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# Academic Year 2020-2021

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## Important Documents

MFA Handbook

MCAD Student Handbook

Long-Range Learning Plan

Semester Learning Contract

Semester Evaluations

all available at [intranet.mcad.edu](http://intranet.mcad.edu)

MFA Program Calendar

[tinyurl.com/MCADMFAcalendar](http://tinyurl.com/MCADMFAcalendar)

## Important Links

MFA Website

[mcad-mfa.com](http://mcad-mfa.com)

MFA Facebook

[facebook.com/MFAatMCAD](https://facebook.com/MFAatMCAD)

MFA Instagram

[instagram.com/mcadmfa](https://instagram.com/mcadmfa)

# Introduction

**Mentorship is regarded as the core of the MCAD graduate curriculum.** Each semester the student and mentor determine its content, which is summarized in a Semester Learning Contract in context with the student's *Long Range Learning Plan*. These documents are also used for assessment at the end of each semester (these are graded pass/fail). Students work one-on-one with their mentor in the advancement of studio work, studio research, and professional practice. Mentor Credits coursework is structured to facilitate discussions and assess goals on a weekly basis. Students have the opportunity to switch mentors every semester.

Mentorship can encompass checking in not only the ongoing studio practice, but also creative projects/activities for Graduate Critique Seminar, looking at last week's goals and planning goals for following week, any classes being audited (partial or full), studio visits a student has had since last meeting, trying a new media/sharpen technical skills, attending or presenting at conferences, curating projects, workshops (taken or given), youth/community engagement, publishing critical writing, attending artist/designer talks, internships/externships, efforts to get to know the local scene, assisting professional artists/designers, development of professional practices documents/plans, etc.

# Four Semester Timeline

## Credit Requirements for Degree

33

Mentor/ Studio Credits  
(3 Credits for Thesis  
Exhibition)

+

9

Studio Critique  
Seminar Credits

+

12

Liberal Arts  
Seminar Credits  
(3 Credits for  
Thesis Paper)

+

6

Elective Credits

=

60

Total Credits  
or 63 Total Credits with  
optional Teaching Seminar  
and Practicum

Semester

1

**Studio Core**  
Mentor Work  
8 Credits

Semester

2

**Studio Core**  
Mentor Work  
8 Credits

**Electives**

6 credits - can be taken  
at any point during your  
four semesters

Semester

3

**Studio Core**  
Mentor Work  
8 Credits

Semester

4

**Studio Core**  
Mentor Work  
8 Credits

**Graduate Critique Seminar**  
3 Credits

**Liberal Arts Seminar**  
Criticism & Theory I  
3 Credits

**Graduate Critique Seminar**  
3 Credits

**Liberal Arts Seminar**  
Criticism & Theory II  
3 Credits

**Mid-program Review**

**Graduate Critique Seminar**  
3 Credits

**Liberal Arts Seminar**  
Thesis Prep I  
3 Credits

**Choose Thesis Committee and Thesis Research Presentation**

**Thesis Exhibition (with Mentor)**  
3 Credits

**Liberal Arts Seminar**  
Thesis Prep II  
3 Credits

**Thesis**

Master of Fine Arts in  
**Visual Studies**

# Before You Interview People

**Start by committing yourself to learning and growing professionally.**

Take responsibility for absorbing all the knowledge you can.

**Talk to second year grad students and alumni** about their experiences and ask for advice. You will find much of their contact info on the MCAD MFA website.

**Remember that not all successful mentorships can or should look the same.** Some mentorships may be more structured, while others are less so. The nature of the mentorship depends entirely on the people involved.

You will **meet with the director** to discuss your long and short-term goals, strengths/weaknesses, influences (doesn't just have to be artists/designers), and your practice. Together, we will generate a list of mentor choices/recommendations for interviews (three to start, more if need be). You will spend time examining the mentor lists on the MCAD MFA website.

Things to look for in a mentor:

- Does their practice interest you?
- Are their professional accomplishments in line with your goals?
- Does their availability and schedule match your needs?
- Do they have skills you would like to learn? (process, time-management, etc.) And/or can they help you get in touch with those who can help?

