

# GRAPHIC DESIGN, BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS (B.F.A.) [VCUQ]

**Astrid Kensinger**  
Associate professor and chair

## Student learning outcomes

Upon completing this program, students will know and know how to do the following:

- **Prioritize making as a primary mode of investigation and exchange:** Students will engage with labor as a physical and emotional activity that is fundamental to the design process. They will understand and practice design as a process that is not driven by assumptions, presumptions or preconceptions.
- **Understand that research is an essential component of the design process:** Students will employ research as a critical lens to understand context and to validate the relevance of design decisions and processes.
- **Develop capacity to design in collaboration with others:** Students will become equipped to participate in broad and diverse exchanges that expand the range and depth of design processes that are oriented to nonhierarchical learning and making.
- **Develop cultural literacy:** Students will be cognizant of forces that affect the formation and reinforcement of meaning and value. These forces define who we are and how the decisions we make can cultivate the dignity of individuals and communities.

## Degree requirements for Bachelor of Fine Arts, Graphic Design (B.F.A.)

Course	Title	Hours
General education ( <a href="http://bulletin.vcu.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate-study/general-education-curriculum/">http://bulletin.vcu.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate-study/general-education-curriculum/</a> )		
Select 12-13 credits from general education foundations and 17-18 credits from areas of inquiry.		30

### Major requirements

• Major core requirements		
GDES 220	Design Practices	4
GDES 221	Core Studio I	4
GDES 222	Core Studio II	4
GDES 231	Theory Inquiry	3
GDES 321	Core Studio III	4
GDES 322	Core Studio IV	4
GDES 331	Precedents Inquiry	3
GDES 380	Multi Studio I (taken twice)	8
GDES 398	Dialogues (taken six semesters)	6
GDES 431	Critical Inquiry	4
GDES 440	Synthesis	6
GDES 480	Multi Studio II	2

### Ancillary requirements

Art Foundation Program		
ARTF 131	Drawing Studio	3
ARTF 132	Surface Research	3
ARTF 133	Space Research	3

ARTF 134	Time Studio	3
ARTF 139	Project Studio	2
or ARTF 138	Project Seminar	
ARTH 103 & ARTH 104	Survey of Art I and Survey of Art II	6
Additional requirements		
UNIV 101	Introduction to the University	1
GDES electives (300 to 500 level)		8
<b>Open electives</b>		
Select any course.		12
Total Hours		123

The minimum number of credit hours required for this degree is 123.

## Electives

Course	Title	Hours
GDES 302	Book Arts	4
GDES 308	Web Design	4
GDES 356	Studio Management	4
GDES 391	Lecture Topics in Design	1-3
GDES 392	Research/Individual Study	2-4
GDES 403	Design Activism	4
GDES 404	Typeface Design	4
GDES 408	Advanced Web Design	3
GDES 412	Typographic Systems	4
GDES 413	Package Design	4
GDES 414	Exhibition and Environmental Graphic Design	4
GDES 417	Interdisciplinary Team Design	3
GDES 418	Design Center	3-9
GDES 445	Problem Seeking	3
GDES 481	Practicum	4
GDES 491	Studio Topics in Design	1-6

What follows is a sample plan that meets the prescribed requirements within a four-year course of study at VCU. Please contact your adviser before beginning course work toward a degree.

### Freshman year

Fall semester		Hours
ARTF 131	Drawing Studio	3
ARTF 132	Surface Research	3
ARTF 139	Project Studio	1
or	or Project Seminar	
ARTF 138		
ARTH 103	Survey of Art I	3
UNIV 101	Introduction to the University	1
UNIV 111	Focused Inquiry I (satisfies general education UNIV foundations)	3
Play course video for Focused Inquiry I		
General education course		3
Term Hours:		17

### Spring semester

ARTF 133	Space Research	3
ARTF 134	Time Studio	3
ARTF 139	Project Studio	1
or	or Project Seminar	
ARTF 138		
ARTH 104	Survey of Art II	3
UNIV 112	Focused Inquiry II (satisfies general education UNIV foundations)	3
Play course		
video for		
Focused		
Inquiry II		
General education course		3
Term Hours:		16

**Sophomore year****Fall semester**

GDES 220	Design Practices	4
GDES 221	Core Studio I	4
GDES 231	Theory Inquiry	3
or	or Precedents Inquiry	
GDES 331		
GDES 398	Dialogues	1
UNIV 200	Inquiry and the Craft of Argument (satisfies general education UNIV foundations)	3
Term Hours:		15

