

MFA / VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN *student handbook*

PURPOSE

The purpose of this handbook is to outline and clarify the MFA's: program of study, procedures & policies, and expectations. The document may be updated periodically. Check with the Department of Art and/or MFA Coordinator to see that you have the most recent version.

MFA PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Visual Communication Design includes: graphic design for print and web, typography, art direction, motion and interactive design, illustration, photo-media and other specializations. Designers analyze, plan and create visual solutions to communication problems.

The *MFA in Visual Communication and Design* at JSU is a terminal degree that allows students to concentrate in one specific discipline under the umbrella of Visual Communication Design (for example, web design or illustration) OR to complete individually crafted interdisciplinary programs of study also under the umbrella of Visual Communication Design. The course of study integrates both research and studio components and is designed to assist students in developing a professional portfolio by the completion of their degree. The 60 hour MFA program, with a recommended completion time of three years, also prepares graduates to teach at the University level.

Both scholarships and teaching assistant positions are available to qualified applicants.

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

Duties of a graduate assistant may include assisting with faculty research, classroom instruction duties as well as other academic support, and departmental operational needs. Although positions will be filled based on individual applicant's skills, qualification, and departmental needs, applicants should convey their preferred position type to the MFA Coordinator. Qualified applicants should expect to be interviewed as part of the appointment procedure.

Applicants wishing to teach undergraduate courses will be asked to shadow a faculty member for a semester prior to teaching. Teaching GAs will be mentored by a full-time faculty member. Teaching GAs should administer student evaluations at the end of the semester as well as document student work and assignments.

Graduate Assistantships are awarded on a semester-by-semester basis. Interested students should apply through the Graduate Studies Office online application form each semester. The Graduate Studies website lists the positions available each semester. The Department of Art will send a call for applicants and note the deadlines for application each semester. See the Graduate Office's rules and regulations on GAs. www.jsu.edu/graduate/gradassist.html

The Graduate Studies Office requires semesterly evaluations of each GA by a faculty member. These reviews are accessible for review by both on and off campus persons.

MFA CAPSTONE COMPONENT

JSU follows the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) guidelines for the MFA Capstone component:

The MFA candidate is required to present a final body of work showing professional competence in studio art or design. While such a presentation may be supported by a written document, such a document in itself may not constitute the final body of work. (NASAD Handbook, 2012/13, pg 128)

The JSU MFA in Visual Communication Design Capstone Project is referred to as a thesis. The thesis consists of a visual body of work (thesis project) supported by a written document (thesis paper).

COURSE SEQUENCING *(see also the MFA curriculum sheet)*

Students should plan to enroll in **ART 640: Contemporary Media/Communication Studio** during the first semester of study. This course is required and typically only offered in the Fall.

Students should also plan to enroll in **ART 625: Design Research, Readings and Seminar** during the first semester of study. This course is required and typically only offered in the Fall.

Students should plan to enroll in **Design Studio/Advanced Design Studio** during each of the first four semesters however **ART 602: Visiting Designer/Artist Project** and **Special Topics** in Design/Art could fill these slots where relevant.

Students should plan to enroll in **ART 641: Traditional Communication Studio** during the second semester of study. This course is required and typically only offered in the Spring.

ART 605: Graduate History of Graphic Design is required. This course is typically only offered in the Spring.

ART 643 and **ART 644** are required. Students should enroll in **ART 643: Design Studio Exhibition Research I** in the second to last semester and **ART 644: Design Studio Exhibition Research II** in the final semester of study. These two semesters worth of classes are the capstone, thesis preparation classes. The student's main thesis advisor will be most likely be the instructor of record.

Enrollment in a **Graduate Independent Study** course requires a signature from the Instructor of Record and the MFA Coordinator. In addition, students must provide a formal outline of the course content and objectives for the department records.

Students must have a minimum of 39 studio credit hours (30 must be in Visual Communication Design studios/9 could be general art studios). Students must have a minimum of 9 Art Academic credit hours (Art History and Research/Theory). It is highly recommended that students have a minimum of 6 elective credit hours (any department outside of Art; 400G and 500 level courses are allowable). *Note that the minimum credit hour requirements total 54 hours, students may use the last 6 hours in ANY of the Studio, Art Academic or Elective areas.*

See also JSU's Graduate Bulletin on GPA requirements.

