

MFA HANDBOOK  
SCHOOL OF ART + DESIGN  
WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY



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## WELCOME

The School of Art + Design believes that your education should be as individual as you are.

At the WCU MFA program you will find a community of art and design practitioners eager to engage with students in an inter-disciplinary program focused squarely on creative research and studio art practice. We have developed a rigorous culture of production where people have the opportunity to invest in an art that accepts no boundaries, challenges conventional thinking, and is eager to explore new possibilities.

## ABOUT

Our residential MFA program is a structured 3-year, 60-credit inter-disciplinary sequence in studio art practice. We accept 3 – 6 applicants a year, which makes for a close-knit and diverse community of 12 – 15 students, most of whom receive competitive graduate assistantships. Once admitted into the program students are provided with ample studio space and given the freedom of choice to work in a specific discipline or across any of our five studio areas: Ceramics, Painting/Drawing, Photography, Printmaking + Book-Arts, and Sculpture.

## MISSION / MFA

Preparing the next generation of competent globally-minded individuals who are capable of connecting and collaborating with professionals in a wide variety of fields and cultural contexts to shoulder the challenges of our times.

## HANDBOOK PURPOSE

To provide program information and assist in navigating your MFA studies. Please use this handbook as an accompaniment to important information found on the WCU Graduate School catalog and Graduate School main webpage, it is not intended to replace these essential sources of information or University policies and procedures. Questions about policies should be directed to the WCU Graduate School.

## SOA+D MAIN CONTACTS

SOA+D Director	Erin Tapley	828.227.3598	<a href="mailto:etapley@wcu.edu">etapley@wcu.edu</a>
MFA Director	Tom Ashcraft	828.227.3877	<a href="mailto:tdashcraft@wcu.edu">tdashcraft@wcu.edu</a>
SOA+D Administrative Support Associate	Beth Moore	828.227.3590	<a href="mailto:bethmoore@wcu.edu">bethmoore@wcu.edu</a>

[SOA+D Department Faculty and Staff](#)

<https://goo.gl/xtJMcr>

## COURSE OF STUDY

An MFA Degree requires the completion of 60 credits beyond the bachelor's degree from the list below:

Studio Critique	ART 674	18 credits
Studio Concentration Courses	ART 500/600 level	18 credits
Art History/Theory/Criticism	ART 500/676 + (1)	9 credits
Teaching Practicum	ART 630	3 credits
Electives, approved by Graduate Director		3-6 credits
Thesis/Exhibition	ART 699	6 credits
TOTAL		60 Credits

### Time Limit

A Master of Fine Arts degree in Studio Art is a three-year, full-time, 60-semester hour course of study with the degree plan listed above. The expected time-frame for completion of the Master of Fine Arts degree is three years.

Sample plan of Study: [wcu.edu/WebFiles/MFA-Program-of-Study.pdf](http://wcu.edu/WebFiles/MFA-Program-of-Study.pdf)

### Course Load

Minimum credit load for an MFA student is 9 hours each semester

[Graduate Course Catalog](http://catalog.wcu.edu/index.php) <http://catalog.wcu.edu/index.php>

## MFA REQUIREMENTS

### Candidacy

After admission to the MFA program, a student becomes an "MFA candidate" only when the student receives approval after a 2<sup>nd</sup> semester Candidacy Advancement Review and Candidacy Exhibition. Approval for candidacy is determined by the Review Committee and with input from the SOA+D studio faculty, which is an integral part of the process. Candidacy must be approved before the student may enroll for their 3<sup>rd</sup> semester and candidate must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or better.

### Probation

A student will be placed on probation by the Graduate School if his/her GPA is lower than 3.0 and might not receive a graduate assistantship. The School of Art may also place a student on probation if his/her work is deemed unsatisfactory with regard to review stages.

*MFA Requirement Continued*

Thesis Abstract

An Abstract is a brief summary proposal of the thesis you plan to write.

This proposal serves as a guide for your written support statement. It is not intended to limit the development of your ideas and creative research as your work progresses.

