

M E

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Academic Year 2020-2021

MFA Program Staff

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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

MFA Program Calendar

tinyurl.com/MCADMFACalendar

Important Links

MFA Website

mcad-mfa.com

MFA Facebook

facebook.com/MFAatMCAD

MFA Instagram

instagram.com/mcadmfa

Introduction

Mentorship is regarded as the core of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design Master of Fine Arts curriculum. Students have the opportunity to switch mentors at the end of each term. Each semester, the student and mentor fill out 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). Mentor Credits coursework is structured to facilitate discussions and assess goals on a weekly basis. Students work one-on-one with their mentor in the advancement of studio work, studio research, and professional practice.

Mentorship can encompass checking in on not only the ongoing studio practice but also everything listed on the checklist at the end of this document.

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

Pay and Expectations

Mentorship consists of fifteen one-hour meetings each semester (generally one hour per week, although this can shift according to the needs of the mentee/mentor), and one meeting with all the mentors at the start of the semester. During the second year, mentors are encouraged to shift to an every-other week model as needed to compensate for any reading or review thesis documents they decided to undertake. If it is helpful to meet at an opening, such as the MFA fall exhibition or Open Studio Night, please feel free to substitute that for one of your weekly meetings. If you need to reschedule something, please be sure to give at least twenty-four hours notice. The MFA Director will provide mentors with the most current compensation amount.

Meetings can be held at the student's studio, the mentor's studio/office, or at other galleries/locations predetermined by the mentor/mentee. Although students and mentors carry on their discussions through various means, including email, telephone, etc., MCAD's approach to the benefits of mentorship are based on the dynamic opportunities provided by face-to-face contact and direct access to student work.

Students have the opportunity to switch mentors every semester. Additionally, mentors are not obligated to continue working with a student if they feel it is not a good working relationship or if their schedules will not allow for sufficient mentoring time. Mentors may only choose to end the relationship at the semester's end (notification must be given by two weeks before the semester's end). The MFA Director is available for advice and counsel regarding any mentor concerns.

If a mentor has to be absent for two or more weeks during the semester (residency, out-of-town work, touring, etc.), it is required that they notify the MFA Program director in advance so appropriate accommodations can be planned for the mentee as needed. Mentors are required to check their MCAD email address for all official correspondence related to the program and their mentorship. If you would like to have MCAD email funneled to your personal email address, the Help Desk can assist with setting up.

Becoming a Potential Mentor

MCAD faculty and other members of the community suggest mentors to the MFA Director. Additionally, students may receive potential mentor recommendations when they are interviewing. (Sometimes during an interview it becomes clear that the match is not a good fit, and the potential mentor can make recommendations to the student, which the director will vet.) The MFA Director then contacts the potential mentor to discuss qualifications and availability. This process is separate from the process of mentor selection carried out by the student, who is given access to mentors previously approved by the Graduate Committee.

Additionally, students tend to interview people who they and other faculty or students are familiar with. It can be useful to do a few studio visits with current grads, attend a few of the MFA Program's events (follow along on Facebook and Instagram), and if invited, participate in thesis committees or Graduate Critique Seminar in order to keep your name and face familiar within the program. Students who are not currently seeking a mentor might also reach out to you for a studio visit, coffee, lunch, or a phone call in order to start planning for future semesters. They are encouraged to be respectful of your time and work around your availability.

Mentor Interviews with Students

Students begin their search for a mentor by studying the list of recent mentors on the MCAD MFA website at mcad-mfa.com.

Therefore, it is helpful for potential mentors to have a website or other online profile we can link to, allowing students to easily learn more about your practice and determine if they would be interested in speaking with you in person. *If you haven't yet, please ensure your name is added to this list by contacting the MFA Director.* Students also meet individually with the MFA Director to receive further recommendations.

Students interview at least three potential mentors before making their selection for the semester. The MFA Director will contact you to ask if it is okay for graduate students to reach out to you about interviews. If you accept, you will receive direct correspondence from student(s) to schedule meeting(s). These interviews ideally must be completed as early in the new semester as possible.

