



College of Fine Art
School of Design
PhD in Transition Design

Doctoral Student Handbook
2026-2027

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SECTION 1: Welcome & Introduction

The School of Design at Carnegie Mellon is amongst the highest rated design schools in North America. It is one of a small number of university-based design programs in the USA; most other programs are based in Art Colleges. The School of Design is part of the College of Fine Arts at CMU, which also houses Architecture, Art, Drama and Music. Different kinds of design are taught and researched across the University, programs which have links to the School of Design such as the Human Computer Interaction Institute (HCII). New degree programs in media design are being developed between the College of Fine Arts and the School of Computer Science and versions of design are also taught at the Robotics Institute and the Entertainment Technology Center. Faculty in the School of Design also co-teach design courses with faculty within Public Policy and Management in Heinz College.

In 2014 the School of Design restructured its curricula from undergraduate to doctoral levels. It has long taught Communication Design and Product Design at the undergraduate level and has now added “Environments Design” to these. The School of Design was one of the first programs to bring together the principles of design to Communication and Information Technologies and consequently runs one of the leading Interaction Design graduate degree programs. These programs now emphasize Design for Services and Design for Social Innovation, and, at the master’s and doctoral levels, Transition Design.

The School of Design has also been a leader in establishing doctoral level study in design in North America. There are still only a handful of design-based PhD programs in the USA. The doctoral program in the school is focused on the emerging field of Transition Design.

While this handbook is specific to your academic experience in the department, it is just one element of the Graduate Student Handbook Suite. There are several other resources within the suite that you should consult when needed:

- School of Design Doctoral Handbook
- [University-Wide Graduate Student Handbook](#) (Office of Graduate & Postdoctoral Affairs)
- [The Carnegie Mellon Student Handbook](#)

Introduction to the PhD in Transition Design

Fundamental change at every level of society is needed to address the issues confronting us in the 21st century. From climate change, loss of biodiversity, and depletion of natural resources to systems of oppression, inequality, and inequity, Transition Design tackles these kinds of complex, wicked problems.

The PhD in Transition Design is for people committed to making a positive change in the world. Our unique program develops future design leaders with the capacity to envision and realize purposeful change across a range of complex systems—from food, water, materials and products, to policy, culture, economy, cities, and social movements.

Transition Design acknowledges that we are living in transitional times, takes as its central premise the need for societal transition (systems-level change) to more just, equitable, and sustainable futures, and argues that design and designers have a key role to play in these transitions. This kind of design is connected to long horizons of time, pluriversal perspectives, compelling visions of desired futures, and must be based upon new knowledge and skill sets. Research in Transition Design, while grounded in systems thinking, can also be undertaken from the perspective of many areas of interest—circular economies, commoning, decoloniality, sociotechnical transitions, public policy, stakeholder participation, and futuring, to name a few.

Complex challenges must be addressed through ecologies of interventions that draw on multiple design specialisms, alongside expertise from other disciplines. In this way, Transition Design is a transdisciplinary field that unites researchers from within and beyond Design. This involves service designers, social designers, communication designers, product designers, environments designers, and design historians, working alongside ecologists, anthropologists, philosophers, economists, and political scientists.

Our PhD researchers develop their own research interests within the broad framework of Transition Design. We practice a collective, rather than competitive approach to creating a strong cohort. Program faculty and researchers alike operate as one supportive community with the shared goal of producing transformational work that matters. Throughout the program, you will maintain fluid interactions between theory and practice, through critical engagements with texts, images, media, objects, and experiences. The program is designed to encourage a supportive, critical research culture in which students, their peers, and advisory committees work closely together to shape new knowledge. As a PhD Researcher at CMU, your research will directly shape the development of this dynamic and emerging field.

SECTION 2: School of Design Mission

We believe the work of designers is essential to help address the escalating business, social, and environmental challenges we face in the 21st century. Our contribution — as a leading design school in the world to offer degrees at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels within a top-ranked multidisciplinary research university — is to prepare the next generation of designers who are capable of working within and across these challenges.