SEMESTER REVIEWS

At the end of each semester, students will present a formal summary of research and creative work in an illustrated digital presentation to all members of the MFA Committee and MFA students. Students should show all work from the current semester. (Reviews are not conducted during Summer terms; any work completed in the Summer semesters should be included in Fall reviews.)

The format is a ten-minute Power Point (or similar) presentations, followed by a five minute Q&A. Verbal feedback on the work may be given following these presentations.

Shortly after the reviews students will receive a written summary that outlines faculty response and student progress.

Semester reviews are mandatory for all full-time MFA students; however, candidates in their final semester will not be required to present a semester review.

CANDIDACY REVIEWS

At the midway point in the program students are required to participate in a Candidacy Review. The review will typically be held towards the end of the student's third semester (OR the student will have completed/be enrolled in 30 hours +/-).

The purpose of the Candidacy (or Midpoint) Review is for students to present their skills as a designer as well as an Initial Thesis Proposal to the MFA Committee, Department Head, and peers. The student's job is to convince the committee that their design skills are professionally viable and that their thesis topic has merit and that the student has the capabilities to execute it.

Contents of the Candidacy Review:

All studio work: Students should provide high quality images (print or screen) of AT LEAST one project from every class taken in the program, including work from classes in progress.

Initial Thesis Proposal: Students should provide a typed document that makes the proposed thesis topic clear and outlines investigations.

The Initial Thesis Proposal might cover (where relevant):

- a) Background information about the topic area and any insights or facts that support the student's ideas.
- b) The problem(s) identified through investigations of the topic.
- c) An audience that is related to the specific problem.
- d) Influences and related topics/projects. Could include images/blogs/websites/etc.
- e) The specific goals hoped to accomplish related to the topic.
- f) Opportunities for design to address the identified audience, problems and outcomes that have been identified.
- g) Any pertinent information about the student and how he/she is connected to the topic.
- h) Related Literature.

Bear in mind: A good proposal does not attempt to determine the outcome of the work you will do during the remainder of the program. Rather, it sets out the fundamental issues, concerns, ideas, questions, and influences that are the driving force behind the work/research in which you have been engaged and which shape your activity and production in the thesis development.

Outcomes of the Candidacy Review:

- 1) A student may be *passed unconditionally* in which case he/she will advance to candidacy and be invited to pursue a MFA Graduate Project.
- 2) A student may be *passed with minor provisions* in which case he/she will advance to candidacy status after completion of minor provisions.
- 3) A student may be placed on *probationary status* and asked to go through the Candidacy Review again. Expectations and deadlines will be communicated to the student in this case. The Candidacy Review would be repeated the following semester of enrollment.
- 4) The faculty may *deny advancement to candidacy status* in which case a student would not be permitted to continue in the MFA program at JSU.

Two unsuccessful or probationary status Candidacy Reviews would result in a denial of student advancement in the MFA program at JSU.

THESIS COMMITTEES

Composition

Graduate students will be evaluated by a Thesis Committee whose membership will vary from student-to-student. The thesis committee should consist of at least three people, one of whom is the thesis advisor. At least one member of the committee should be full time Art/Art History faculty at JSU. At least one member of the committee should be on the Art Department's MFA Committee and/or be a Visual Communication Design faculty member. One member of the committee can fulfill several of the criteria (i.e., be the thesis advisor, full time faculty member, and member of the MFA Committee, etc.).

One member of the committee could be someone from outside of the JSU Art Department (i.e., could be a full-time or adjunct faculty affiliated with the College, University or community). This outside member should have expertise in art (e.g., Art Historian, Critic, Curator, Artist, Professor) or have notable expertise in a field that the thesis addresses. It is preferred for this person to have a graduate degree. The person should be able to approach the work impartially (i.e., is not a personal friend or relation to the student). A faculty member from a JSU department other than the Art department is acceptable.

