



**MFA in Design Criticism  
School Of Visual Arts**

For more information  
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**ABOUT D-CRIT**

The MFA in Design Criticism at the School of Visual Arts is an innovative two-year program that trains students to research, analyze, and evaluate design and its social and environmental implications. Students are taught by some of the best design writers and thinkers of our time, including “Studio 360” host and author Kurt Andersen, MoMA’s design curator Paola Antonelli, Pentagram partner and co-founder of Design Observer, Michael Bierut, former editor of *I.D. Magazine* Ralph Caplan, *Metropolis* contributing editor Karrie Jacobs and architecture critic Philip Nobel. The program is chaired by Alice Twemlow and co-founded by Steven Heller.

**PROGRAM OUTLINE**

The SVA MFA in Design Criticism—the only one of its kind in the United States—seeks to cultivate design criticism as a discipline and contribute to public discourse with new writing and thinking that is imaginative, historically informed and socially accountable. Drawing on the broadest possible definition of design, the curriculum includes graphic, web and product design, as well as fashion, urban planning and networked systems. The course of study couples a theoretical framework with significant opportunities for practical experience. In providing the tools for researching, analyzing, evaluating and chronicling all aspects of design, students will prepare for careers as design critics, journalists, editors, curators, educators and design managers.

**STUDENTS**

We welcome students from a range of academic backgrounds whose diverse perspectives and experiences enrich the debate. The program is equally well suited to designers, who want to hone their skills in writing and critical thinking, as it is to journalists and writers, who wish to deepen their understanding of design. Students learn skills and techniques for the uncovering of data, the development of a story and for communicating with different audiences. The two-year program places significant emphasis on the practical application of the many methodologies it teaches. Students produce tangible documents of their critical practice, such as books, blogs, documentaries, course syllabi, conferences and exhibitions.

It’s an exciting time to be involved in design criticism; Students of this program will be instrumental in shaping its formats, directing its priorities and negotiating the ways it is encountered by its many publics.

**PROGRAM STRUCTURE**

The focus of the first year of study is threefold: on design as subject matter, on criticism as a literary genre and on the range of tools with which to practice design criticism. The second year offers the opportunity for specialization both in subject matter and format. Students participate in medium-specific workshops devoted to topics such as producing a radio program or documentary, curating an exhibition, or editing a magazine or blog. They then research and develop a large-scale thesis project that must include a substantial written component, and which may be realized in any format.

The program culminates in an annual public conference, conceived and organized by graduating students, in which they present papers based on their theses, alongside professional design critics and thinkers. Students are required to complete and present the thesis research, which must be reviewed and approved by the thesis committee and the department chair, in order to be eligible for degree conferral.

Degree candidates must successfully complete 64 credits, including all required courses, with a cumulative grade point average of 3.0. A residency of two academic years is required.



## CURRICULUM

### First Year Courses

#### Fall Semester

Architecture and Urban Design  
Criticism  
Design History  
The Critical Imperative  
Urban Curation  
Radio and Podcast Workshop  
Lecture Series

#### Spring Semester

Print Meets the Web/  
Blogging about Design  
Exhibition and Collection  
Curation  
Researching Design  
Criticism Lab  
Thesis Development  
Reading Design  
Lecture Series

### Second Year Courses

#### Fall Semester

Thesis Consultation  
Cultural Theory Meets Design  
Magazines Under the  
Microscope/The Role of the  
Magazine Critic  
Reviewing a Design Exhibition  
Typologies  
Lecture Series

#### Spring Semester

Thesis Production  
The Longest (and Heaviest)  
Form: The Design Book  
Design Criticism Conference Lab  
Design Studio Visits/  
Interviewing Techniques  
Restaurant Design Review  
Lecture Series

## PROGRAM FACULTY

Alice Twemlow, *program chair and design writer*  
Steven Heller, *program co-founder and The New York Times columnist*

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Kurt Andersen, *co-creator and host of PRI's "Studio 360"*

