

How do I apply for admission into the MFA program in Design with a concentration in design research

Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Design with a Concentration in design research

This program (henceforth in this document referred to as the MFA-DES-DR) has been designed to advance the academic or professional careers of graduate students who have accrued at least three years of professional experience in communication design, industrial design, interaction design, user experience design, fashion design or interior design. This curriculum is designed to immerse MFA candidates in learning situations wherein they are challenged to invent new means and methods that can potentially fuel the development of new processes, products and systems that have the power to positively transform:

- public policy,
- how emerging or extant technologies can better meet the needs of particular users
- social and cultural practices
- micro- and macro-economic situations
- how particular environmental resources are harvested and utilized

The learning experiences that will be facilitated as these students fulfill the requirements for this MFA will prepare them to create or assume essential positions as leaders, collaborators, provocateurs, and empowered advocates for change in the real world. The active approach to learning that informs this curriculum emphasizes real-world problem identification and problem solving supported by empathy building, select types of argumentative reasoning and iterative thinking.

Students who emerge from the MFA-DES-DR program will be prepared to successfully pursue careers as design strategists, managers and project-based collaborators in the corporate world, the non-profit sector, or in the arena of university-level design education. 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. Graduates from this program who wish to pursue careers in the private sector will be well prepared to identify, formulate, operate, gather data from, analyze, evaluate and finally utilize the results derived from design research to catalyze innovation on behalf of a wide variety of clients, audiences and user groups.

What follows is a listing of national and international consulting firms and corporations that are actively utilizing applications of design research theory and methods to better serve their clients. Most of these organizations employ sets of people who possess diverse educational and professional backgrounds; many of them now operate in-house design research teams or offices.

frogDesign

Rackspace

Firstwater

Institute for Creative Integration

IDEO

Lincoln Financial Group

Qualcomm

Centralis

Huge

SC Johnson

Jump Associates

Nurun

Leo Burnett

Chamberlain

Tti North America

Dubberly Design Office

Greater Good Studio

Sapient

The Doblin Group

Ecco Design

The Nielsen Norman Group

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**MFA-DES-DR
Coursework**

The MFA-DES-DR is geared toward professionals who have accrued experience in one of the professional design disciplines mentioned in the opening paragraph of this document. Graduate students in the MFA-DES-DR program will begin their learning experiences by developing and sharing knowledge of the iterative processes required to invent, make and disseminate not only effectively designed artifacts, products and systems, but processes and new ways for doing and using things, and for analyzing how doing and using things affects social, technological, economic and political change. As they do this, they will gain new knowledge in areas such as ethnography, information management, strategic business planning, user experience design, service design and a select variety of research methodologies that have evolved both within and outside of design to inform what has recently become known as “design research.”

The MFA-DES-DR program requires full-time enrollment (9 to 12 graduate-level credit hours per 15-week semester) and transpires over the course of two to 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-DR 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.

Beyond their first year, students enrolled in the MFA-DES-DR 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 design research 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.

**Required Academic
Background**

It is expected that applicants to the MFA-DES-DR program hold an accredited Bachelor’s degree (minimum 120 semester credit hours), and have earned a minimum undergraduate GPA of 3.0 (3.3 is preferred) from an institution of higher learning accredited by at least one of the following regional accreditors:[§]

*§Please note that so-called “online undergraduate degrees” are generally **not** accepted as adequate preparation for either of the Master’s Level programs in Applied Design Research.*

The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
The New England Association of Schools and Colleges
The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
The Northwest Accreditation Commission
The Western Association of Schools and Colleges
The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

Application Deadlines

*December 12, 2012 for spring 2013 admission;
February 1, 2013 for fall 2013 admission if pursuing GATS funding†
March 22, 2013 for fall 2013 admission if not pursuing GATS funding;*

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**Application Deadlines
(Continued)**

†GATS is a UNT acronym for “Graduate Assisted Teaching Scholarship.” Individual graduate students in the design research MFA program may obtain GATS...

These deadlines ensure adequate processing time and that enough qualified faculty are available for 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-DR students begin their coursework in the fall semester to ensure proper course sequencing, although arrangements to begin this course sequence at the beginning of the spring semester can be made in select cases.

Funding Opportunities

...funding that pays for a portion (between 25% and 75%) of their tuition and fees in a given academic year in return for fulfilling either a temporary teaching position in the College of Visual Art and Design’s Department of Design or Core Program (required of all first-year undergraduates), OR for fulfilling a Research Assistantship on behalf of the Design Research Center or the design research program. GATS are awarded competitively, and levels of available funding fluctuate from year to year.