Take time to familiarize yourself with the two documents you will fill out with your mentors, and that will guide your relationship: *the Long-range Learning Plan* and the *Semester Learning Contract*.

## Long-range Learning Plan asks the following questions

1. Please describe your goals for 1 year out of grad school, and 5 years out of grad school.
2. Outline your plans for achieving these goals. This should include specific learning experiences, skills, and outcomes during your time in the MFA Program.

## Semester Learning Contract has the following prompts:

1. Weekly meetings/discussion
2. Studio research
3. Quantity of studio output and production
4. Exploration of content/central message
5. Technical explorations/processes
6. Exploration of form
7. Exploration of context
8. Professional development

Once the director has reached out to the potential mentors with an introductory email, you will receive word that you are clear to contact them for interviews.

- The email you send to the mentor should have six parts:
- A greeting and introduce yourself
- Thank them for agreeing to meet with you
- Link to your website/portfolio
- Three to four sentences summarizing your work and what your goals are
- At least three different days and times you can meet (provide as many choices as you can - we want this to be easy for them to schedule)
- Thank them again and sign your name

# Interviewing

When given the go-ahead by the MFA program director, you may initiate an interview. Please send a polite email that introduces yourself and explains that you are in the process of interviewing **multiple potential mentors**. You should send them information about yourself and your practice - feel free to use the answers to the questions you prepared for meeting with the MFA program director. You can meet at the MCAD library, a coffee shop, your studio, their studio, etc. Bring your laptop/tablet with you to show images of your work.

Be sure to have **thoroughly researched the potential mentor** before the interview. Be prepared to ask questions about their projects/processes that interest you.

At the interview, **be ready to describe your practice, your strengths and weaknesses, and your long-term goals - be specific**. This is the place to be open and honest about where you want to go. You don't have to shy away from verbalizing your vision, even if it feels lofty. Explain why you admire the potential mentor, and what you'd specifically like to learn. This will help potential mentors understand if they would be a good fit.

When you are interviewing, **Set clear expectations** of the mentorship from the get-go. If someone agrees to mentor you, they want to see you succeed. In addition to providing feedback on your studio practice, can they help you strengthen your interviewing skills? Edit your resume/cover letters? Help you better navigate social politics on the local scene? Coach you on negotiation skills? Set clear objectives for what you want to accomplish so you have a strong framework in which to work.

**Make sure your expectations are realistic**. The mentor is a professional guide, not a personal life coach. They are professionals who are invested to help you cultivate your studio practice, skills, and professional development. Remember they are busy professionals, so set attainable goals for your time spent together.

Remember that **the interview is a two-way process**. The potential mentor is interviewing you as much as you are interviewing them.

**Thank the potential mentor** for finding time to meet with you, both in person at the end of the interview, and via email afterwards. Let them know you will contact them after the interviews are complete.

Remember, **even if this person doesn't end up being your mentor**, they can still be in your thesis committee or have a studio visit in the future. Be respectful and considerate throughout - the art/design world is small!

## Selection

If you don't hear back from an invite to meet with a potential mentor, try visiting them during **office hours** (or equivalent).

**Consult with the director before you select a mentor.**

**Trust your gut;** You either click or you don't. There needs to be some organic chemistry for a mentorship to work. This individual must want to be your mentor, and if you sense this is not the case, it will not be a good fit. Ask yourself:

- Did they look at your work before you arrived?
- Do you respect them creatively/intellectually?
- Do you think you can work with them?
- Were they present mentally?
- Were they on time?
- Did they only talk about themselves, or did they take an interest in you?
- Were they insightful?
- How did they talk about your work?
- Did you like talking to them?
- Do they have the time to meet you as you need?

If you ask a mentor and they decline, **ask who else they recommend.** Also consult with the MFA program director for further suggestions.

It's worth repeating: **even if this person doesn't end up being your mentor**, they can still be in your thesis committee or give you a studio visit in the future. Be respectful and considerate throughout—the art/design world is small!

Once a mentor has accepted your request, send a brief **polite email to the others** you interviewed to thank them again for their time, and inform them that you have selected someone else as your mentor.