Paola Antonelli, *curator in the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art*

Michael Bierut, *co-founder of the online design magazine, Design Observer*

Akiko Busch, *design essayist and contributor to The New York Times Sunday regional section*

Ralph Caplan, *former editor-in-chief at I.D. Magazine*

Andrea Codrington, *design writer and editor*

Michael Eng, *philosophy professor*

Russell Flinchum, *design historian*

Janet Froelich, *creative director of The New York Times Magazine and T: The New York Times Style Magazine*

Emily Gordon, *managing editor at Print magazine*

Karrie Jacobs, *contributing editor at Metropolis magazine*

Alexandra Lange, *journalist and architectural historian*

Julie Lasky, *editor-in-chief of I.D. Magazine*

Elaine Louie, *assistant to the editor, House and Home section of The New York Times*

Matilda McQuaid, *deputy curatorial director at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum*

Leital Molad, *senior producer for PRI's "Studio 360"*

Philip Nobel, *columnist for Metropolis magazine*

Phil Patton, *automotive design writer for The New York Times*

Karen Stein, *writer, editor, and architectural consultant*

Patricia Juncosa Vecchierini, *curatorial assistant in the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art*

For more information, please visit our website at <http://dcrit.sva.edu>

## FAQs

### How do I apply?

Admission to the program is by online application, the submission of required documents, and an interview. Candidates are encouraged to discuss their application with the department. Detailed directions can be found in the Apply section of the D-Crit Web site (<http://dcrit.sva.edu>). Short-listed candidates will be interviewed in person or by telephone.

### What qualifications must I have?

A bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university is necessary in order to enroll in an MFA program at the School of Visual Arts.

### Do international students need to take an English proficiency exam?

International students whose previous education was not conducted in English must take a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to prove proficiency. Those whose college or university courses were taught in English do not.

### What do I include in my application?

After completing the standard SVA application form online, there are several components in the application package that must be submitted via mail to the Office of Admissions:

1. Official transcripts from each college or university attended
2. Three letters of recommendation from instructors or practicing professionals
3. A written statement (250-500 words) of the applicant's reasons for pursuing graduate study
4. A short essay (750 words) critiquing a design object, event or concept
5. A writing sample of published or unpublished writing (1,000-2,000 words). Content is at the discretion of the applicant; However, the piece should demonstrate the applicant's research and analytical skills and facility with the language.
6. Résumé, including professional experience as well as related activities such as research, internships, publications and awards.



FAQs (cont.)

**What is the tuition for the program?**

The estimated tuition fee for the Design Criticism program is \$13,060 per semester, with a departmental fee of \$250 per semester.

**What are living costs for a student in NYC?**

Housing costs and personal expenses fluctuate from year to year and student to student. But on average, a student might allow \$17,000 annually for room, board, transportation and personal expenses combined.

**How long is the program and when does it start?**

The MFA in Design Criticism is attained in four semesters over two years. A residency of two academic years is required. Orientation begins in the last week of August and classes begin in September.

**Must students be NYC residents during the two-year program, or can they take the course from elsewhere?**

Because of the demanding nature of the program, we strongly recommend that students live in or very near to New York City for the duration of the two-year program.

**Are all the courses on the curriculum required?**

Yes!

**What kind of housing is available for students?**

The School of Visual Arts offers several options for graduate students who choose to live on campus. Please visit the Residence Life page on the SVA's Student Affairs website for a list of housing options and rates ([schoolofvisualarts.edu/studentaffairs](http://schoolofvisualarts.edu/studentaffairs)). You may call Residence Life at 212-592-2140 or send an email to [reslife@sva.edu](mailto:reslife@sva.edu) with housing requests. Those who elect to live off-campus may find SVA's Housing Registry (linked to the Residence Life Web page) helpful: This system allows you to search apartments, post a profile and search profiles of others looking for roommates. You may log onto this system once you receive a student ID number from SVA. Another tried and true option for finding NYC housing is Craig's List ([www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org)), a wide-ranging, constantly updated index of available apartments throughout the city.