For current information regarding a wide variety of scholarships, fellowships and assistantships, please visit the CVAD website at <http://art.unt.edu/fellowships-assistantships.html>, or the “fellowships, assistantships and scholarships” page at the UNT Toulouse Graduate School website at <http://tsgs.unt.edu/graduatelife/fellowships-assistantships-and-scholarships>.

Teaching Assistantships. Please note that design research degree candidates may not usually apply for teaching assistantships until after they have successfully completed 12 graduate-level credit hours. With that stated, please also note that MFA candidates enrolled in the Design with a concentration in design research program are eligible to apply for a Teaching Assistantship in the Department of Design—in the communication design, interior design and fashion design areas—after they have successfully completed ADES 5536 (University Citizenship) and ADES 5534 (Design Pedagogy). MFA candidates who wish to teach undergraduate courses in UNT CVAD’s Core Program during their graduate experiences here MUST successfully complete ART 5700 (Seminar in University Art Teaching) during their first semester of study within UNT CVAD (this counts as the “Free Elective” course in their degree plans), or complete both ADES 5536 and ADES 5534.

If you’re interested in being an MFA candidate in the design research program who is eligible for GATS funding, please submit your application materials to us prior to February 1, 2013.

Research Assistantships. (In most cases^{††}) MFA candidates enrolled in the Design with a concentration in design research program become eligible to apply for Research Assistantships once they have successfully completed ADES 5520 (Design Research Methods) and ADES 5530 (Design Research Theory). Research Assistantships become available as select aspects or portions of design research projects that UNT CVAD Design Research Center (DRC) faculty—Owens, Gibson, Wong Kung Fong and Carlson—are leading deem them necessary to be filled by select MFA and MA candidates enrolled in the design research programs. As these positions are most often funded at least in part by grantors, foundation funders or donors to the DRC, as well as by various Dallas/Fort Worth/Denton-based organizations that collaborate with the DRC, their availability and level of funding fluctuates. The DRC faculty consistently makes concerted efforts to match the interests and strengths of particular MFA and MA candidates from the design research programs with the formulations and operations of particular design research projects to fill available Research Assistantships.

††Some MFA candidates enter the design research program with significant applied design research experience that they’ve accrued working in various private sector design firms, agencies, or consultancies. These candidates may be deemed eligible for Research Assistantships prior to taking ADES 5520 and ADES 5530.

Academic Achievement Scholarships. New MFA students may be eligible to receive \$1,000 Academic Achievement Scholarships to help finance their first year of study. This award qualifies a student for in-state tuition rates and is renewable for a second year if the student makes satisfactory progress in his/her program during the first year. Contact the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies for further details.

Tuition-Waiver Scholarships. The College of Visual Arts and Design offers thirteen tuition-waiver fellowships annually for students enrolled in terminal degree programs (PhD and MFA). These fellowships are supplemented by teaching assistantships or teaching fellowships. Consult the Department of Design office for more information about these or other awards.

Application Procedures

The process of applying to the MFA in Design with a Concentration in design research 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 Procedures (Continued)

Application Step One:
Application to the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies
(phone 940.565.2636)

Send the following items 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 (reference the list at the bottom of page 2) of higher learning.*
- c | *Graduate Record Examination (GRE) test scores.* There are no minimum scores that must be achieved on the GRE for entry into the MFA in Design program; however, the faculty in the Department of Design consider an applicant's scores on the GRE as another indicator of potential success in this program, and therefore *recommend* that applicants to this program score at least 150 on the verbal reasoning portion of this exam, and at least a 4.0 on its analytical writing portion. *Please understand: not achieving these scores is will not automatically disqualify any applicant from being accepted into the design research MFA program.* For information regarding the locations of testing centers and testing dates, etc., visit the GRE website at www.gre.org. This is a very helpful website that contains study guides and sample test questions.

It takes the UNT Office of Graduate Admissions in the Toulouse Graduate School (TGS) approximately two to four weeks to process the application materials it receives in response to *Application Step One*, requirements a–c. If TGS asserts that the application materials they receive on behalf of a particular MFA-DES-DR candidate meet the minimum university requirements, the applicant's materials are forwarded to the Department of Design, where they will then be reviewed by select members of its faculty, along with the materials submitted by the applicant directly to the Department (please refer to *Application Step Two* for more information about this process, which immediately follows this paragraph).