It is the graduate student's responsibility to recruit the thesis committee members. The MFA Coordinator will help coordinate recruiting JSU Art Department committee members if necessary, but locating an outside member is the sole responsibility of the student.

Thesis Committee Timing

After successful completion of the Candidacy Review—at the beginning of the 4th semester of study (OR 30 +/- hours completed) the student should present the Thesis Advisor with a proposed list of committee members (all of whom should have accepted the responsibility). When necessary the list should include an attachment

(Thesis Committee Timing Cont'd)

that summarizes the outside thesis committee member's qualifications (e.g., bio, resume, and contact information). After receiving approval from the Thesis Advisor the student should present the committee member list to the MFA Committee Chair for approval.

The thesis committee members should be familiar with the student's work prior to the Thesis defense. It is suggested that the committee members should have 2-3 studio visits per semester at a minimum with the student once the Thesis Committee is formed. It is the student's responsibility to arrange for these meetings. Meeting times should be mutually agreed upon. Although it is beneficial for the students to meet with the entire their entire Thesis Committee, it may not always be attainable. Students are encouraged to meet with their entire committee at least once a semester.

In the case of emergency, members of the MFA Committee and/or full-time faculty can substitute for Thesis Committee members who are unable to attend the thesis defense.

A refined Thesis Proposal, taking into account suggestions from the Candidacy Review, should be given to the student's Thesis Committee for final approval by the end of the 4th semester and prior to enrollment in ART 643: Design Studio Exhibition Research I.

THESIS SHOW

The creative body of work is the main component of the MFA Capstone requirement. Students are expected to create and install a public exhibition of this creative work. It is the student's responsibility to schedule a venue for exhibition in the local area. While JSU galleries are an option for exhibition, they are not guaranteed to be available. As part of the exhibition—and in addition to the Thesis Defense—students should have a reception that includes a public presentation or talk about the work.

THESIS PAPER

While the following is a suggested framework for papers, other alternatives may be more appropriate for the student's study. Should students have questions regarding the thesis paper, they should contact the main Thesis Advisor or another Graduate Faculty member with thesis advising experience.

Graduate Thesis Content:

(Thesis papers MIGHT include the following)

The topic and its setting

Statement of the topic *(could be a thesis statement, hypothesis, argument)*

Review of related literature

Related influences

Extended artist statement

Selected bibliography

Definition of terms *(What are the relevant terms and how are you using them; make sure their use is consistent throughout)*

Justification for relevance of study to visual communication

Justification for relevance of study to personal development

Additionally for more qualitative & quantitative research based projects:

Sub-problems *(Smaller research problems within the overall study; these are not simple methodological decisions you must make but problems that are truly researchable)*

Delimitations *(The limits of the study; what is included and what is not included)*

Assumptions *(What things do you take as given?)*

Studies that suggest a method or content relevant to the topic

Studies that reveal significant individuals, movements, or theories that are relevant to the topic

Studies that place the research in historical context

Studies that provide comparisons useful in evaluating your own work

Methodology

Methods for gathering information (visual and/or verbal)

Methods for analyzing information (visual and/or verbal)

Methods for generating solutions (visual and/or verbal)

Methods for evaluation (may be a list of criteria)

Importance of study

May be arranged topically to indicate how material is to be used

Writing and citation style should adhere to the Chicago Manual of Style.

Thesis Paper Review

A proposed final draft of the Thesis Paper should be circulated to the Thesis Committee at least two weeks before the thesis show opens.

ARCHIVING THE THESIS

The student is responsible for submitting an archive of the thesis show and paper to the Art Department. The archive should be in the form of:

- The thesis paper printed on archival paper. Attention should be paid to the presentation of the book and its materials and binding.
- A CD-ROM (label with student's name and the graduation term and year) that contains:
 - + Approximately 20 images from the show. These images should document each individual work as well as images giving a view of the show's layout. The images should be saved in both RGB and CMYK in LZW .tiff format and be 300 dpi (sized as large as possible). The Department may use your images for recruitment purposes.
 - + An Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) version of the written thesis.
- Optionally (and in addition to the CD-ROM), a DVD containing video documentation of the thesis show.
- There should be no loose materials and all items (including the CD-ROM documentation) should be affixed to or incorporated in the bound book with appropriate sleeves or hubs for DVD/CDs.