**Spring semester**

GDES 222	Core Studio II	4
GDES 380	Multi Studio I	4
GDES 398	Dialogues	1
General education course		3
Open elective		3
Term Hours:		15

**Junior year****Fall semester**

ENGL 215	Reading Literature (satisfies general education BOK for humanities/fine arts and/or AOI for creativity, innovation and aesthetic inquiry)	3
GDES 321	Core Studio III	4
GDES 331	Precedents Inquiry (or GDES 231 if not already taken)	3
GDES 398	Dialogues	1
GDES elective (300-500 level)		4
Term Hours:		15

**Spring semester**

GDES 322	Core Studio IV	4
GDES 380	Multi Studio I	4
GDES 398	Dialogues	1
General education course		3
Open elective		3
Term Hours:		15

**Senior year****Fall semester**

GDES 398	Dialogues	1
GDES 431	Critical Inquiry	4

GDES elective (300-500 level)	4
General education course	3
Open elective	3
Term Hours:	15

**Spring semester**

GDES 398	Dialogues	1
GDES 440	Synthesis	6
GDES 480	Multi Studio II	2
General education course		3
Open elective		3
Term Hours:		15
Total Hours:		123

The minimum number of credit hours required for this degree is 123.

**GDES 202. Design Technology. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: successful completion of the Art Foundation Program. A design foundation workshop that emphasizes skills development and application of design technology: time and project management, visual thinking, image capturing and editing.

**GDES 205. Design Methods and Processes. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. An in-depth investigation of the theoretical aspects of the design process within the context of designing effective visual communications.

**GDES 211. Typography I. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: ARTF 131, ARTF 132, ARTF 133 and ARTF 134. An introduction to communication problem-solving through the visual medium of language. The fundamentals of typography and typographic design are explored in experimental and practical projects.

**GDES 212. Design Form and Communication. 3,6 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours or 4 lecture and 6 studio hours. 3 credits for Richmond; 6 credits for VCUQ. Prerequisites: ARTF 131, ARTF 132, ARTF 133 and ARTF 134. The relationship of form and communication in graphic design is explored through theoretical and applied projects. The impact of typography and imagery and their syntactic relations upon audience and content is stressed.

**GDES 213. Typography II. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: GDES 211. An intermediate exploration of typography as an expressive and functional communication vehicle. Emphasis is placed on defining effective design criteria to meet the reader's needs, the communicator's intent and the designer's formal sensibilities.

**GDES 214. Imaging I. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: ARTF 131, ARTF 132, ARTF 133 and ARTF 134. Enrollment requires successful completion of the Art Foundation Program. A studio course focusing on the use of digital imaging techniques for communication purposes. The processes and techniques for making and working with digital images are explored.

**GDES 216. Imaging II. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: GDES 214. A studio course focusing on the creation of visual images for communication purposes. The processes and media for making visual images and the limits of visual literacy are explored.

**GDES 220. Design Practices. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. This studio is an introduction to research, analysis and the interpretation of content, emphasizing how hierarchical and syntactic structures participate in the making of meaning. Students are oriented as shapers and interpreters within culture.

**GDES 221. Core Studio I. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. This studio is an introduction to the generation and control of form. This involves the exploration of methods, materials and language. Students are oriented to fundamental modes of design practices.

**GDES 222. Core Studio II. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. This studio reinforces methods, materials and language used in generating and organizing form. Students examine the potential and implications of design processes and their outcomes.

**GDES 231. Theory Inquiry. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. This inquiry course is an overview of theory and philosophy influencing graphic design as a situated practice. Students are exposed to design criticism and theoretical perspectives from a variety of disciplines.

**GDES 252. History of Visual Communication. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. An investigation of contemporary visual communication concepts, media and images, and their role in contemporary society.

**GDES 253. Theory and Philosophy of Visual Communication. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. An overview of theoretical and philosophical issues influencing the practice of visual communication design.

**GDES 301. Letterpress. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. A letterpress printing studio course designed for students interested in being introduced to and developing their visual vocabulary in letterpress and relief printing. Students will undertake critical analysis of the letterpress medium and utilize techniques to develop and produce finished editions of each assigned task.

**GDES 302. Book Arts. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. An introduction to the tools, materials and craft of contemporary bookmaking. Investigation of bookbinding, handcraft and related techniques.

**GDES 308. Web Design. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. A course developing the design of websites. Emphasis is placed on the visual design, navigation, development, communication and authoring of websites.