**What should I do if I need financial aid?**

Prospective students seeking financial aid should fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). For more information about the FAFSA and other financial aid options, visit the Office of Admissions website ([schoolofvisualarts.edu/adm](http://schoolofvisualarts.edu/adm)), and feel free to contact an adviser in SVA's financial Aid office at 212-592-2030 with any related questions.

**Does SVA offer scholarships to students?**

The Design Criticism department annually offers a one-year, full-tuition as well as several partial tuition awards. The Henry Wolf Scholarship (a \$25,000 grant) will cover one year of tuition for an incoming student. The receiver of this award is chosen based on their submitted D-Crit application. All students entering their second year will be eligible to receive Silas H. Rhodes Scholarships. These partial-tuition awards—totaling \$50,000 annually—will be distributed to individuals who have demonstrated outstanding ability in their academic work during the course of their first year of study. No additional application form is necessary for either scholarship.

**How do I find funding outside of SVA?**

The search engines listed on SVA's Financial Aid site are a good start in helping to find available scholarships outside of SVA. We will also be regularly listing project-based grants and related opportunities on the D-Crit website (<http://dcrit.sva.edu/resources.html>).



FAQs (cont.)

**Can a student have a part-time or full-time job outside of class?**

A flexible part-time job is certainly manageable, as all classes take place in the afternoon and therefore mornings are free. Yet since the program is so demanding, a full-time job is discouraged.

**Where will classes be held?**

The Design Criticism MFA department has its own, newly designed, floor of an SVA building at 136 West 21st Street. This location is in Manhattan's Flatiron District, well within walking distance from some of the world's best design collections, libraries and archives, and also very close to New York's design studios and publishing houses. Most classes meet in one of two classrooms in the department; fieldtrips and site visits take place at various locations. Each student is designated their own desk space within an open plan workspace whose layout is modeled after a magazine's editorial office.

**What is the student intake for this program?**

12-14 students.

**Who is the ideal D-Crit candidate? Someone with work experience or someone just completing his/her undergraduate degree?**

Both. We're looking for a mix of students: those who have experience working outside of school and those who are coming straight from school and still immersed in the academic world. A diversity of approaches and backgrounds within the group will help foster varied dialogue and critical thinking, which is of course an essential component of the program.

**Do you prefer students who want to be writers that specialize in design, or can students be designers who simply want a deeper understanding of their field?**

Both writers and designers make great students and benefit equally, although it should be emphasized that writing is a major thrust of the D-Crit MFA program. Designers who complete the program will have an improved knowledge of design and a facility for thinking critically, with the added benefit of being able to promote their ideas through words as well as visuals. We encourage all students to have a strong writing practice if not now, then certainly by the time the course begins. We recommend that writing is part of your weekly practice: If it's not, consider starting or contributing to a blog to build up some momentum.

**What kind of edge would D-Crit graduates have over those who write for design magazines without a D-Crit background, but perhaps with other degrees in architecture or design?**

While one can learn a lot at an editorial job, with the pressure of deadlines there's rarely a chance to be self-reflective about the practice of criticism. Many professional writers and editors benefit from this program because in the field they may never have had a chance to fully refine and enhance their practice. Plus, writers may have been so busy writing that they haven't yet had a chance to explore other media such as radio documentaries, conferences, exhibitions, and blogs. We have workshops devoted to exercising critical thinking in all of these formats.

**This program is an MFA. What is the difference between an MA and an MFA?**

An MFA is considered a terminal degree that allows you to work right away. An MA allows a student to pursue a more academic path and to go on to pursue postgraduate studies. We hope to offer a dual MFA/MA program where in the second year a student can decide between the two degrees.

**What kind of jobs might students get once they finish the course?**

By providing students with all the intellectual equipment they need to express historically, politically and culturally informed opinion about contemporary design, D-Crit graduates will be prepared for careers as design critics, journalists, editors, educators, design managers and curators.