Submit one copy of the signed Thesis/Thesis-Exhibition Abstract Form to the Graduate School four weeks prior to the end of the semester one term before your semester of graduation. Your Committee and Department Head will read your abstract, suggest revisions if necessary, and determine whether your work should proceed.

IMPORTANT: Abstract Forms, due dates, detailed Thesis formatting and University requirements can be found at:

[Graduate School Thesis and Disquisition Information and Resources](https://goo.gl/g8yj8p) <https://goo.gl/g8yj8p>

Thesis Committee

The Thesis Committee is responsible for directing the student's thesis project.

The Thesis Committee is comprised of a committee chair and two additional faculty members. The committee chair must be a faculty member in the School of Art + Design and have full Graduate Faculty Status. At this point the Committee Chair becomes the student's advisor (before the committee is formed the Graduate Director is the student's advisor). In some cases, one member may be from an area outside the School of Art.

The Thesis Committee must be formed by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester. A completed committee form, signed by the committee chair and all other faculty members on the Thesis Committee, must be turned in to the art office before the last day of the student's 3<sup>rd</sup> semester.

MFA Thesis Exhibition and Gallery Talk

Each candidate is required to mount an exhibition of his/her work which takes place during the student's last semester and is either installed in the Fine Art Museum or at a pre-determined off-campus location. The exact content and organization of the student's MFA Thesis Exhibition are determined in close consultation with members of the Thesis Committee.

Students are responsible for all printing and distributing of exhibition announcements, posting and providing a current statement in the venue, and creating an exhibition identification list.

Professionalism in the installation of the exhibition is expected and required. You are responsible for the installation and removal of your exhibition by the agreed upon dates. Whether on or off campus, care must be taken to restore the gallery to its previous condition.

Students are required to give a short gallery talk about their work. (*Dates TBD*)

*MFA Requirement Continued*

Oral Examination

The student will schedule a meeting with their committee for the oral examination, the final and comprehensive discussion of their work. The oral examination may be held at any time during the spring semester, but must be held prior to the closing of the student's MFA Thesis Exhibition (exceptions to this time constraint may be arranged with the approval of the Graduate Advisor).

At least two weeks prior to the oral examination, the student will deliver a printed copy of their Final Thesis Supportive Statement to all members of the committee.

No more than one week after the completion of the oral examination the Committee Chair will deliver the signed MFA Defense Approval Form to the Dean of the Graduate School and Research.

MFA Thesis

The MFA Thesis is a critical essay that focuses on the student's work, its development, and its cultural and historical references. The candidate writes the final Thesis Supportive Statement in consultation with the Thesis Committee Chair and distributes it to committee members 2 weeks in advance of the Thesis Exhibition opening.

The Thesis is usually 2,500 – 5,000 words in length. It includes a title page, a table of contents, a bibliography, and typically includes illustrations of works from the Thesis Exhibition.

A format check of the Thesis may be scheduled with the Graduate School. Otherwise, adhere to deadlines and guidelines of the Graduate School.

The defended thesis must be signed by all committee members and submitted electronically to the Graduate School (via PRO QUEST <https://secure.etdadmin.com/cgi-bin/school?siteId=149> approximately four weeks prior to the end of the semester in which the student will graduate. <https://secure.etdadmin.com/cgi-bin/school?siteId=149>

Refer to the [Thesis/Disquisition Information and Resources](https://goo.gl/g8yj8p) <https://goo.gl/g8yj8p> web page for the exact deadline or see the Academic Calendar of the Graduate Catalog (follow the link in the Related Information section of the Graduate School homepage).

## **GRADUATE REVIEW COMMITTEE**

Twice a semester all graduate students will participate in an MFA committee review.

Mid semester and end of semester critique.

### Composition of Review Committee

The MFA Review Committee is comprised of at least three SOA+D faculty.

Spring semester of the second year, the student will select their Thesis committee members. The Thesis Committee will review students during their third year.

### Criteria for Evaluation

- Quality and ambition of work
- Effective use of materials and processes
- Presentation of work
- Caliber of physical, verbal and written articulation
- Ability to contextualize work

### First Year MFA Candidacy Exhibition

Spring semester of the first year, students are required to install an exhibition of their work for review.