**GDES 321. Core Studio III. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. This studio examines systems and structures as frameworks for design methods, processes and outcomes. Students broaden their practice relative to scale, context, conditions and effect.

**GDES 322. Core Studio IV. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. This studio expands critical discourse to investigate design's impact through distribution and engagement. Students consider how their personal voice and point of view function in a larger context.

**GDES 330. The Business of Design. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. This course introduces basic global economics and general design business concepts such as the free enterprise system, legal forms of business and financial considerations. It also surveys business and management practices such as planning, decision-making, communication, global ethics, marketing, human resources, finance and entrepreneurial skills needed to open a design business. Crosslisted as: IDES 330/FASH 330.

**GDES 331. Precedents Inquiry. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. This inquiry course is a pluralistic survey of precedents and historical examples of design with an emphasis on multiple perspectives and power structures. Students will encounter design histories through a source-based approach.

**GDES 343. Systems in Design. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: GDES 205, GDES 213 and GDES 216. The study of systematic and methodological approaches to communication design through the solving of complex problems in visual communication. Emphasis is placed on objective process and research in approaches to various professional situations.

**GDES 345. Print I. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: GDES 205, GDES 213 and GDES 216. An introduction to the design process and applied realizations of print-based materials and outcomes. Addresses the form and communication of the printed page from the tradition of print to the organizational principles outside that tradition. Objectives accomplished through lectures, demonstrations and problem-solving.

**GDES 346. Visual Narrative I. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: GDES 205, GDES 213 and GDES 216. Studio course that introduces the conceptual and technical issues involved in the design and production of sequential documents and time-based compositions. Addresses the possibilities and limitations of the integration of word, image, video and sound as they relate to problem-solving in visual communication.

**GDES 347. Interaction I. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: GDES 205, GDES 213 and GDES 216. An introduction to the conceptual and technical issues involved in the design and production of interactive documents and environments. Addresses the possibilities and limitations of computer-generated images, sound and digital video as they relate to problem-solving in visual communication.

**GDES 356. Studio Management. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 4 lecture hours. 4 credits. A study of business and management factors that relate to creative design. Topics include marketing, structure and organization; financial factors; ethical and legal aspects; and management of design, illustration and photography studios.

**GDES 365. Print II. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: GDES 345. An advanced studio course devoted to the study of systematic and methodological approaches to the design process and applied realization of print-based materials and outcomes. Emphasizes rigorous objective and experimental research methods in approaches to various professional situations. Objectives accomplished through lectures, demonstrations and team-based approaches to problem-solving.

**GDES 367. Interaction II. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: GDES 347. A studio course devoted to the design and production of advanced projects in interaction design and experience design with focus on research, problem definition and team-based approaches to problem-solving.

**GDES 370. Design History: 20th and 21st Centuries. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: ARTF 105-106. Study of the major theories and styles on communication arts, fashion and interior environments of the 20th and 21st centuries. Contemporary analysis of cultural conditions and the manner in which designers respond to those conditions. Crosslisted as: FASH 370/IDES 370.

**GDES 380. Multi Studio I. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. May be repeated for a maximum total of 8 credits. This studio emphasizes critical engagement, research and speculation. Students engage in collaboration, peer learning and interdependent discovery.

**GDES 391. Lecture Topics in Design. 1-4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1-4 lecture hours. 1-4 credits. May be taken for a maximum of four credits per semester and repeated for a maximum of 12 credits. Topical lectures focused on evolving and emergent issues that affect contemporary design practice. Upper-level students outside of the graphic design major may take this course with an override.

**GDES 392. Research/Individual Study. 1-4 Hours.**

Semester course; 2-8 studio hours. 1-4 credits. May be repeated for a total of eight credits. Enrollment is restricted to students with permission of the instructor, approval of faculty adviser and department chair. The structuring, research, execution and presentation of an independent project in visual communications under the direction of a faculty adviser. The student will be encouraged to become a self-generating problem-seeker and -solver with the ability to carry out self-stated goals.

**GDES 398. Dialogues. 1 Hour.**

Semester course; 1 seminar hour. 1 credit. May be repeated for a maximum total of six credits. This course engages students in peer-to-peer reflection, dialogue and debate in order to further develop an understanding of the diversity and scope of design practices. Graded as pass/fail.