Each interview is much like a studio visit. The potential mentor typically visits the student's studio (or the student visits the potential mentor's office/studio) and both parties have the opportunity to ask each other questions as they get a sense of each other's personalities and practices. Topics that will come up include the student's goals/strengths/weaknesses, questions about your process/projects (and theirs), schedule and availability, skills you can help the student with, professional practices/opportunities, etc. Before the meeting, the student typically looks at the mentor's web presence, so a strong website or other online profile is very useful for the student in preparing for this experience.

Students are directed to communicate clear and realistic expectations for mentorship. Potential mentors are encouraged to respond candidly about their ability to meet those expectations (or not). Students are also reminded that the mentor is a professional guide, not a personal life coach. They are professionals who are invested in helping students cultivate a studio practice, skills, and professional development. Students keep in mind that mentors are busy professionals and that attainable goals should be set for time spent together.

Please remember that the interview is a two-way process. You as a potential mentor are interviewing the graduate students as much as the they are interviewing you. Trust your gut. If it didn't feel like a good fit, and the student asks you to be their mentor, politely decline. Students are instructed to ask for recommendations for other mentors if their request is declined. If you have anyone in mind, please share.

If a student selects you as a mentor, and you agree to be their mentor, the student will let the MFA Director know, who will then send emails to both the mentor and student to initiate the necessary paperwork. You will receive further correspondence from the MFA Senior Administrative Assistant.

If a student selects someone else as their mentor, please do not take the decision personally. There could be many reasons for the decision, and they may simply be interested in working with you during a later semester during their time at MCAD.

Weekly Meetings

As a reminder, the MFA Program wants to be respectful of the value of your time. Students are instructed to approach mentorship with respect and gratitude for the time mentors invest. The weekly meeting is meant to be one hour (fifteen meetings per semester). If you need to reschedule something, please be sure to give at least twenty-four hours notice. Meetings can be at the student's studio, the mentor's studio/office, or at other galleries/locations predetermined by the mentor/mentee. If your mentee invites you to an exhibition or other event to discuss their work, please do not hesitate to count that as one of your weekly meetings.

Setting Goals

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 are found on the MCAD intranet, which you will gain access to after completing hiring paperwork and receiving your MCAD email address. The completed forms will be stored in the student's Google Folder. By filling out these documents together, it provides an opportunity for both mentor and mentee to fully understand the goals and parameters of the mentorship. This process also provides the structure for assessment and accountability at the end of the semester (graded pass/fail). Generally, these documents are due by the end of the first month of the semester (specific dates are determined each semester).

What is a Long-Range Learning Plan?

The *Long-Range Learning Plan* is an outline of the individualized learning objectives for each MFA student at MCAD and consists of two prompts:

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

The plan is discussed and agreed upon by the student working with their mentor. It can include skill acquisition, theoretical frameworks, professional preparation, and/or a host of other outcomes. These outcomes mark the specific work and methods a student uses to realize the larger

learning outcomes of the program. Long-Range Learning Plan contracts are completed by the MFA student, reviewed by the mentor and the MFA Director, and archived in the MFA Program Office

What is a Semester Learning Contract?

Mentor credit is monitored through a *Semester Learning Contract*, which 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

Every MFA candidate works with their mentor to create a learning contract that outlines the learning goals of the semester. MFA students are responsible for completing the *Semester Learning Contracts*, which are held in the MFA Program Office.

At the first or second meeting, some mentors find it useful to map out a schedule of dates to guide the student through goals/projects for the semester. For others, meetings might be much more casual, such as simply starting with, “Tell me what you’ve been up to.” It is fine to be flexible (because life happens and there’s a lot on a grad student’s plate), but it’s also good to have specific goals for the student to be held accountable to, which is why the program uses the *Long-Range Learning Plan* and *Semester Learning Contract*.