Application Step Two:
Application to the Department of Design
(phone 940.565.3621)

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**Application Procedures
(Continued)**

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 76203-5017
design@unt.edu

d | A portfolio of work that you have created or collaborated to create in one or more of these areas:

- ✿ visual communication design (as manifest in the design of publications, brand identity systems, packaging systems, print, broadcast or web-based advertising campaigns, typographic systems, examples of information design—charts, maps and diagrams—, the design of books, environmental graphic systems, signage systems, etc.)
- ✿ interaction design/IxD (as manifest in the design of web-based interfaces, digital products, environments, services and systems, mobile technology applications, virtual mapping and wayfinding systems, visually based data retrieval systems, etc.)
- ✿ industrial design (as manifest in the design of consumer products, automotive or other types of human transport systems, usability systems, ergonomic studies and systems, etc.)
- ✿ interior design (as manifest in the design or the supervision of design of interior spaces that positively affects a wide range of human activities, such as living, playing, working, shopping, educating children, caring for the sick or injured, etc.)
- ✿ user experience design/UxD (as manifest in decision-making processes that ensure that the needs of particular groups of users or audiences are met or anticipated in all aspects of their experiences with and perceptions of a whole system of products or services)
- ✿ fashion design (as manifest in applying knowledge of aesthetics, materials, and apparel manufacturing processes, and synthesizing these with specific cultural and social belief systems to affect the appearance and functionality of clothing and accessories)

Your portfolio may be contained on a CD or DVD, or you may direct the admissions committee to its presentation on a website or other online resource; you must include a minimum of 20 depictions of artifacts, projects or research endeavors you have completed. You may also choose to submit samples of your writing to augment your portfolio; if you choose to do this, please 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 an MFA-DES-DR here at UNT CVAD. This document must

^{†††}Professional writing can include advertising copywriting, writing published in scholarly journals or trade publications, writing published in the popular press, or writing published on well-vetted websites and blogs. A website or blog that is produced, written and edited only by the applicant is NOT considered a well-vetted resource by the admissions committee.

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**Application Procedures
(Continued)**

be between 500 and 800 words in length. Write it in a manner that articulates how your immersion in the MFA-DES-DR curriculum might help you attain particular career- and life-path goals.

f | *At least two (2) letters of recommendation.* These should be written by former professors/ instructors, professional supervisors or colleagues, or clients with whom you have worked closely. The admissions committee suggests that the applicant seeks letters of recommendation from individuals that the applicant has known for at least a year. Each letter of recommendation should address *why* the writer believes that the applicant would be a viable candidate for the MFA-DES-DR program. No specific recommendation form is required, but these letters must be submitted directly to the Department of Design by the reference, and they should be written on their scholarly or professional letterhead.

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

**Department of Design
Suggested Admissions
Timeline**

Once all required admissions materials are received, the admissions committee will review each applicant's application and use it as the basis to formulate an official admission decision. Please note: the admissions committee reserves the right NOT to review incomplete packets of application materials.

Since admission to Graduate School involves the submission of materials not only from the applicant, but from testing services (official GRE scores), other colleges and universities (official transcripts), and from outside professionals (letters of recommendation), the application process is somewhat time consuming. Applicants should allow significant time to allow the application process to operate within the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies and within the Department of Design. The following are suggested dates to keep applicants on track:

December 18, 2012 (if applying for entry in the spring of 2013);

February 1, 2013 (if applying for entry in the fall of 2013 with the potential for GATS funding);

March 22, 2012 (if applying for entry in the fall of 2013 without GATS funding).

These are the dates by which you should submit graduate application form, official printed transcripts, and application fee to the Toulouse School of Graduate Studies. (On average, the Graduate School takes one full month to fully process an application and forward it to the department for review by the faculty in the Design Department.)

October 26, 2012 (if applying for entry in the spring of 2013);

March 1, 2013 (if applying for entry in the fall of 2013).

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 scores usually takes a minimum of 2 weeks.) *Please note:* these dates are *recommended* dates for completing the GRE, not *required* dates. Some students delay taking the GRE until they are within 30 days of beginning their studies, and some students delay taking the GRE until after they have completed their first semester's array of at least three courses. MFA candidates must take the GRE prior to beginning their second semester of study.

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**Department of Design
Suggested Admissions
Timeline (Continued)**

November 30, 2012 (if applying for entry in the spring of 2013);

April 19, 2013 (if applying for entry in the fall of 2013).