### Second Year Students

Spring semester of the second year, students will assemble a Thesis committee. The committee will consist of no less than three faculty members, with a minimum of one from the student's major area. A committee member from outside the School of Art + Design is encouraged where appropriate. One SOA+D faculty will be Committee Chair. Each committee member and the student will sign the Graduate Committee form. The student will turn this form in to the Graduate Director by March 1.

### Third Year Students

In the fall of the final year, the student will begin preparations for graduating in the spring, (or semester prior to graduating). The student will notify the Graduate School and the School of Art + Design of their intention to graduate, meet with the Graduate Director to assure that all the academic requirements will be met and meet regularly with their committee to discuss their progress in the program. By the end of the spring semester, students are required to complete the Thesis Exhibition, Oral Examination, and MFA Thesis.

Failure to meet deadlines will result in the postponement of graduation.

A student will be permitted to graduate upon completion of their course requirements,

## **STUDIOS + FACILITIES**

Studios and workspaces are dedicated to the intellectual, creative, and personal growth of aspiring artists and designers at all stages of development. Art and design practices are independent in nature; however, when students come together to use these spaces and resources they collectively create a community of practitioners dependent on: tolerance for divergent opinions, differing belief structures and aesthetic production; personal safety and well-being; and the respect required for a commonly-shared culture composed of a plurality of backgrounds, voices and aspirations.

All graduate students must sign a Studio Contract before occupying and vacating their studio.

Students are provided with 24/7 access to the SOA+D facilities and a private or semi-private studio space.

All students are expected to adhere to the [WCU Mission and Core Values](https://goo.gl/hebAQa) <https://goo.gl/hebAQa>

## **ADVISING / REGISTRATION**

### Advising

The MFA Graduate Director is officially your advisor.

Whenever possible, please make an appointment to meet during the Graduate Director posted office hours, drop-ins are also welcome. You will also want to consult with the faculty member(s) with whom you take most of your studio courses. We keep the MFA program small in order to foster close communication between the faculty and the students: every member of the faculty is interested in your development, and you will find that everyone welcomes contact with you.

### MY WCU

As your progress towards the MFA continues, check on your record in [MY WCU](#) regularly to make sure that you are properly credited with the courses you have taken. Please report any inaccuracies in your Degree Audit to the MFA Coordinator.

<https://www.wcu.edu/mywcu/index.aspx>

### Registration

Early registration is critical if you have a graduate assistantship or tuition waiver, as the Graduate School considers these contracts to be void if you are not a full-time student. To be considered full-time, you must be enrolled for a total of 9 graduate credits (a full-time course load for a graduate student) for the following semester. The only exception to this is your final semester of graduate study, when you will be required to register for only 6 credits.

### LINKS/PDF

#### [Office of the Registrar](#)

<http://www.wcu.edu/learn/academic-services/registrars-office/>

## **ASSISTANTSHIP**

The number of Graduate and Teaching Assistantships awarded in a given academic year is determined by the availability of funds and the needs of the School of Art & Design.

### Teaching and Research Assistantships

Graduate Assistantships are available to a limited number of students. Assistantships provide a monthly stipend for fulfilling research, professional development and SOA+D program responsibilities, or Teaching in addition to being a full-time student.

Stipends for a full assistantship in the School of Art & Design are \$8,500 (two semesters)

Non-Teaching Assistantship students are required to work a 20-hours-per-week work program assignment.

Teaching Assistantship students teach 1 course and are required to work a 6 – 10 hours-per-week program assignment.

To qualify for an assistantship, MFA students must be full-time (taking at least 9 hours) and must maintain a 3.0 GPA on all graduate coursework. In the last semester of graduate study, students taking 6 credit hours may maintain a graduate assistantship.

A few graduate assistantship opportunities are also available to students outside their particular academic program. The MFA coordinator will forward the announcements of these assistantships to MFA students as the information is received.