SECTION 3: Degrees Offered

The School of Design awards a PhD in Transition Design. Note: Immigration changes may impact an F-1 or J-1 student's ability to change their academic program, even if allowed to by the program. Students on F-1 or J-1 documents should proactively consult with OIE when considering a program change.

SECTION 4: Departmental Contacts

School of Design Personnel

Jonathan Chapman: Head of School, Professor, jchapma1@cmu.edu

Stacie Rohrbach: Associate Head of Curriculum & Academics, Professor, stacie@cmu.edu

Andrew Twigg: Director of Masters Programs, Associate Teaching Professor,
atwigg@andrew.cmu.edu

Wayne Chung: Director of Undergraduate Studies, Professor, wcchung@andrew.cmu.edu

Gladys Perez Sriprasert: Director of Recruitment and Enrollment,
gpsripra@andrew.cmu.edu

Donna Cardiff Frost: Graduate Programs Coordinator, dfrost@andrew.cmu.edu

Mandy Best: Undergraduate Academic Advisor, mandyb@andrew.cmu.edu

Mila Maldando: Senior Administrative Assistant, mmaldona@andrew.cmu.edu

Heather Johnson: Business Manager, heatherj@andrew.cmu.edu

Stephanie Lange: Senior Administrative Coordinator: slange@andrew.cmu.edu

Joe Lyons: Marketing and Communications Manager, jwlyons@andrew.cmu.edu

Josiah Sadelmeier: 3D Lab Manager josiah@andrew.cmu.edu

Mathew McGehee: 3D Lab Night Manager, tbd

Ray Schlachter: Facilities and Computer Technology Manager, destech@andrew.cmu.edu

Jill Chisnell: School of Design Librarian, jillianc@andrew.cmu.edu

Campus Address

Carnegie Mellon University, School of Design
5000 Forbes Avenue, MMCH 110
Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3890

Phone: 412-268-2828

Office Hours

Monday to Thursday from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm, Friday 8:30 am to 4:30 pm

Website

<http://www.design.cmu.edu/>

Map of Campus

www.cmu.edu/home/visitors/map/index.html

SECTION 5: Design Resources

Computer Accounts & Email

All students will be assigned an account on the campus-wide Andrew computing system. An email account will be automatically generated for each student, with a user ID also automatically assigned. Student email addresses will be <USERID>@andrew.cmu.edu. Initially, your assigned password will be the first eight digits of your social security number or university assigned student ID number. The password can be changed the first time you access your account.

Email accounts are assigned upon the school's notification to the University that a student has officially accepted an offer of admission and that we wish to have the student added to the University rosters. This will be done as soon as possible after the student's acceptance of the admission offer. Therefore, email accounts should be available to incoming students sometime in late spring.

Andrew accounts will be automatically discontinued 3-6 months after graduation. The university will inform students before the accounts are deactivated. Students are urged to have a new, permanent email address in place before that time, and to inform the Graduate Program Coordinator of the new address so that we can maintain contact. Alumni email accounts are available through the Carnegie Mellon Alumni Association at:

<https://www.cmu.edu/engage/get-involved/resources/alumni-email>

Copying and Printing

For daily printing needs, doctoral students have access to a printer in the PhD Studio, situated in Margaret Morrison room 108. To print materials for courses you teach, a black & white and color 2-sided copier is available for your use in 110 Margaret Morrison, the Design Office.

CMU University Printing offers copying services and various copiers are available on campus; <https://www.cmu.edu/computing/services/endpoint/printing-kiosks/locations.html>.

Hunt Library

The library for the School of Design is in the Hunt Library, between the College of Fine Arts building and Baker Hall. Design publications are available on the bookshelves of the fourth floor in Hunt Library. The Design library liaison is Jillian Chisnell: jillianc@andrew.cmu.edu. Additional library resources may be found at: <https://www.library.cmu.edu/>

Technical references on human factors and other related design resources may be found in the Roger Sorrels Engineering and Sciences Library, located in Wean Hall.

To access electronic resources such as databases, eJournals, eBooks, and streaming content, log in using your Andrew ID & password when prompted. Contact the library for more information: <https://www.library.cmu.edu/ask>.

The PhD in Transition Design also benefits from its own library, housed within the PhD Studio. This library is under development and set to expand considerably in the coming academic year.