## Sample Texts for Declining A Mentor

Dear [insert name],

I just wanted to thank you for such a wonderful/informative/interesting meeting yesterday/last week, I really enjoyed it and felt that you would be a good choice for a mentor. However, I have decided to go with someone else, only because he/she/they are a bit closer to what I feel like I need. So thank you so much, for your time and discussion, I deeply appreciate your help.

[Optional: However, would you be willing to do a studio visit at some point? I am still interested in getting your opinion of my work.]

Sincerely,  
[Your name]

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Dear [insert name],

I want to let you know that after careful consideration I have decided to go with a different candidate for mentorship. (optional: insert a reason – such as: This was a hard decision because I really valued your \_\_\_\_\_ but ultimately decided on \_\_\_\_\_ because I want to work with (processes, mediums, approaches, etc.)) I appreciate the time you've taken to speak with me and I truly hope I might be able to reach out to you for a studio visit at some point, as I respect your insight and experience.

Sincerely,  
[Your name]  
Hi [insert name]

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Thank you for your patience through this lengthy selection process. Life has been a bit chaotic these past few weeks while I've been getting settled in the program. Choosing a mentor has been excruciatingly difficult, and after careful consideration, I have decided to go with a different candidate. I was only able to do so because of how assured I am that your dedication as an educator is sincere. Your

dedication to all the grad students is beyond impressive, which is why so many have already chosen to work with you! I truly hope you will be willing to meet with me at some point in the future, perhaps when I have some work installed for a Graduate Critique Seminar session, as I know your insight, passion, and skills are invaluable.

I am honored to know and work with you. Again, thank you for your patience and understanding.

My Best,  
[Your name]

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The director then sends an email to both the confirmed mentor, the mentee, and the senior administrative assistant, who completes necessary paperwork.

## Weekly Meetings

**Start the relationship with respect** for the fact that the mentors are offering you help with a skill set that they have more experience in. This person is taking time out of their life to help you develop skills—**approach the relationship with gratitude.**

**Be patient within reason.** Don't expect to learn everything from your mentor on your first meeting. It takes time to build a relationship with someone, even when that relationship has clearly outlined objectives.

At your first meeting, complete the **long-range learning plan** (this is a living document that gets re-evaluated at the end of the semester), and the **semester learning contract.** Both will be located in your MCAD Google Student Folder and references can be found on the MCAD MFA intranet page. This is what your mentor will use to assess your semester grade (pass/fail).

**Come to each meeting with a prepared agenda.** Do your homework and really come back each time with an update, progress (or not), and look for specific advice by asking specific questions. If you've asked for help writing a document, have a draft ready for them to look over. If they've given you something to work on, make sure you do that in time for your next session. If they've opened doors for you, make sure you

walk through them! This will help you to stay on task and optimize your time together in a time-efficient way.

**Consider sending your mentor a summary of notes after each meeting;** this could also exist as a running shared document online.

Mentor conversations can be intense and very dense, it's good to have a written record of what transpired because you won't be able to remember it all. It will also ensure you don't forget important details, such as the names of artists/designers you need to look up. Finally, it also provides an opportunity to expand the conversation via web links, further artist suggestions, etc.

**Weekly meetings can include** check-ins on any number of activities as detailed on the checklist in this handbook as well as others as they arrive.

Consider making **familiarization with the Twin Cities' scene** a part of your weekly check-ins. Your mentor can be a great person to help hold you accountable for attending at least one extracurricular event per week. It is a good goal to try to visit all the relevant venues, events, agencies, etc. in your area of study during your first year in grad school, which will help you get further involved during your second year.

Optionally, mentors are welcome to **attend their mentee's Graduate Critique Seminar** as observers on the days they are presenting work, but they are not allowed to verbally participate in the critique. Mentors are only welcome for the duration of their mentee's critique (not other students' critiques). Mentors are not expected to attend Graduate Critique Seminar, as it is beyond their one meeting per week, however some mentors have expressed interest in it in the past, so the option is available

If a mentor is curious about feedback in Graduate Critique Seminar, but is unable to attend, you can **prepare a report** of the feedback you received and provide it in your next meeting. It can be useful to engage a classmate to take notes for you during the critique to help facilitate this process.

