

DESIGN STUDIES

Design Studies at Carnegie Mellon examines theoretical aspects of design, and provokes inquiry into the cultural, political, and ecological conditions it shapes, and is itself shaped by. Comprising eight minis in the first and second years, followed by a year of electives in the third, this sequence both complements and enriches your studio practice. These inspiring courses introduce a broad panorama of tools and methods to build critical understandings of design and its world-making, and world-breaking power. In response, you will shape your own design ethos, and become a designer that not only knows “how” to drive positive change, but “why” you absolutely must.

YEAR 1

YEAR 2

YEAR 3

FALL

Mini 1

1 Place

Mini 2

2 Histories

SPRING

Mini 3

3 Futures

Mini 4

4 Experience

5 Systems

6 Cultures

7 Persuasion

8 Power

Electives

1 Place

introduces you to place-based design thinking. It trains your senses to perceive all that is designed and sustains everyday human lifestyles, especially those infrastructures and services invisible to city dwellers in the built environment. In addition, you will recognize relations between natural and artificial worlds. Coursework covers methods to evaluate individual and collective environmental and social impact at a regional and local level through techniques that develop capacities to reveal dynamic relationships among elements.

Topics: #Context and Environment
#Neighborhood and Suburbanization
#Nature, Landscape, and Infrastructure
#Consumption and Waste

2 Histories

explores a plurality of design histories extending beyond the dominant, Anglo-European story of Design. Through a series of guest lectures, critical readings, and lively debates, you will expand your understanding of design as a "field," which evolves and changes over time in the context of broader technological, social, and philosophical developments; a tapestry woven of many threads, some more noticeable than others, but all relevant in their own way. Coursework includes authoring a well-historicized account of an influential designer, practice, or movement, and feature as part of a growing, online archive.

Topics: #Design's Ongoing Journey
#History as Imagining the Past
#Pluriversal Histories
#Pulling-on Narrative Threads

3 Futures

frames design in a temporally-extended, systemic context. It offers essential perspectives, practices, and competencies that are increasingly called for as designers progress in their work and careers, and as the design field evolves to acknowledge its significant powers and responsibilities. You will explore numerous futures methods, which support designers through ideation and storytelling, problem-finding and framing, brief formulation, project coordination, and collaboration. Coursework includes engagement with readings and videos, hands-on creative workshops, and visual prototyping and sketching.

Topics: #Steep #Alternative Futures
#Causal Layered Analysis
#Three Horizon Framework

4 Experience

explores how design touches people's lives, and shapes their materials and non-material worlds. Through a series of lectures, viewings, and class discussions, we'll try to determine just what design is and what designers can do. We will explore contrasting definitions of design, and get to know it as an experientially-rich process. We'll examine how users and audiences interact with what is designed, and debate the designer's responsibility to consider what lies behind it. Coursework includes individual and team projects exploring design's role in shaping our experience of the world.

Topics: #Humanitarian Design
#Designing for Access
#Cradle to Cradle
#Art in Design and Design in Art

5 Systems

prepares you to design for, and within, complex systems. You will make use of systems theory and experiment with systems-thinking techniques to interpret and illustrate how ecological, social, and cultural systems operate at different levels of scale. You will also learn to identify leverage points within a system, and design ways to intervene that creates openings for norms, behaviors, attitudes, and habits. Coursework includes exposure to theoretical frameworks, analysis of case studies, and complexity mapping projects to analyze and represent the world from scalar and systemic perspectives.

Topics: #Systems Theory
#Living Systems & Wicked Problems
#First and Second Order Cybernetics
#Leverage Points & Designing for Scales of Change

6 Cultures

immerses you in ways in which societies shape design, and how design shapes societies in return, rooted in historical and philosophical origins of identities and cultures. We will explore various aspects of human difference and relate them to the designed, material worlds we inhabit. Coursework involves reflective practices to connect theoretical, personal, and contextual understandings of the themes exposed, to explore meaning, purpose, and values that represent you as a person and as a designer.

Topics: #Human Differences and Worldviews
#Material/Designed World
#Self and Collective Reflective Work
#World Making

7 Persuasion

develops your capacity to put across your message, to get other people to understand you, to value your work, and to want to work with you—skills that will be central to your career, both inside and outside of design. Understanding what persuades you and others—how we are influenced by other people, by media, by technology, by our environment, by design—is a critical skill to develop in better understanding yourself, your design practice, those around you, and society more widely. Coursework includes a series of persuasive, exploratory exercises including filmmaking and exhibition of speculative work.

Topics: #Design is Persuasion
#Behavior Change
#Developing your Argument
#Strategies and Ethics of Persuasion

8 Power

explores the concepts of politics, the political, and the powers that intertwine with design. You will delve into the mesh conformed by plural forms of knowledge, wisdom, power, and designs. A deepening into matters of ideology allows us to think critically about how designed artifacts are the embodiment of ideology; having the power to influence what people think, and shape their aspirations, desires, and values. You will be exposed to emerging design practices and theories that harness the power of design for social change with sociocultural and ecological mindsets. Coursework includes facilitation of activities for the collective analysis of topics at the intersection of design and power.

Topics: #Ideology, Politics, and Power
#The Politics of Design
#Affect, Objects, Intentionality and Ethics
#Making, Unmaking, and Being