

Graphic Design

Graduate Program Coordinator

Professor → Bethany Johns

p 401 427.6956

f 401 277.4980

Graphic Design Department

Rhode Island School of Design

Two College Street

Providence, RI 02903 USA

About the Program

RISD's graduate program in Graphic Design prepares students for professional practice through a curriculum that emphasizes the roles of social context, media and aesthetics in the production of visible language systems. Like the discipline of graphic design itself, the MFA program requires a nimble and intelligent response to constant change, burgeoning technology, and floods of data — all while considering and building on well-established foundations of formal, aesthetic and analytical knowledge.

RISD offers two program tracks leading to the MFA in Graphic Design: a two-year option for students entering with undergraduate degrees in graphic design and closely related majors, and a three-year option for those with degrees in liberal arts, the sciences or fine arts. The curricula for both the two- and three-year tracks are built on a sequence of required courses along with broad opportunities for tailoring an individual course of study through electives across disciplines. The Graduate Studio sequence explores the range of skills and activities within the design process, from an initial visual/verbal response to content to the shaping and communication of messages. Students in both tracks meet in the Graduate Seminar course sequence, which builds a sophisticated sense of context through discussion of design history and contemporary critical issues, and with readings and exercises that combine written and visual work.

Individual thesis investigation is central to the final year of MFA study. The thesis is not one culminating object or artifact so much as a consistent approach to persistent ideas within a body of work — the development of an original voice for both verbal and visual expression of an area of design thinking. Guest critics — including professionals in the field — are invited to participate in the year-end thesis review, which serves as a forum for critical dialogue focused on each student's ideas.

A core team of full- and part-time faculty extends the energy and ideas graduate students bring to the studio to encourage generative thinking and making. In addition to departmental faculty, national and international visiting designers broaden students' awareness of resources within the larger design world and offer varied models for critical practice.

Enrollment

of currently enrolled graduate students: 36

of currently enrolled undergraduates: 177

Frequently Asked Questions

Should I apply to the two-year or three-year program?

The two-year program is intended for students with an undergraduate background in graphic design — individuals with a BFA or BA in Graphic Design, or BFA or BA in Visual Communications (or the equivalent). Applicants to the two-year program typically also have at least two years of professional experience in the field.

These undergraduate degrees and their accompanying transcripts show us the applicant is versed in the entire range of study of graphic design: advanced typography, color theory, grids and systems, and the application of these skills across media (print, screen, motion, web, etc.). Their application portfolios usually include a mix of professional projects together with independent, self-generated work and examples of past student work.

The three-year program is for students who have visual/verbal aptitude and an interest in entering the field, but lack the academic background in graphic design that culminated in a related degree. It is possible that even without the degrees listed above an applicant has accrued enough classroom and professional experience to be competitive with those who earned undergraduate degrees in the field. Usually, however, even then the three-year candidate really needs to enter our preparatory first year to gain intensive skills in type, image, color, theory and design application over varying forms.

In our present group of three-year students, we have people with undergrad degrees in such fields as Computer Science, Literature, Fine Arts and Photography, Creative Writing and even in Neuroscience. All of their portfolios demonstrated visual skills through work that used visual and verbal language to make meaning — in personal websites; self-initiated book and magazine projects; posters for events; identity systems for themselves or small companies; and so on.

What should I include in my portfolio?

Your portfolio should by all means put your best and most complete work forward, which might even include three-dimensional work. Support it with working drawings, pages from your sketchbook — anything that shows you are able to “think through making.” Show drawings, prints and photographs that are good finished pieces, and some that are process pieces (as mentioned above). This shows a scope of visual engagement and lets us see the genesis of your solutions. We are looking for examples of your design sense, and while your typographic practice may be limited, we need to see some demonstration of your ability to give form to content through the use of visual language.

How should I format my portfolio?

Despite the program literature, slides are no longer the preferred format given newer digital options for submission. These include:

- 1) on disk, as individual tiffs or jpegs. Note: keep resolution appropriately small for on-screen or projected viewing (not larger than 2MB or so). Organize and sequence for viewing as a slideshow or in Preview.
- 2) on disk, in PowerPoint or Keynote self-running sequences
- 3) posted on a website; provide the URL with a disk submitted for backup

In all cases, be sure to:

- put your name on all your materials, including disks
- include a print-out of disk contents
- organize the work for our viewing (perhaps in folders for Print, Motion, Web, Student Projects, Professional Work and so on)
- provide a copy/backup disk as well
- provide hard copy of your work (in captioned thumbnail form, binder pages, as a book, etc.)
- also, be sure to give us a caption of what we are looking at: medium, date, etc., and any other brief description that helps us understand your work in context

Where can I find information about the application process?