Mentors can also sign up for the MFA program calendar, which lists visiting artist talks and all MFA classes via a Google calendar. To

subscribe, log into your MCAD email, visit tinyurl.com/MCADMFACalendar, and click the icon in the bottom right-hand corner that looks like this:



It can also be useful to ask your student for dates related to MCAD’s academic calendar and when your student’s crits are coming up. After each crit, you can reevaluate future dates/goals according to what the student has learned. Generally speaking, it’s always useful to have more than less to look at when it comes to critique.

Conducting Meetings

At each meeting, be prepared to check progress as you see fit.

Students are instructed to come to each meeting with a prepared agenda and be prepared with any “homework” assigned at the end of the previous meeting. Students might ask for help writing a document, book/article suggestions, researching artists, suggestions on techniques, or any number of activities as detailed on the checklist at the end of this handbook.

Consider keeping a written record. Some students might send you a summary of notes after each meeting; this could also exist as a running shared document online. If having a written record helps you manage the mentorship, it is fine to request this exercise from the student, though you can also keep such a record yourself or maintain the document jointly. This can also be a way to share web links, topics for research, artist references, etc. Additionally, this type of ongoing document (electronic or hard copy) can be extremely useful for reviewing the student’s activities when submitting your semester evaluation with grades. Other options include sending an email at end of your meetings—while you are still together. This can also be a way to determine action items, for both mentors and mentees, each week.

Discuss any classes your mentee is auditing or taking for credit.

A graduate student may take undergraduate classes for credit (see MFA Handbook for details), audit classes (see MCAD Student Handbook for details), sit in on part of a class, or participate in other learning experiences at MCAD or elsewhere. Please document these class experiences as part of the Semester Learning Contract and consider

feedback from faculty members or individuals who have worked with the student when grading the mentorship at the end of the semester (pass/fail).

Please help the student to familiarize themselves with the Twin Cities' scene/resources as a part of your weekly check-ins.

You have a unique perspective on this region, and it is okay to request students attend at least one extracurricular event per week. If you have connections to any local leadership groups (AIGA, FilmNorth, NEMAA, Springboard for the Arts, etc.), please introduce them to the student as appropriate. We hope students will try to visit all the relevant venues, events, agencies, etc. in their area of study during the first year of the program, which will help them get further involved during their second year.

Tips for Successful Meetings

Provide regular feedback. A tactic that works well is called “Start, Stop, and Continue.” You can prompt your student to review what you think they should start, stop, and continue doing. This structured approach can often be helpful in generating a specific and actionable to-do list, rather than simply reviewing how someone did last week.

Be aware that sometimes students can become defensive when you give constructive, critical feedback. Students are instructed to remain open to being coached; however, some of them may have more or less practice with receiving feedback. Try to help them through this experience and explain how you personally handle challenging feedback.

Listen and be patient with yourself and the student (within reason). Students can't learn everything from you at the first few meetings. It takes time to build a relationship with someone, even when that relationship has clearly outlined objectives.

Building Off Graduate Critique Seminar

The Graduate Critique Seminar provides all graduate students structured group critiques of their work and that of their peers. Each student has a minimum of two formal critiques each semester with options for additional critiques throughout the semester as time permits. To learn more about Graduate Critique Seminar, please visit the MFA Handbook.

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.

You can use Graduate Critique Seminar critiques for motivation and to help students gain valuable project management experience. Students may make use of Academic Services to assist in installation. Students should communicate their needs via the gallery assistant GA. Please encourage students to avail themselves of these services as needed.

Use difficult feedback that students receive during critique as a point of departure for a conversation about where that person is coming from in terms of ideological or critical stance. Why might that person have said what they did? How do they interpret and evaluate work?

While it is not typical, if needed, mentors may attend their mentee's Graduate Critique Seminar class as observers on the day their student is presenting work, but they are not allowed to verbally participate in their student's critique or any other students' critiques that day. Mentors are only welcome for the duration of their mentee's critique (not other students' critiques). Please contact the instructor before attending to help them prepare for class. Occasionally, a mentor may choose to attend a student's critique if there are communication challenges or other concerns that would make attendance helpful to the mentorship. It might also be helpful for a brand new mentor to attend one critique to gain greater understanding of the MCAD MFA Program.