Mail

Your mail is delivered to Margaret Morrison 110, the main office for the School of Design. All students have alphabetical hanging file holders located in the general office area. Mail or other items can be left for other School of Design faculty or personnel in mailboxes also located in the office. US Mail should be addressed to you as follows:

<your name>
Carnegie Mellon University
School of Design, MMCH 110
Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3890

Use this same address for any packages you wish to have delivered to you on campus. We will inform you by email when you have a package. Please be prompt in retrieving your packages.

Have personal mail delivered to your home/apartment.

Items to be mailed can be placed in folders designated in specific mailboxes in the office. There are separate folders for Campus Mail and Stamped Mail. You may send something anywhere on campus by addressing to:

<name>
<department>
<building><room number>

Students are responsible for postage on any outgoing personal mail—this includes Federal Express or UPS. Any off-campus mail left to be mailed at the office MUST have correct postage; any items without stamps left for mailing will be returned to the sender. Mail is picked up and delivered once a day at around 9:00 a.m. If you want a mailing to go out quickly, we recommend you walk it to a public mailbox or to the CMU Post Office in the basement of the Cohen University Center (CUC).

Studio Space

All Doctoral Design students will share a dedicated studio space in Margaret Morrison 108. This space is available to you seven days a week, though vacation periods may have slightly reduced hours for access.

Administrative Assistance

Students are not entitled to secretarial support. The School of Design staff can help you with financial matters, enrollment information, or general university information. However, any copying, classroom preparation work, setting up meetings, etc., is the responsibility of the student. For those tasks that do require administrative assistance, the following generally applies:

- Program related: See the Graduate Program Coordinator
- Class related: See the Instructor/Professor responsible for that class

SECTION 6: Advising

Advisory Committee

For the Research Phase, candidates must assemble an Advisory Committee of academics with expertise relevant to their research topic. The Committee should comprise between 2 and 4 members, with at least one of whom is external to the School of Design, preferably external to CMU. The Primary Advisor must be in the School of Design.

Candidates are expected to meet with their Primary Advisor for substantial meetings about their research at least once a month. They are expected to be in contact with all members of their Committee about their research at least 4 times a year.

Committee members make consensual determinations of the candidate's standing and completion and report this to the Director of Doctoral Studies, periodically.

All candidates must make presentations about the progress of their research at the Fall and Spring Progress Reviews. There will be a Review Panel present at these presentations, at least one of whom is not on the candidate's Advisory Committee. Candidates do not present at their first and last semester but must attend all reviews

Advisor & Advisee Collaboration

- Students should consult with the Program Directors, Graduate Program Coordinator, or appropriate advisor as needed each semester for final course selection.
- Keep abreast of your progress through the Graduate Program Coordinator.
 - Obtain and keep a written record of ALL decisions regarding coursework, progress, etc., including follow up conversations in email for purposes of future confirmation.
- Assure that the advising process is maintained.

Individual Development Plan (IDP): Individual Development Plans (IDPs) are meant to promote professional and personal growth by formally documenting goals and facilitating dialogue, collaboration, and accountability between advisors and advisees. Carnegie Mellon has developed a set of templates that can be used by doctoral students and their advisors to create an Individual Development Plan. You can find the templates here:

<https://www.cmu.edu/graduate/professional-development/index.html>

Review/Redress of Academic Conflicts

If academic problems cannot be resolved by direct interaction with an instructor, you may discuss any academic problem(s) with the Director of Doctoral Studies, who will attempt to negotiate a resolution with the instructor. If this is unsuccessful, the Head of the School of Design will decide unresolved conflicts. For a full description of the process please see the [Summary of Graduate Student Appeal and Grievance Procedures](#) for connection to University policies and procedures.

SECTION 7: Doctoral Degree Requirements

Residency Requirements

The university requires PhD students to have a minimum of one year in residency on a CMU campus.

International students in years 2-4 are required to demonstrate residency through bimonthly in person check-in appointments with the Director of the PhD program to maintain legal status during years 2-4.

