

In the School of Visual Communication Design, we are witness to the fact that visual design is in an exciting position to influence industries and nations across the world — because we're producing graduates who are making an impact — everywhere. Design thinking solves problems visually. The school celebrates a rich tradition in 2-D and 3-D design, photo-illustration, motion and interaction, illustration and design education. With a diverse faculty of both young and seasoned professionals, we're primed to welcome innovative and talented professional designers interested in a researched-based graduate education. Professors challenge students to realize their creative process, harness it and improve upon it.

Through the lens of design, graduate theses and projects explore the intersection of visual communication and research, understanding the impact of design on areas such as international healthcare, urban and 3-D environments, business management, finance and education, to name a few.

Design research is increasingly relevant to industries in need of purposeful visual communication. As a National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) accredited school with nationally and internationally recognized faculty members, the School of Visual Communication Design is the place for students and professionals who are ready to redefine the boundaries of visual communication for this generation and the next.

AnnMarie LeBlanc

— AnnMarie LeBlanc, Director



DESIGN GROUNDED IN RESEARCH

M.A. and M.F.A. students dive into theory using design to solve open-framed problems. Graduates wrap their heads around the rigor and work ethic of the school's design program and start building community with fellow graduates in the cohort from day one.

TACKLE UNFRAMED DESIGN PROBLEMS

Students are immersed into designing artifacts as creative solutions to the research questions asked in semester one. In advanced research and design courses, students test and develop their solutions and design process. With the help of a faculty advisor in a similar interest area, students propose thesis topics and begin thinking critically about how to spend year two.

SHAPE, LEAD AND TEACH FUTURE DESIGNERS

Graduate students earn professional experience teaching undergraduate courses, and serving as creative directors at various student-staffed design and marketing firms.

PERSONALIZE. INTERNATIONALIZE. SCRUTINIZE.

M.F.A. students customize their degree process with collaborative research and interdisciplinary coursework. These include personally focused courses, annual summer workshops, design-oriented education-abroad programs and individual investigations.

Graduate students immerse themselves in extensive research and design projects for social good, domestically and abroad, and present their research at conferences and to other professional audiences. Students may also investigate traditional letterpress printing at Type High Press.

CAPTURE YOUR INTERESTS AND LAUNCH YOUR THESIS.

M.A. and M.F.A. graduates develop innovative future practices, broaden scholarly research in visual design and make a meaningful contribution to society — all through the process of writing practical and scholarly theses.

Graduates investigate design's impact on issues in business, wayfinding and 3-D design, finance, education, letterpress, healthcare and information management. Numerous graduates have jump-started their careers from their thesis projects.

Past thesis projects have answered questions such as how mobile technology can increase a child's exposure to outdoor play; how explaining a student's educational loan debt visually might influence borrowing decisions; and how companies as large as Microsoft could improve recruitment technology for mobile job seekers.



Left to right: Ian McCullough, Basma Almusallam, Jason Richburg, Jason Bacher, Peni Acayo, Todd Wendorff

DEGREES

The M.A. and M.F.A. graduate students are encouraged to develop their individual abilities and personal aesthetic while pursuing an advanced degree. Students benefit from faculty advisor support and individualized courses of study to achieve their educational goals and career objectives.

Students come to the graduate program from a variety of backgrounds such as advertising, industrial and graphic design, design education and undergraduate design programs around the world. This diversity of experience creates an ever-changing and enriching environment in which degree candidates strive to reach individual and group goals.

M.A.

The Master of Arts degree serves designers seeking an opportunity to retool for an evolving design industry and become influential in emerging markets such as social media, branding, digital media and user experience design.

M.A. students may write a thesis or develop a graduate project in this 32-credit-hour program. Online, weekend and evening courses are available to effectively serve the demands of working professionals.

While students learn from world-class faculty and industry leaders in the classroom and as colleagues, the M.A. program accelerates students' design skills and allows them to command profitable careers with current knowledge and relevant portfolios.

M.F.A.

Master of Fine Arts degree graduates typically pursue careers in design education, but also stand out in the industry for their ability to solve problems from a research-based design perspective. From the first day onward, students follow their curiosity by finding problems of interest to them and seeking solutions through research and visual communication theory.

Teaching or graduate assistantships, collaborative projects and practical client work in the community charge VCD graduate students to refine their creative process. Gaining this experience helps graduates gain tools to succeed in their careers as innovative leaders in visual communication, management, entrepreneurship and higher education.