**Sometimes your mentor's advice will clash with feedback you hear elsewhere**, such as Graduate Critique Seminar. Because MFA Seminars are made up of groups of people, there are bound to be disagreements about work. Besides disagreements within the seminars, mentors might also disagree with various observations and suggestions made by the seminars. This disagreement is a necessary part of graduate experience. Once students are outside of the program, you will continue to be

surrounded by differences of opinion about your work. Learning how to discuss these differences and make decisions is a crucial part of graduate learning. Use your mentor to talk through these differences in opinion. Constant conversation unearths hidden opportunities, especially when opinions differ.

**Remember the time commitment.** Mentors are contracted to meet with you in-person for the equivalent of one hour per week over the course of the semester. Meetings can be at the student's studio, the mentor's studio, or at a gallery or the MCAD main campus. Keep in mind they are most likely a very busy person. If you need to reschedule something, make sure to give at least 24 hours in advance. If you are respectful of their time, your mentor will appreciate it.

**Ask questions.** Curiosity will serve you well as a mentee. You should be hungry to learn, improve, and grow. In a way, this relationship is almost entirely focused on you, so take advantage of that! Ask thought provoking questions that lead to discussions. Have a hearty debate over an issue you feel passionate about. Ask questions that only your mentor can answer about their careers and experiences at work.

**Don't be afraid to disagree.** You shouldn't feel like you have to take every single piece of advice your mentor gives you without question. If you disagree with something they've said, tell them. It will lead to a discussion with much more value than if you simply nodded your head in agreement.

**Take appropriate risks.** The mentoring relationship offers you the rare opportunity of having someone committed to your progress toward goals. The mentor will help you think about ways to remove barriers and actions you can take. However, without trying some new actions, there may be little substance to the mentoring. Try new actions, assess what you learned, and use this to guide the mentoring conversations. Don't be critical of yourself for making mistakes, remember Rome wasn't built in a day.

**Be flexible and keep an open mind.** A mentor and mentee relationship can be a beautiful and useful way to enhance your own ability, so loosen up a bit; step outside of your comfort zone. Be constantly aware and thinking of ways to better yourself in the relationship.

**Have fun.** While this is serious work, don't forget to have fun. Laugh with your mentor, be adventurous, and don't take things so seriously as to get in your own way. Don't be afraid to make/do things for fun. Experiment with wacky collaborations, and so on.

**Mentorship is a two-way street**—promote your mentor's accomplishments. This is a reciprocal relationship. Don't miss an opportunity to ask them how you might support them in their own work (attend events they are featured in, spread the word about their accomplishments, etc.).

**Please do not enter into any employment agreements with your mentor** while you are their mentee. MCAD has both a conflict of interest policy and a faculty/staff employment policy that prohibits employment of a current student by a faculty/staff member who grades/oversees that student. If you have questions, please contact the MFA Program Director.

**Build an authentic relationship** with your mentor. If you read a book or article that you think will resonate with them, send the link with a well thought-out note.

**Ask for regular feedback.** A tactic that works well is called "Start, Stop and Continue." Ask people "What would you like me to start, stop, and continue doing?" That's much more helpful than going to someone and saying, "Tell me how you think I did last week." You get very specific insight into what you need to change or what you need to keep doing. You will receive feedback that you might disagree with. But it's important to remember that people's perceptions form their reality. Regardless of how you intend to be perceived, you still need to reconsider your behavior if it's interpreted in a way that doesn't fit with how you want to be seen. Taken all together, constant feedback helps us to evolve.

**Avoid getting defensive** when you receive constructive, critical feedback from your mentor. You have to be open to being coached and stay receptive to the things your mentor tells you. Closing your mind off will hinder any progress you could be making.

**Be open about your needs and provide feedback to your mentor.** Make sure you are being open about the things being implemented, and your comfort level with the insight you are receiving. If your mentor is doing an exceptional

job, do not hesitate to let them know, and show your gratitude. If you need a little more help with one topic, let them know; they are there for your benefit.