If your schedule does not allow for attendance at Graduate Critique Seminar, but you would like to reach out to the instructor with a specific question, please feel free to email them. Additionally, it is fine to request your mentee provide a report of the feedback they received during their critique. It can be useful to encourage your mentee to have a classmate take notes for them during the process.

How can mentors and students approach differences between their appraisal of a student's work and those that might arise during the Graduate Critique Seminar or liberal arts classes?

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, artists and designers will continue to be surrounded by differences of opinion about their work. Learning how to discuss these differences and make decisions is a crucial part of graduate learning. The most important thing a mentor can do in terms of multiple opinions is to talk through these differences with your student; one-on-one conversations are an indispensable learning mechanism. Constant conversation unearths hidden opportunities, especially when opinions differ.

Grading

Grading Process

All mentorships are graded pass/fail based on the student's ability to achieve learning goals set out in the *Semester Learning Contract* or equivalent goals altered as the term progresses. When planning the semester, make sure the student's objectives are ambitious enough for grad school but not so ambitious that they set impossible goals that constantly end in disappointment. When submitting your grade, please be mindful of the due dates, which are detailed on the official MCAD academic calendar found on the intranet.

If a student set a goal of auditing a course, completing an online series of tutorials, or taking an in-person workshop (such as those at MCAD's Learning Center) to gain a new skill, please consider completion of these endeavors in grading. Listen to feedback from faculty, staff members, or individuals who have worked with the student on these courses or trainings.

When writing your final evaluation at the end of the semester, please submit at least a few sentences - students will find this feedback very valuable. Reflect on the student's progress, what they can work on as they move forward, and how well they met their goals and/or changed their goals. Reference the *Semester Learning Contract* and *Long-Range Learning Plan* as needed. This is another place where a running electronic agenda for your weekly meetings can serve as a useful tool for you to look back on as needed.

Managing Concerns

At midterm, you will be sent a reminder about Student Alerts, which are simply online forms you can fill out if you have concerns about your mentee's performance (excessive absences/canceled meetings, unsatisfactory work, etc.) that you've tried discussing with them but are still not seeing any improvement. The Student Alert is meant as a next step you can take to help the student get back on track. When a Student Alert is submitted for a student, the MFA Director is notified and will meet with the two of you to discuss steps forward. Most mentors will never need to use a Student Alert, but in case you feel you might need one, please do not hesitate to reach out to the MFA Director to help talk through any situations.

Mentors are welcome to request their mentees to visit the Learning Center as a part of mentorship. This center provides a variety of services, from writing help, to software training, to practice with critique in English, and more. To view everything offered by the Learning Center, please go to the Intranet > Resources > Learning Center.

Privacy reminder: Very rarely, a mentor/mentee relationship can dissolve due to unexpected conflict, and when it does, your email correspondence might be requested by an MCAD investigation. Please remember that emails are not private - always write as if your email could be read publicly.

Special Events During Semesters

Semester 1

The MFA fall exhibition (first weeks of school) and Open Studio Night (first week of December) will likely be points of discussion. Scheduling and goal setting will also be a focus.

Semester 2

Your mentee will be preparing for the mid-program review, which consists of four components:

1. Creative work presented
2. Process book
3. Candidate's verbal presentation and defense during committee questions
4. Written statement of intent

For more detailed information on the Mid-Program Review, please visit the MFA Handbook (available on the intranet). Mentors attend their mentee's mid-program review as a silent observer, only speaking with the committee after the review is complete and the student has left the room.

Semester 3

Your student will be taking a Thesis Research course walking them through various research techniques, topics, and drafts. It is important to be available to your student on various ideas and drafts. The outcome of this semester is a 10-12 page paper. If you take on a measurable amount of writing assistance, please make accommodations in your weekly meeting schedule to ensure you are counting that time towards your 15 hours.