**GDES 401. Experimental Letterpress. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. May be repeated for a maximum of eight credits. An advanced print studio course designed for students interested in exploring their visual vocabulary in digital and letterpress relief printing. Students will undertake critical analysis of the combined media of digital and letterpress and utilize techniques inherent within each technology to develop and produce finished editions.

**GDES 403. Design Activism. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. This course explores relationships between design, activism, advocacy and organizing. Students will critically examine the politics of design practice and the artifacts and systems design practice activates. Working with internal and external collaborators, students will interpret the relevance of social and political topics, pose critical questions and provoke new relationships within the spaces they occupy.

**GDES 404. Typeface Design. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. Glyph construction is explored through historical and methodological analysis as well as the creation of typographic systems. Formal mechanics of typefaces are emphasized in discussion of their function as vehicles for communication. Both the functional and expressive nature of typefaces are examined through hands-on exercises.

**GDES 408. Advanced Web Design. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: GDES 308. Investigation into the design and development of dynamic websites. Introduces database integration, webhost management and advanced coding techniques. Emphasis is placed on the semantic design and development of content-rich websites and blogs.

**GDES 412. Typographic Systems. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. Advanced approaches to typographic design with focus on typography as a primary interface to information.

**GDES 413. Package Design. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: GDES 213 and 367. Theoretical and studio investigation of three-dimensional structural principals as they relate to the area of packaging, exhibition and environmental design.

**GDES 414. Exhibition and Environmental Graphic Design. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 1 lecture and 6 studio hours. 4 credits. Study of the presentation of information in large-scale, multi-dimensional formats. Exploration of exhibition and environmental design, including understanding the use of "wayfinding" and "wayshowing" (identification, interpretation and orientation), sensitivity to and awareness of human factors, and developing visual and experiential navigation solutions.

**GDES 417. Interdisciplinary Team Design. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: GDES 213 and 366. Advanced projects in visual communication in which student design teams solve complex problems requiring collaboration.

**GDES 418. Design Center. 3-9 Hours.**

Semester course; 2-6 lecture and 3-9 studio hours. 3-9 credits. May be repeated for a total of 12 credits. Enrollment requires portfolio review by faculty. A professional studio to give students practicum experience working with faculty on self-initiated and client-initiated, real-world design projects.

**GDES 431. Critical Inquiry. 4 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture and 2 studio hours. 4 credits. This inquiry course is focused on research, critical analysis and discussion. Students assess and reflect on their emerging practice and its relation to the field.

**GDES 440. Synthesis. 6 Hours.**

Semester course; 12 studio hours. 6 credits. Prerequisite: GDES 431. This studio provides students the opportunity to synthesize knowledge, skill and experiences accumulated over their progression through the program. Students are required to define and execute a capstone project that demonstrates their readiness and capacity to engage responsibly and creatively in the field. The class culminates in a public exhibition.

**GDES 445. Problem Seeking. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. A seminar exploring the nature, scope and implications of defining design objectives in terms of limitations, requirements and potentials of a product's implementation, performance and life cycle.

**GDES 470. Senior Seminar. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. An examination of selected theoretical, historical, aesthetic and social areas of concern to the graphic designer. Scholarly research, critical analysis and discussion are expected.

**GDES 472. Senior Studio. 3 Hours.**

Semester course; 2 lecture and 3 studio hours. 3 credits. A capstone course oriented toward the creation of a professional portfolio, self-promotional materials and business system. The course culminates in the annual Senior Show.

**GDES 480. Multi Studio II. 2 Hours.**

Semester course; 4 studio hours. 2 credits. Prerequisite: GDES 380. Utilizing principles and skills gained in the prerequisite course, students facilitate discourse, framing and articulation of creative partnerships.

**GDES 481. Practicum. 2-4 Hours.**

Semester course; 2-4 field experience hours. 2-4 credits. Students must be actively engaged in work for a minimum of 30 hours per credit. This course engages students in practical experiences related to the contemporary and future practice of design and research through hands-on learning under the supervision of qualified practitioners. Graded as pass/fail.

**GDES 491. Studio Topics in Design. 1-6 Hours.**

Semester course; 2-12 studio hours. 1-6 credits. May be repeated for a maximum of 16 credits. Studio focusing on evolving and emergent topics that affect contemporary design practice.

**GDES 492. Design Internship. 1-3 Hours.**

Semester course; 1-3 credits. May be repeated for a maximum of 3 credits. Prerequisites: senior standing, 3.0 GPA or permission of the chair. Supervised pragmatic work experiences. Training is provided under the direction and supervision of qualified professional practitioners.