### Teaching Assistantship Eligibility

To be eligible for a Teaching Assistantship, a student must have completed 18 graduate credits and completed Art 630 Teaching Methods in the Visual Arts, 3 cr.

### ART 630 Teaching Methods

Taken in the second semester of the first year of the MFA course of study.

Student is assigned to assist faculty in the teaching of SOA+D studio course. The faculty member with whom the student takes Art 630 Teaching Methods will serve as her/his mentor during the semester in which s/he is listed as the Instructor of Record.

Dedicated sections of this course are added to the schedule as requested by the student and faculty member. Students register for this course and section through Beth Moore, SOA+D Administrative Support Associate.

### Teaching Assistant Evaluation

The Graduate Teaching Assistants in the School are evaluated by classroom visits by members of the Annual Faculty Evaluation Committee. The rules governing this evaluation process for Teaching Assistants are the same as those governing the Adjunct and Tenure Track faculty. Copies of the written evaluation will be given to the Graduate Teaching Assistant as well as to the Director of the School and the Annual Faculty Evaluation Committee.

*Assistantship continued*

#### Tuition Waivers

The School of Art & Design receives a limited number of out-of-state and in-state tuition waivers each year. Tuition waivers are normally offered to incoming students to attract outstanding applicants to campus. Only students who receive assistantships may be offered these waivers. Students receiving an out-of-state waiver are required to pay in-state tuition, and receipt of a tuition waiver does not waive the payment of fees.

#### Chancellor's Fellowships

These merit-based awards have a value of \$6,000 and carry no work assignment. Applicants must be registered for a minimum of nine semester hours in the upcoming semester and must carry a nine-hour load throughout the academic year. Please see the application on the Graduate School website for eligibility requirements and directions. Applications for the Chancellor's Fellowships for the following year normally become available in February, and recipients of these awards are normally notified in June.

#### Graduate School Study Grants

Each academic year, the Graduate School awards a limited number of Graduate School Study Grants. Study Grants are intended to relieve financial pressures on especially promising students so they may concentrate on completing their graduate work. Please see the application for eligibility requirements and directions on how to apply. Applications for the Study Grants for the following year normally become available on the Graduate School website in February, and recipients of these awards are normally notified in June.

#### LINKS/PDF

#### [Tuition and Funding](#)

<http://www.wcu.edu/apply/graduate-school/tuition-and-funding/index.aspx>

## FORMS / WEBSITES / INFORMATION

### SOA+D

<a href="#">SOA+D MFA Program</a>	<i>mfa.wcu.edu</i>
<a href="#">MFA 3-year Sample Plan of Study</a>	<i>wcu.edu/WebFiles/MFA-Program-of-Study.pdf</i>
<a href="#">WCUMFA.com</a>	<i>wcumfa.com</i>
<a href="#">MFA FAQ's</a>	<i>wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/soadMFA.faqs.pdf</i>

### SOA+D FORMS

<a href="#">Studio Contract</a>	<i>https://goo.gl/6DJ735</i>
<a href="#">Graduate Review Report Form</a>	<i>https://goo.gl/ifVRPc</i>

### WCU GRADUATE SCHOOL

<a href="#">Newly Admitted Student Checklist</a>	<i>https://goo.gl/8bUVXR</i>
<a href="#">Graduate Catalog</a>	<i>catalog.wcu.edu/index.php</i>
<a href="#">Graduate School FAQ's</a>	<i>https://goo.gl/ZtgfHM</i>
<a href="#">Tuition and Funding</a>	<i>https://goo.gl/wR3VPS</i>
<a href="#">Graduation Information</a>	<i>https://goo.gl/nA2uo9</i>

### THESIS

<a href="#">Information And Resources</a>	<i>https://goo.gl/g8yj8p</i>
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### OTHER

<a href="#">Coulter Faculty Commons</a> <i>(Support for pedagogy, technology, and research)</i>	<i>wcu.edu/learn/faculty/coulter-faculty-commons/</i>
<a href="#">North Carolina State Residency Classification</a>	<i>https://goo.gl/7S7xNs</i>

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