It's possible to request a graduate catalog and apply online at → http://www.risd.edu/apply_applic.cfm. Information about application requirements is included below, but details about tuition and financial aid can be found online.

Can I visit RISD?

Yes. Information on graduate → **In Focus** information sessions and campus tours is available online. Due to the volume of inquiries, it's not possible to schedule individual meetings or portfolio reviews.

What scores are required on the GRE or the TOEFL tests?

The Graduate Record Exam (GRE) is not required for admission to our program. However, if English is not your native language, you must submit results from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The minimum results accepted are 237 on the computer-based TOEFL, 93 on the internet-based TOEFL and 580 on the paper-based version.

Can I apply for admission to the spring semester or summer session?

Students in the Graphic Design MFA program matriculate each fall only, with no mid-year admissions. However, non-matriculated students have the opportunity to register for workshops and credit-bearing courses during the → **Summer Institute for Graphic Design Studies**.

Application Requirements

Application Form + Fee

The graduate application form must be filled in completely and accompanied by a \$60 application fee (non-refundable).

Academic Transcripts

Applicants must submit official transcripts (displaying the registrar's signature and school seal) of all undergraduate and/or graduate study indicating satisfactory completion or evidence of anticipated completion of an undergraduate degree program from an accredited college or university.

An international student completing requirements for a diploma, rather than a degree, must submit a written statement prepared by an appropriate official at the school you are attending verifying the status of the diploma to be the equivalent of a baccalaureate degree in the United States. All academic credentials must be translated into English.

Letters of Recommendation

Applicants should arrange to have three letters of recommendation written by professors, instructors or professionals with whom you have recently worked or studied. These letters are required. We strongly suggest that your recommenders use our form (pdf), which you may → **download here**. (Recommenders may also use their own stationery, but it is critical that they include your full name in their letter.) Each person who writes a recommendation should send it directly to the Admissions Office in time to meet the deadline of January 21, 2008.

Portfolio

Applicants are required to submit 20 to 40 images that can be easily accessed for a quick overview and clear representation. You may present these Mac-compatible

images by CD or DVD as individual .tif or .jpg files (file size per image should not exceed 2MB), in Powerpoint or Keynote self-running sequence, or via web source (with a disk submitted for backup). Please do not affix any adhesive labels to your CD or DVD. Examples should exhibit a range of work experiences in graphic design and the visual arts so we can evaluate the quality of your conceptual skills, experiences and interests.

Include a work description sheet. Number the examples you are submitting and on your description page list the corresponding number, medium, size, date of completion and title for each work. It is very important that your full name and address are clearly noted on your portfolio contents, CD/DVD, description sheet and thumbnail pages.

CDs and DVDs will not be returned, but slide portfolios will be sent back if you include a self-addressed envelope or mailer with the correct amount of postage. International students should send postal coupons to cover return postage. Portfolios will be returned before May 15. *Please note: All portfolio materials will be handled with great care, but neither RISD nor the Admissions Office takes responsibility for loss or damage.*

TESTS

Graduate Record Exam (GRE)

Results from the Graduate Record Examination are not required for admission to this department.

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

If English is not your native language, you must submit results from the TOEFL. Proficiency in English is a prerequisite for acceptance and applicants must attain an acceptable score on this test.

On the Internet-Based TOEFL (IBT), which is becoming more widely available, we expect a minimum score of 93. On the paper-based version, which is still in use in some testing centers, we expect a score of 580. Finally, some applicants may have taken the Computer-Based TOEFL (CBT), which uses a different scoring scale; we expect a result of at least 237 if you used this version of the test.

You should schedule to take the TOEFL well in advance of the application deadline you have chosen, as it may take (depending on the test center location and the test format) six weeks for your scores to be sent to RISD. Further information about TOEFL is available at →www.toefl.org.

International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

Students may choose to submit their result from IELTS in place of TOEFL. RISD expects a minimum score of 6.5 from an IELTS examination. Further information is available at →www.ielts.org.