Students will also be selecting their Thesis Committees (deadline: November 1). Every Thesis Committee has three members that include the MFA mentor (you), an MCAD faculty member (either full-time or adjunct) and an Outside Advisor; the mentor and/or the MFA Director can help advise on selection. The Thesis Committee is the body that evaluates and makes a recommendation for the awarding of the degree.

The Thesis Research Presentation will also take place this semester. Please reference the MFA Handbook for full description of this event.

Semester 4

During the final semester, students take a Thesis Writing course, which includes a two-week writing intensive after the thesis reviews. The Thesis Committee holds three meetings over the course of the semester, and provides a Meeting Report sheet after meetings one and two. Students can

get various levels of support from MCAD's Learning Center, including light editing. Depending on your volume of writing review and committee meetings involved in this semester, it is possible for meetings to shift to every other week to compensate for this editorial and committee work.

For more detailed information on the Thesis Committee, schedule, and responsibilities, please visit the MFA Handbook.

General Notes on Mentorship

Have fun. While this is serious work, don't forget to encourage your student to have fun; laugh with your mentee and encourage them to be adventurous while not taking themselves too seriously. This can include making/doing things for fun, experimenting with wacky collaborations, and so on.

Mentorship is a two-way street. Please share your accomplishments and upcoming events with your mentee. This is a reciprocal relationship. The MFA Program wants to help promote your career and can do so by amplifying your stories on the website and social media. You can also submit your news at tinyurl.com/mcadMFAnews and the program will promote your activities.

Please do not enter into any employment agreements with your mentee while you are their mentor. 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.

If you are recommending the student use the 3D shop for a project or research, please email Don Myhre - dmyhre@mcad.edu - to talk to him about what your recommendation entails. It is a good idea to have everyone on the same page from the start of any projects or research, so communication can stay as clear as possible, and the student can have a positive experience.

If you are interested in putting an article or book on reserve at the MCAD library for your mentee, please email library@mcad.edu to get

assistance using their systems. You can search the collection at <https://intranet.mcad.edu/library>. It is a good idea to have everyone on the same page from the start of any projects or research, so communication can stay as clear as possible, and the student can have a positive experience.

If you have an illustration or graphic design student, sometimes the transition to a self-guided practice can be challenging because they are used to receiving a brief from a client or teacher. In the past, some mentors have found it helpful to give these students a few ‘assignments’ alongside exercises to help them transition into a more self-guided and research-driven practice.

Remember that not all successful mentorships can or should look the same. Some mentorships may be more structured with specific guidelines, while others may be less structured and more self-directed, depending on the student. The nature of the mentorship depends entirely on the people involved. Each student is unique, and techniques that worked with one may not work for another—please remain flexible.

Students are encouraged to recognize the support, strengths, and limitations of mentors, faculty, staff, and other community members. Please encourage students to pursue knowledge and feedback from a variety of sources. For example, auditing a course can help fill in gaps in knowledge—so can doing independent research or speaking with another faculty/staff member at MCAD. *This is an opportunity for students 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 the MFA director if you are having a bad experience. Sometimes it just takes a while to click, and sometimes it might not be a good match.

Deciding to change mentors is completely normal. There is no pressure for students to stick with the same mentor for more than one semester. In fact, students are encouraged to think about cultivating a “team” of people invested in their success. To end a mentorship, please let the student know at least two weeks before the end of the semester

that you will not be continuing. Students should similarly give mentors at least two weeks notice of discontinuing the mentorship at the end of the semester. Both parties should know that if things aren't working out the way they're hoping for, there's no shame in switching. Furthermore, if a student decides to switch, it can be very impactful and supportive to let them know there are no hard feelings after the switch is complete. Many times students are worried that they have perhaps ruined a professional relationship by switching mentors, and MFA Program staff want to do everything to reassure them that this is not the case at all.

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