THESIS DEFENSE

It is the responsibility of the graduate student to schedule a mutually agreed upon time for the Thesis Defense to take place. Except in unusual circumstances, this Thesis Defense will take place during the thesis show's exhibition period. It should be planned for the defense to take approximately one hour. The Department Head has the right to join the Thesis Defense proceedings and take part in it as a peer to the Thesis Committee members.

The Defense has these stages:

- 1) Short presentation of the show by the MFA candidate
- 2) Questions from the thesis committee & answers by the MFA candidate
- 3) Comments from the thesis committee regarding the work
- 4) Optional response from the MFA candidate

Upon the completion of the above stages, the candidate will be asked to leave the room and the Thesis Committee will determine the acceptability of the Thesis Show & Paper. It is expected that the committee will determine the outcome through consensus. If a consensus cannot be achieved, then the determination will be put to a vote. In case of a tie, the MFA Coordinator would act as a tie-breaker. If the MFA Coordinator is on the committee, the Department Head would act as tie-breaker.

The possible outcomes for the show are:

- 1) The show is **accepted** as fulfilling the requirements for the MFA Thesis Show
- 2) The show is **not accepted** as fulfilling the requirements for the MFA Thesis Show

The possible outcomes for the paper are:

- 1) The paper is **accepted** as fulfilling the requirements for the MFA Thesis Paper
- 2) The paper is **accepted** as fulfilling the requirements for the MFA Thesis Paper
pending minor edits
- 3) The paper is **not accepted** as fulfilling the requirements for the MFA Thesis Paper

Procedure for Unacceptable Thesis Paper

If the thesis paper is unacceptable the MFA student is expected to rewrite it and to submit it to the Thesis Advisor and Art Department MFA Committee during the first week of the following term. The MFA Committee and Thesis Advisor will determine whether the new paper is acceptable using the consensus/voting procedures outlined above.

If the paper is still not acceptable, the Thesis Committee will determine (in consultation with the Department Head) how to proceed. A possible outcome is for the Committee and Department Head to determine that the candidate does not and will not qualify to receive a MFA degree from JSU.

Procedure for Unacceptable Thesis Show

If the Thesis Show is unacceptable, the MFA student will be required to mount a new Thesis Show in the next term. It is the candidate's responsibility to find a venue that is deemed acceptable by the Thesis Advisor and Art Department MFA Committee.

It is expected that the same Thesis Committee will reconvene for a second Thesis Defense. In the case that Committee members are unable to attend (or choose not to), members of the Art Department MFA Committee will substitute. It is the candidate's responsibility to determine whether substitute Thesis Committee members are required. The new Thesis Committee must be approved by the Department Head at least four weeks prior to the show's opening.

The Thesis Defense will proceed as per above. If the Thesis Show is still not acceptable, the Thesis Advisor should prepare a report detailing the reasons. This report should be circulated among the Thesis Committee members. Committee members have the right to append comments to the report. The report and comments will be sent to the candidate, the Art Department MFA Committee, and the Art Department Head. The MFA Committee will determine (in consultation with the Department Head) how to proceed. A possible outcome is for the Committee and Department Head to determine that the candidate does not and will not qualify to receive a MFA degree from JSU.

DESCRIPTION OF ROLES

Main Thesis Advisor

The person primarily responsible for:

- Approval of Thesis Committee Members.
- Approval of the Thesis Proposal (along with Thesis Committee).
- The regular advising of the student's thesis development for the duration of that project.
- 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 second to last 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 student's semester.
- The student's grading in ART 643/644 in consultation and with the general consent of other advisors.
- Responsible for relaying Final Thesis/Creative Project 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 JSU Art Department faculty member.

Associate Thesis 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/Creative Project 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.
- 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.

Grammarians

- A grammarian reviews and comments on the student's 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.

MFA Committee Chair

- The person may or may not be one of the Advisors or Readers, but remains at least an ex officio member during the final 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 Semester Reviews, Candidacy Reviews and can assist in Oral Review (defense) scheduling.
- Responsible for providing 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 Committee 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).