Summer Program in English Language Studies

The Summer Program in English Language Studies is recommended for non-native speakers of English who either need or would like to increase their fluency in listening, reading and/or writing formal English. The program runs for six weeks and prepares students for the regular RISD curriculum with a rich mix of classes. Students who successfully complete the summer program will receive three Liberal Arts elective credits.

During these classes, students listen to and write English, focusing on the specifics of art and design studies. In the reading and writing course, they develop critical reading and writing skills, whereas in the studio class they focus on the language of art critiques and develop self-confidence in speaking in front of their peers. Students in the summer program live on-campus in RISD's residence halls, make use of the collections of The RISD Museum of Art and the Fleet Library at RISD, travel as a group to New York City and visit the many art galleries and smaller museums in and around Providence. During the six-week program, which begins in late June, students have the opportunity to practice both formal and informal English within the larger community of students who study at RISD during the summer months.

In rare circumstances, a student may be required to attend and successfully complete this program as a condition of their acceptance to RISD.

Curriculum

two-year MFA: minimum course requirements

A minimum of 66 credits is required to graduate.*

Graduate Seminar I and II (in Graphic Design: 321G, 322G)
6 credits total

Graduate Seminar (one required in Graduate Studies: see listings for possible courses): 3 credits total

Graduate Studio I and II (in Graphic Design: 323G, 324G)
12 credits total

Graduate Thesis I and II (in Graphic Design: 327G, 328G)
15 credits total

three-year MFA: minimum course requirements

A minimum of 96 credits is required for the MFA degree.*

Graphic Design Core courses (Graduate Typography I and II: 3214-06, 325G; Form and Communication: 3220; Color: 3211; Visual Systems: 3216; History of Graphic Design: 3225)

Graduate Seminar I and II (in Graphic Design: 321G, 322G)
6 credits total

Graduate Seminar (one required in Graduate Studies: see listings for possible courses): 3 credits total

Graduate Studio I and II (in Graphic Design: 323G, 324G)
12 credits total

Graduate Thesis I and II (in Graphic Design: 327G, 328G)
15 credits total

*Note: these courses may be supplemented, but not substituted, with other course credits during the year. The balance of required credits is comprised of electives and Wintersession courses.

Electives include:

departmental electives— any course or independent study in the Graphic Design Department

open electives— any major or non-major course, including Liberal Arts, Art History, studio or seminar courses open in other departments, and in some cases Brown University courses

Graduate Studies— you are also advised to shop for electives in Digital+Media and in the Graduate Studies interdisciplinary listings

Thesis

Graduate Thesis I and II are the central required courses in the final year. The individual thesis investigation supports original thinking, and the varied visual and verbal responses rooted in that thinking. Students are encouraged to extend their personal work and test their thesis in the context of the social conditions and systems that influence its shape, function, and purpose.

The graduate thesis in graphic design should be equal parts exploration, explanation, provocation, and contribution. The thesis takes on many forms over the course of study, and the final thesis book projects are made available for viewing in RISD's Fleet Library Special Collections. These books catalogue the many projects and writings that comprise the Thesis, which is itself centered on a specific topic area and line of inquiry germane to graphic design.

Guest external critics are invited to join the faculty and individual thesis advisors for the year-end Thesis reviews, a forum for presenting the final thesis ideas and its forms to a professional audience for critical dialogue. Recent visiting critics for final thesis reviews have included Alice Twemlow, Jessica Helfand, Achim Wieland, Cornelia Blatter, Marcel Hermans, Lorraine Wild, and Peter Hall.

Equipment + Facilities**Design Center**

computers:

pod of 4 Mac G5 towers and 11 Mac Minis

network access via Ethernet and Wireless (All printing and transferring of computer files can be accomplished using either network method)

two tabloid Xerox color printers

tabloid and lettersize Xerox Phaser 7300 (color) in DC 301

Xerox phaser 6200 (color, lettersize only) in DC 404

8 black and white printers, two of which are tabloid size.

LaserJet 8150 (tabloid and letter) in DC301

LaserJet 8150 in DC 404

letter-size LaserJets in DC 501, 601, 704, 801

digital projectors in DC 404, 407, 501, 601, 704, 801

audio components in DC 404, DC 704

digital cameras, both still and video, are available for checkout.