**Don't forget to thank them along the way.**

## Looking Ahead

**Recognize your mentor's limitations and appreciate their support.**

If they can't help you in a certain area, capitalize on the skills they do exceed in. For example, auditing a course can help fill in gaps in knowledge, as well as independent research, or speaking with another faculty/staff member at MCAD. *This is an opportunity to cultivate additional advisors in a variety of areas, which is also helpful when it comes time to select a thesis committee.*

**Don't be concerned if you don't become best friends.** Mentoring is first and foremost professional; you don't have to have tons in common or want to hang out every weekend for it to be valuable.

Don't be afraid to **reach out to your peers and the director** if you are having a bad experience. Sometimes it just takes a while to click, and sometimes your mentor might not be the right person for you.

**Deciding to change mentors is completely normal.** There is no pressure to stick with the same mentor all four semesters. If you decide to switch, you must give your mentor notice at least two weeks before the end of the semester.

If you're **looking for a new mentor**, you can check out current faculty, alumni, and members of the Twin Cities community. Be sure to check out local leadership groups (AIGA, FilmNorth, NEMAA, Springboard for the Arts, etc.).

**Don't be afraid to ask someone to meet for coffee to jumpstart a potential mentorship, or invite them for a studio visit.** You don't have to feel as if you're taking up their time. Try to work around the potential mentor's life—for some people lunch is better, whereas a phone call during a long commute might be better for others. Remember, it's just as worthwhile to the mentor's development as it is to yours to have a relationship.

In general, it's a good idea to try to **reach out to all the MCAD faculty in your area(s) of study** during your first semester. This will allow you to discover and solid connections early in your graduate career. You want to avoid a situation where you get to your final semester, and a faculty member is confused about why you haven't reached out to them since your arrival.

## Mentee Checklist

### Before You Interview People

- Mentally commit yourself to learning and growing professionally
- Not all mentorships look the same
- Talk to second-year students and alumni
- Meet with the director to prepare for interviews
- Contact potential mentors after receiving the OK from director

### Interviewing

- Mention you are interviewing multiple people
- Practice talking about your work and showing your work
- Define specific long-term and short-term goals
- Share your strengths and weaknesses
- Set clear realistic expectations of the mentorship
- Remember it's a two-way interview
- Say thank you

### Selection

- If you don't hear back, try catching them at office hours
- Consult with the director before final selection
- Trust your gut

- If you find a potential mentor isn't a great fit, ask them to recommend other mentors
- Politely email the other mentor candidates once you make a final decision
- Director gets confirmation from mentor/mentee

## Weekly Meetings

- Start the relationship with respect and gratitude
- Be patient
- Complete Long-Range Learning Plan and Semester Learning Contract at first meeting
- Have an agenda at each meeting and send notes after each meeting
- Weekly meetings can include check-ins on many different activities
- Respect time limitations
- Ask questions of your mentor and communicate your needs
- Don't be afraid to disagree
- Take appropriate risks
- Be flexible and have fun
- Remember mentorship is a two-way street
- Ask for regular feedback and avoid defensiveness
- Thank your mentor

## Looking Ahead

- Recognize limitations of any mentor
- Don't worry if you don't become best friends
- Ask for help/advice from peers and director
- Looking for a new mentor is okay
- Invite people to coffee, studio visits, etc.

# Possible Topics for Mentor Meetings

- Ongoing studio practice
- Creative projects/activities for Graduate Critique Seminar
- Looking at last week's goals and planning goals for following week
- Development of professional practices documents/plans
- Recommended books/articles/artists to review
- Any undergraduate or continuing education classes being audited (partial or full)
- Any trainings/tutoring/etc. at the MCAD Learning Center or Continue Ed
- Studio visits a student has had since last meeting
- Trying a new media/sharpening technical skills
- Attending or presenting at conferences
- Curating projects
- Workshops (taken or given)
- Youth/community engagement
- Publishing critical writing
- Attending artist/designer talks
- Internships/externships
- Efforts to get to know the local scene
- Assisting professional artists/designers
- Mentor could demo a skill for mentee
- Mid-program review
- Thesis Work



