learning, along with all other transcripts that document successfully completed collegiate work.*
- c | *Graduate Record Examination (GRE) test scores.* There are no minimum scores to be achieved on the GRE for entry into the MFA-DES-IS program; *however*, the faculty in the Department of Design consider an applicant's scores on the GRE as a viable indicator of his or her potential to succeed in the program and beyond it, and therefore suggest that performance on this test not be taken lightly. To obtain information regarding the location of testing centers and testing dates, please visit the GRE website at www.gre.org. This helpful resources also contains study guides and sample test questions.

It takes the UNT Office of Graduate Admissions in the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies *approximately two to four weeks* to process the application materials (items a–c) it receives in response to Application Step One. If they determine that the contents in these materials meet the minimum university requirements, items a–c will be forwarded to the Department of Design, where they will be reviewed by select faculty within the Department. Items a–c will be reviewed by these faculty along with items d–g, which must be submitted directly to the Department by the applicant (for more information about this, please refer to *Application Step Two*, which immediately follows this paragraph).



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Application Step Two:

***Application to the Department of Design
(phone 940.565.3621)***

Send the following items to:

The University of North Texas
College of Visual Arts and Design
Department of Design
1155 Union Circle, # 305100
Denton, TX 76203
design@unt.edu

d | *A portfolio of work that you have designed to facilitate effective visual communications.* Your portfolio may be contained on a CD or DVD; you must include a minimum of 20 depictions of artifacts, projects or research endeavors you have completed, or you may direct the faculty to a web URL that contains these. If you choose to submit samples of your writing, include at least one recent research paper along with one to two other samples of professional or scholarly writing. If you have accrued previous university-level teaching experience, please submit up to 20 samples of work created by students who have been guided by your tutelage.

e | *A letter/statement of intent.* Please articulate what life and career objectives you hope to achieve by completing the requirements to earn a MFA-DES-IS with a concentration in Innovation Studies from UNT CVAD. This document must contain between 500 and 800 words.

f | *At least two (2) letters of recommendation.* These should be from former professors/instructors, professional supervisors or colleagues, or clients with whom you have worked closely. Each letter should articulate *why* you would be a viable candidate for the MFA-DES-IS program here. No specific recommendation form is required (or even supplied), but these letters must be submitted directly to the Department by the referee, and they should be written on their scholarly or professional letterhead.



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g | *A professional résumé.* Should list all of the applicant's relevant work experience, affiliations, etc.

Once all required admission materials are received, the faculty will review your application and use it as the basis to formulate an official admission decision.

7. Program Structures and Components

With each course counting as 3 credit hours, each candidate must successfully complete a minimum of 60 credit hours to earn the MFA-DES-IS degree. All courses taken to satisfy the curricular objectives of this degree must be numbered 5000-level or higher. The basic program structure is as follows:

Major Required Courses

6 classes; 18 credit hours

Interdisciplinary Elective Courses

4 classes; 12 credit hours

Minor Required Courses (The Design Pedagogy Sequence)

4 classes; 12 credit hours

Art History Courses

4 classes, one of which must be *AEAH 5842 | A History of Communication Design*; 12 credit hours

Practicum Courses (Interdisciplinary Team-Based, Taken as "Independent Study" Courses)

2 courses that span an entire academic year; 6 credit hours

For more information regarding the individual courses that constitute the MFA-DES-IS curriculum, please contact Professor Michael R. Gibson, Graduate Programs Coordinator: Innovation Studies, at:

michael.gibson@unt.edu.



8. The Role of the Major Professor

This Department of Design faculty member serves as the Chair of an individual MFA-DES-IS candidate's MFA advisory committee, and may provide periodic counseling to this MFA-DES-IS candidate during his or her progress through the final 36 credit hours of study in this program. This assignment is made by select Department of Design faculty in consultation with the MFA-DES-IS candidate, and is heavily influenced by the candidate's declared area of scholarly focus within the program and cannot be made without the consent of the professor.

9. The MFA-DES-IS Candidate's Degree Plan

The degree plan is a form that outlines every MFA-DES-IS candidate's course of study. It lists courses already completed, as well as courses that remain to be taken in order for these individuals to satisfy the graduation requirements necessary to earn the MFA-DES-IS degree from UNT CVAD. The degree plan must be filed with the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies through the Department of Design office *before* the graduate student completes 24 credit hours of study. A full-time faculty member from the Communication Design area of UNT CVAD (preferably a potential Major Professor) must work with the candidate to complete this form and must sign it before it is forwarded to the Department of Design office.

10. The MFA-DES-IS Candidate's Graduate Review

All MFA-DES-IS candidates are required to present their work for critical analysis and evaluation by the select Department of Design faculty (most likely from the Communication Design area) at the culmination of each academic year. This Review will occur in April or May for most of these individuals, and its results are used to determine whether individual candidates may advance within the program, or if they must repeat particular courses within it, or if they must leave the program.