The faculty challenge students to produce unique thesis projects as a culmination of their degree experience. The curriculum provides a flexible program integrating advanced studio-based learning, design theory, method and practice, with unique opportunities for individual investigations and community-based design initiatives. Students can experiment in the Type High Press Lab, practice wayfinding and environmental graphic design, learn from creative entrepreneurs and gain exposure to global design through education-abroad options.

COURSEWORK

A design education at Kent State means personalized exploration. The intentionally broad course titles allow both students and faculty to tailor the experience, producing a more innovative course of study.



RESEARCH

Design research is agile and responsive. It's about knowing an end-user so well that you understand his uniqueness, his challenges and most important, his opportunities. VCD graduate students take a proactive, in-depth approach to learning research methods and tackling unframed design problems. Conducting ethnographic research and interviewing target populations allows students to bring the world to the classroom and vice versa. The hands-on Graduate Seminar course gives students a dry run at applying each research framework, strengthening creative development and rapid prototyping. The course combines lectures, readings and group discussion with team engagement in research field-work, practicing the strategic design research process in real time. Students become adept at mixing and matching methods for each project, client and question — and eventually their thesis.

STUDIO

In the studio courses, professors and students embrace the often muddled, unpredictable, complicated — and deeply personal creative process. Each year, the Graduate Studio course implements a Design for Good project, using primary and secondary research to identify how a visual message can shape an outcome for a social problem. Graduate Studio 1 and 2 make research and problem solving a reality through design. In these courses, students have developed icons to promote proper sanitation and malaria prevention in Kenya, as well as resolved communication breakdowns between local healthcare providers and the Hispanic community on the west side of Cleveland.

TEACHING

In VCD, you won't find a generic "how to" course on teaching. Teaching style is personal and subjective, so a course aimed at developing a teaching pedagogy must be customized as well. As design educators, we lead undergraduate students from idea through process, to an eventual understanding and ability to visualize messages. Imagine the best teacher you have ever had. She didn't just know the course content, she knew you. Students and faculty in VCD collaborate on best practices, sharing real teaching experiences and problem solving together.

DIVERSITY OF FACULTY

"Faculty, and their work, is the true measure of the merit of a design school," says Director AnnMarie LeBlanc. "With diverse focus areas like interactive motion design, environmental graphic design, photo-illustration and design research, which has been earned through education and industry experience, M.A. and M.F.A. graduate students in each interest area study closely with renowned faculty members who've dedicated their careers to the design and illustration fields."

ILLUSTRATION

Illustration at the graduate level allows students to hone their technical and conceptual skills as professional illustrators and educators, investigating issues of concept, color, form, theory and process.

Douglas Goldsmith
AnnMarie LeBlanc



INTERACTION AND MOTION

Students interested in animation and motion explore how moving elements communicate messages, and how to craft effective interactive platforms.

Jessica Barness
Gretchen Rinnert



PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION

Photo-illustration students use light, cameras and digital techniques to explore, interpret and produce still and moving imagery, creating both commercial and personal narratives.

Jaime Kennedy
Christopher Ransom



2-D DESIGN

Two-dimensional design students apply visual solutions and creative problem solving in print and Web formats.

Jillian Coorey
Joan Inderhees
Sanda Katila
Ken Visocky-O'Grady
Valora Renicker



3-D DESIGN

In three-dimensional graphic design, students learn about designing for branded environments, exhibitions, wayfinding programs, packaging and retail spaces.

David Middleton



COMMUNITY

Visual Communication Design starts, ends and continuously thrives on the thing that binds us — our people. To us, community is personal. It commands respect, provides care and supports the individual and his or her interests.

This program expects students to become thoughtful designers, purposeful teachers and permanent members of the Visual Communication Design community.

COHESIVENESS AND COMMUNITY EXTEND FAR BEYOND THE WALLS OF OUR STUDIOS

Students in the M.A. and M.F.A. programs work collaboratively in a supportive learning community, recognizing that each has individual strengths and goals. Graduate faculty members contribute to this immersive environment by engaging students in activities that clarify personal vision and voice — pushing the very boundaries of each student's chosen discipline. A lasting, professionally and personally connected cohort is built in the classroom and graduate studio.

NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED AS A THRIVING COLLEGE TOWN

The city of Kent and Kent State University have formed a partnership that has propelled in drastic changes to downtown Kent, resulting in an abundance of businesses, retail and restaurants, and a hotel and conference center, paired with our tried and true favorites.

VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN GRADUATE PROGRAM

at Kent State University



Left to right: Stephanie Snyder, Daniel Echeverri, Brian Buirge, Larrie King, Bryan Rinnert, Adina Feigenbaum, Rachel Hellgren