All required materials must be in your file for review by Department of Design faculty by this date. This includes your writing samples, your portfolio (in print, online or other digitized form), letters of recommendation, statement of intent, resumé and the forwarded application packet from the Graduate School.

December 21, 2013 (for entry in the spring semester of 2013);

May 24, 2013 (for entry in the fall semester of 2013).

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

February 1, 2013 (for entry in the spring semester of 2013);

June 14, 2013 (for entry in the fall semester of 2013).

Date by which you must notify the Department of Design of your intent to enroll *in writing*.

The earlier you apply, the greater your chances for securing scholarship and/or fellowship funding to support your MFA-DES-DR graduate experience become.

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-DR 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.

**Program Structure:
Sequence of Courses**

With each course counting as 3 credit hours, each candidate must successfully complete a minimum of 60 credit hours to earn the MFA-DES-DR 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 (a.k.a. “the design research core sequence”)

4 classes; 12 credit hours (ADES 5520, ADES 5530, ADES 5522, ADES 5526)

Applied Design Research Courses (a.k.a. “the applied design research sequence”)

3 classes; 9 credit hours (ADES 5521, ADES 5523, ADES 5525)

Interdisciplinary Elective Courses

3 classes; 9 credit hours (all of these must be earned from courses taken within one UNT Department)

The Design Pedagogy Sequence

3 classes; 9 credit hours (ADES 5534, ADES 5536, ADES 5538)

Art History Courses (all must have “AEAH” prefixes)

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

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Program Structure: Sequence of Courses (Continued)	<p>Practicum Courses (during which a design research project is formulated, operated, tested, analyzed, evaluated and reported upon in a thesis document)</p> <p>2 courses that span an entire academic year; 6 credit hours (ADES 5546 and ADES 5548)</p> <p>A “Free Elective” course</p> <p>1 class; 3 credit hours</p> <p><i>For more information regarding the individual courses that constitute the MFA-DES-DR curriculum, please contact Associate Professor Michael R. Gibson, Graduate Programs Coordinator: design research, at: michael.gibson@unt.edu.</i></p>
The Role of the Major Professor	<p>This Department of Design faculty member serves as the Chair of an individual MFA-DES-DR candidate’s MFA advisory committee, and may provide periodic counseling to this MFA-DES-DR candidate during his or her progress through the final 30 credit hours of study in this program. This assignment is made by select Department of Design faculty in consultation with the MFA-DES-DR 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.</p>
The MFA-DES-DR Candidate’s Degree Plan	<p>The degree plan is a form that outlines every MFA-DES-DR 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-DR 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 18 credit hours of study. A full-time faculty member from the Department of Design 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.</p>
The MFA-DES-DR Candidate’s Graduate Reviews	<p>All MFA-DES-DR candidates are required to present their work for critical analysis and evaluation by the select Department of Design faculty at the culmination of each semester. This Review will occur in December and again in 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.</p>
The MFA-DES-DR Practicum/Thesis Advisory Committee	<p>Each MFA-DES-DR candidate must constitute this committee with a minimum of three faculty members before the end of the sixth week of the first semester during which the candidate begins his or her Practicum/Thesis project. One of these faculty members must be the candidate’s Major Professor, the second must serve as a Minor Professor and the third can be a faculty member from the Department of Design, or, as necessary, and with the approval of the Major Professor, can be a full-time faculty member from a UNT Department outside of Design or even a full-time faculty member from an institution beyond UNT. This may be desirable in cases where expertise from beyond Design becomes necessary to inform and evaluate a given candidate’s scholarly endeavors during his/her Practicum/Thesis experience. 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</p>

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**The MFA-DES-DR
Practicum/Thesis
Advisory Committee
(Continued)**

of CVAD, as well as UNT full-time faculty members from UNT Departments outside of Design or from an institution beyond UNT. 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.

**The MFA-DES-DR
Practicum/Thesis
Experience**

All MFA-DES-DR candidates must engage in a process that spans the final year (i.e. two semesters) of their studies in the program to:

one~

identify a social, technological, economic, environmental, cultural or market-based “problem” or situation that they believe they can suggest or 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;

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, the user groups or audiences they have pledged to work on behalf of, and with their faculty;

four~

effectively document and present the processes that informed the evolution of their Practicum/Thesis experiences, and the artifacts, systems communities processes or methods that were invented or affected as a result of it.

FIN.