11. The MFA-DES-IS P.I.L.O.T. Advisory Committee

Each MFA-DES-IS candidate must constitute this committee with a minimum of three faculty members before the end of the fourth week of the first semester during which the candidate begins his or her Problem-in-Lieu-of-Thesis (P.I.L.O.T.) project. One of these must be the candidate's Major Professor, the second must serve as a Minor Professor and the third must be a faculty member from the Department of Design. This process must be conducted in consultation with the Chair of the Department of Design and the candidate's Major Professor. This committee is *not* limited to the aforementioned three individuals: additional faculty members may also constitute it, including the Chair of the Department, one or more of the Associate Deans of CVAD, or the Dean of CVAD. Faculty members from outside of CVAD (and, if the candidate gains the approval of the Chair of the Department and the Major Professor), from outside of UNT who possess knowledge relevant to the candidate's P.I.L.O.T. topic area may serve on this committee. Adding faculty members to this committee from outside of CVAD or UNT requires the approval of the Chair of the Department and the Major Professor.

12. Admission to Candidacy

Since admission to Graduate School involves submission of materials not only from the applicant, but testing services (official GRE scores), other colleges and universities (official transcripts), and outside professionals and academic personnel (letters of recommendation), the application process is very time consuming. Applicants to the MFA-DES-IS program should allow themselves ample time prepare the array of materials necessary to meet both the application deadlines set by the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies and the Department of Design. The following are suggested milestone dates in the application process that, if met, will help keep applicants "on track" during this process (please notice that these dates occur one month prior to the *deadline* dates specified on page 3 of this document):

January 1 (for entry in the fall semester);

September 1 (for entry in the spring semester):



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These are the dates by which you should submit your graduate application form, your official printed transcripts, and your application fee to the **Toulouse School of Graduate Studies**. (On average, their personnel require the better part of a month to fully process an application and forward it to the Department of Design for review by its faculty.)

January 15 (for entry in the fall semester);

September 15 (for entry in the spring semester):

These are the dates by which you should have taken the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) so that the official scores will be received by UNT in time to be included with your application. (The Analytical Writing section is hand-graded, so receipt of these scores usually takes a minimum of two weeks.)

February 1 (for entry in the fall of summer semester);

October 1 (for entry in the spring semester):

These are the dates by which you should submit your all of the materials required by the Department of Design that must be in your file for review by their faculty. This includes your portfolio, your statement of intent, your letters of recommendation, and your resumé.

March 1 (for entry in the fall semester);

November 1 (for entry in the spring semester):

Date by which you will likely hear from the Department of Design regarding your admission status.

April 1 (for entry in the fall semester);

December 1 (for entry in the spring semester):

Date by which those who have been accepted into the program should respond in writing to the Department of Design regarding their intent to enroll in the MFA-DES-IS program.

Should your application *not* be completed by the Departmental deadline and/or by the time the faculty collect the applications submitted during a particular review period to evaluate them, the assessment of your application may be postponed, which could result in your entry into the MFA-DES-IS program being delayed. If you submit an incomplete application to either the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies or to the Department of Design, you will



be contacted concerning what materials need to be submitted to complete your application within three to five weeks of the Departmental office receiving your materials.

13. Oral Examinations

All MFA-DES-IS candidates will be subject to oral examinations as a part of the Graduate Reviews they must undergo that are mentioned in Section 10 of this document. These reviews will vary depending on the area(s) of research, professional and pedagogic interest expressed and pursued by individual candidates. These reviews will also vary depending upon what courses in the MFA-DES-IS curriculum the individual candidate has completed and may be affected by the nature of some or all of the designed projects the candidate has chosen to pursue during his or her enrollment in the program. An oral examination is also an integral part of the defense of the Problem-in-Lieu-of-Thesis for each MFA-DES-IS candidate.

14. The Problem-in-Lieu-of-Thesis (“P.I.L.O.T.”)

All MFA-DES-IS candidates must engage in a process that involves collaborating with members of an interdisciplinary research and development team that spans the final year (i.e. two semesters) of study in the program to:

one~

identify a social, technological, economic, environmental, cultural or market-based “problem” or situation that they believe they can design the means to improve, and then;

two~

engage in carefully selected and studied research methodologies to begin to gather, analyze and then utilize relevant data to fuel the invention of a means to make or re-make an artifact, system, community, process or method that they can test as a potential means to solve the problem or improve the situation they identified in step one;



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three~

test and re-test whatever they made or re-made in step two as they explore and assess multiple hypotheses, prototypical iterations and modalities for working and communicating with each other, their users or audiences and with their faculty;

four~

effectively document and present the processes that informed the evolution of their P.I.L.O.T., and the artifacts, systems communities processes or methods that were invented as a result of it.