Design Center Type Shop

two Vandercook 219 flatbed proofing presses

wide assortment of lead and wood type

Polymer Platemaker to allow for letterpress printing of any "graphic" that can be rendered as a film positive

guillotine paper cutter and Wiro book binding system

48 Waterman Street Papermaking and Bookbinding Facility

15-enlarger b+w darkroom along with two film developing rooms

Graphic Design-Graduate (Mason/CIT building, 5th floor)

G5 Macintosh computers

software includes Adobe Creative Suite 3

Nikon Super Coolscan 4000 35mm Slide Scanner

Epson Expression 10000XL Flatbed Scanner (11x17)

HP Designjet Z3100ps GP Photo large format inkjet printer

b+w laser (letter)

color Laser (letter)

color laser (tabloid)

use of RAID SanCube (for video)

→ laptop program

Campus Locations

Design Center

30 North Main Street

Center for Integrative Technologies, 5th floor

169 Weybosset Street

Faculty

department head

→ **Bill Newkirk**

Professor

BFA, Rhode Island School of Design

graduate program coordinator

Bethany Johns

Associate Professor

BA, University of Iowa

MFA, Rhode Island School of Design

full-time

Jan Baker

Professor

BA, University of California, Santa Cruz

MFA, Yale University

Lucinda Hitchcock

Associate Professor

BA, Kenyon College

MA, Columbia University

MFA, Yale University

Krzysztof Lenk

Professor

MFA, Academy of Fine Arts, Cracow, Poland

Akefeh Nurosi

Professor

BA, Ecole Superieure des Arts Modernes

MFA, Yale University

Hammett Nurosi

Professor

BFA, Ravensbourne College of Art

BA, London School of Film and Technique

MA, MFA, Yale University

Thomas Ockerse

Professor

BFA, Ohio State University

MFA, Yale University

Nancy Skolos

Professor

BFA, Cranbrook Academy of Art

MFA, Yale University

Hans van Dijk

Professor

Diploma, Technical School for the Printing and Allied

Trades, Utrecht, The Netherlands

MA, Ohio State University

Franz Werner

Professor

Swiss Federal Diploma, Typography,

School of Design, Basel, Switzerland

Grafische Weiterbildungs-Klasse,

School of Design, Basel, Switzerland

adjunct faculty

Ernesto Aparicio

BA, Ecole des Arts Decoratifs

Luke Bulman

BA, University of New Mexico

MArch, Rice School of Architecture

John Caserta

BA, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

MFA, Yale University

Suzanne Cozzens

BFA, Rhode Island School of Design

Rob Giampietro

BA, Yale University

Malcolm Grear

Professor Emeritus

Janet Fairbairn

MFA, Yale University

Alice Hecht

BFA, Rhode Island School of Design

MFA, Cranbrook Academy

Cyrus Highsmith

BFA, Rhode Island School of Design

Nicole Juen

BFA, Rhode Island School of Design

John Kane

BFA, Yale University

Mark Laughlin

BFA, University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth

Robert Ootje Oxenaar

Nina Pattek

Heather Quinn

BFA, Rhode Island School of Design

David Reinfurt

BA, University of North Carolina

MFA, Yale University

Richard Rose

BFA, Rhode Island School of Design

Doug Scott

MFA, Yale University

Clifford Stoltze

BFA, University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth

Thomas Wedell

MFA, Cranbrook Academy

Anne West

BA, Queen's University

MA, Syracuse University

PhD, University of Toronto

Achim Wieland

MFA, Rhode Island School of Design

Janet Zweig

BA, Cornell University

MFA, State University of New York

Recent Visiting Designers + Critics

→ Philippe Apeloig

→ Michael Bierut

→ Peter Bil'ak

→ Luke Bulman

→ Matthew Carter

→ Art Chantry

→ Anna Gerber

→ Sheila Levrant de Bretteville

→ Malcolm Grear

→ James Goggin

Peter Hall

→ Gary Hustwit

→ Alexander Isley

→ Piotr Kaczmarek

→ Anja Lutz

→ Michael McPherson

Jacek Mrowczyk

Adam Pendleton

Laura Raynor

→ Laurie Rosenwald

Katie Salen

Jan van Toorn

→ Jacob Trollback

→ Ileana Truneanu

Alice Twemlow

→ Lorraine Wild