

PhD in Interdisciplinary Design and Media
College of Arts, Media and Design
April 2, 2020

Catalog Overview

The PhD provides a rigorous, globally-aware, practice-based, and human-centered approach to advanced scholarship. It aims to cultivate researcher-designers with a versatile repertoire of methods and a passion for applying those skills to the emerging epistemic perspective of integrated human, technological and data frameworks within creative collaboration across disciplinary boundaries. The degree is designed to attract entrepreneurial self-starters who seek to break ground and invent new fields through hybrid and integrated approaches to knowledge creation.

The PhD emphasizes four pillars of excellence within a research culture:

- Engaging with the nature of human experience through innovative, interdisciplinary approaches to design;
- Investigating new forms of digital media and data-driven communication across diverse disciplines;
- Articulating how creativity can embrace connections between artistic practices, innovation, entrepreneurship, and research;
- Connecting with changing forms of technology and media to foster shared experiences and exchange within local and global communities.

The PhD is unique in its focus on practice-based research, or scholarship applied to or conducted through making or creation. This is an emerging area that has been applied internationally to a wide range of creative fields and industries, many of which are represented within the College of Arts, Media and Design: music, theatre, design, studio art, games, architecture, journalism, and others. It differs from other forms of knowledge creation in that it rigorously cultivates the creation of artifacts as a mode of producing new knowledge, theories, and methodologies. Practice-based research integrates fields such as creativity and cognition or human-computer interaction to understand how practice operates, to enact that knowledge in practical applications, and to use the acts of creation themselves as a research methodology. PhD students will be encouraged to conduct their research in—and in some cases create—"living labs" embedded in real-world contexts and through on- and off-campus research partnerships.

The PhD degree program is composed of a common core and pathways of specialization. The core is centered around three areas: a) design research, which provides a methodology for understanding the ways design and media touch every aspect of daily life at every level of society; b) ethical practice, which engages with the humanistic concerns of design and cultural production; and c) experiential learning, which offers students the opportunity to produce research and conduct fieldwork with partner organizations.

Specialized pathways, customized according to the program of study as approved by the PhD advisors and vetted by external experts, include:

- Information design and visualization;
- Design research;
- Creative research.

Degree Requirements

The PhD degree requires completion of at least 48 semester credit hours beyond a bachelor's degree. Students who enter with an undergraduate degree will typically need four to five years to complete the program.

Qualifying Examination

The qualifying exam is a written and or oral examination in the primary and secondary research fields that ensures the student is intimately familiar with the relevant scholarly work in her or his area of concentration. The pedagogical role is not in the examination itself, but in the rigorous preparation of the primary and secondary fields by the student, approved by the advisor. Prior to the qualifying exam, the student prepares a document that outlines the selected primary and secondary fields, provides an overview of the current state of research, and assembles a list of relevant literature that will serve as the basis for the examination. The emphasis of the examination (for example short essays, a lecture presenting a scholarly argument) is to be useful for the dissertation research. Typically, the student takes the qualifying examination during the second year.

Dissertation Proposal Defense

To ensure students complete satisfactory dissertations that are appropriate for their focus area(s) all students are required to submit and defend a dissertation proposal prior to advancing to candidacy. The dissertation proposal is a detailed document outlining the scholarly context, methods, arguments, and activities underpinning the dissertation. It will include a detailed research plan and timeline, and is to be approved by the student's dissertation committee, which the student has to assemble in advance. The student then defends the accepted dissertation proposal in the context of the research seminar, inviting feedback from faculty and other students. The dissertation proposal defense is open to the entire CAMD PhD community and constitutes the last step before degree candidacy.

Degree Candidacy

A student is considered a PhD degree candidate after:

- Successfully completing core and specialization courses with a minimum of a 3.0 cumulative GPA and no grades lower than a B in core courses;
- Passing the qualifying exam;
- Submitting and successfully defending the dissertation proposal.

Advising and Committee Formation

Each entering student will be assigned to a faculty advisor based on their interests who will guide students in completing their core requirements of their degree. Ideally this person will also serve as their thesis committee chair, but they may transition to another committee chair as they transition into ABD status. As part of this process, in addition to their thesis committee chair, they will also be expected to identify two other readers representing their secondary and, if applicable, tertiary disciplines areas. The advisory committee will be responsible for guiding the students through their individual research proposal process, helping them to develop a robust research methodology, and clear plan for completion. The advisory committee will also be responsible for identifying an appropriate external expert to consult at key stages of degree progression. The advisors will also guide the students through the thesis project and its written component. Where applicable, committee members will also mentor and support the student through funded research.

Dissertation Defense

Each student will, with the aid of their advisor and committee, define the final product. The research component will typically consist of empirical and/or theoretical scholarship created using a methodology appropriate for the topic and field that is fully integrated with the practice component. The synergy between creative practice and research can take the form knowledge production through a variety of potential means: production of digital and physical artifacts, software and hardware applications, games, paintings, documentaries, comics, or exhibitions, design projects or products, theatrical productions, musical compositions, performances or other formats. The work will include a written dissertation which can also be paired with other modes of conveyance, such as a documentary, demonstration, performance, or exhibition. A key function of the dissertation will be to contextualize the practical work in contemporary scholarship and discourse, clearly articulating its rationale and contribution to the field. Over the course of their studies, students are expected to produce peer reviewed submissions based on their work.

The dissertation defense follows a similar format to the proposal defense. Acceptable dissertation models may include long-form (book-style) dissertations, multiple publishable papers, a system build-evaluate model, or other creative formats enumerated above.