U.S. government regulations require F-1 and J-1 international students to be enrolled in an in-person degree program, with in-person expectation coursework. Even though this immigration requirement is specifically for international students, residency requirements in a degree program must be consistent for both international and domestic students.

Expected Timeline

The program has two key stages: the first is taught in person (year 1); the second comprises a self-defined project developed in consultation with an advisory committee (years 2–4). Where schedules permit, our students can take electives from across Carnegie Mellon's rich and diverse curricular offering.

The PhD in Transition Design is one program, but it can be completed in two ways. International students study in residence in Pittsburgh for all four years. Visa sponsorship requires full time enrollment with the expectation of in person presence on campus for the duration of the program. Domestic students — U.S. citizens and permanent residents — also complete their first year in person but may be able to continue employment and pursue the program with low-residency in years 2-4, while remaining fully enrolled. Both ways will lead to the same degree, with the same expectations and the same quality of work.

View the online [PhD Planner](#) to see an illustration of how courses are mapped across the 4 years.

Registration Process

Students will be registered for required courses by the Graduate Program Coordinator. In subsequent semesters, students are responsible for registering for elective courses online by logging into Student Information Online at <https://www.cmu.edu/hub/>. Any problems or questions regarding registration should be directed to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

Required Units for Degree Attainment

Total number of units for PhD attainment = minimum of 288

PhD Course List

Year One—Fall

- 51903: Design Theory and Practice (12 units)
- 51907: Design Teaching (12 units)
- 51937: Ecological Worldview (12 units)
- 51703 Graduate Design Colloquium (3 units)
- 51950: Progress Review I (0 units)

Year One—Spring

- 51904: Transition Design (18 units)
- 51974: Design Futures (9 units)

- 51914: Framing Proposals for Change (9 units)
- 51952: Progress Review II (0 units):
Experiential Futures (9 units)

Year Two—Fall

- 51921: Research I (36 units)
- 51954: Progress Review III (0 units)

Year Two—Spring

- 51922: Research II (36 units)
- 51956: Progress Review IV (0 units)

Year Three—Fall

- 51923: Research III (36 units)
- 51913 Design Writing Workshop (12 units)
- 51957: Progress Review V (0 units)

Year Three—Spring

- 51924: Research IV (36 units)
- 51958: Progress Review VI (0 units)

Year Four—Fall

- 51971: Coda I (36 units)

Year Four - Spring

- 51972 Coda II (36 units)

Core Courses

Please refer to the [School of Design](#) website for the full, year-by-year schedule of completion, and course descriptions for all required courses.

Intensive & Progress Reviews

Each year there is required attendance for the doctoral intensive that is scheduled before fall classes begin and two progress reviews; one at the end of the Fall semester and one at the end of the Spring semester.

The fall intensive is a 1-day, required workshop that introduces students to the program. There are two progress reviews each semester which take place before faculty and peers. Invited guests may also be present at the fall Intensive and Progress Reviews.

Coursework (Year 1)

The first year of the PhD comprises a series of courses which will help prepare students to frame and develop their research proposals and introduce them to Transition Design. All courses in the first year must be successfully passed to progress to the second year.

Research (Years 2–4)

The nature of the process for most of a doctoral candidacy will depend on a candidate's research topic and approach. Ordinarily, it will involve engaging with the Primary Advisor on a minimum monthly basis and with a wider research committee on a minimum quarterly basis. These advisory committees are convened in agreement with the Director of Doctoral Studies (see below). Given the scale of the project, all research will have internal phases of work on distinct components, with explicit product milestones and iterative evaluation criteria. These agreed milestones will be monitored and checked along the way to ensure the candidate is making progress, and working at a satisfactory pace, and level of productivity.

Over the three years, candidates will produce a substantive and multifaceted body of work that documents research undertaken, articulates the new knowledge that has been demonstrated by that work, establishes the validity of what has been discovered, and communicates the significance and relevance of that work and new knowledge to different stakeholders. Dissertations can be entirely written (60—80K words), or a body of written and practical work (40—60K words, by negotiation). Your final body of work must demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge, advancing the field of Transition Design.

PhD Interim Requirements

The Coursework Phase takes place during the first academic year. Candidates can only advance to the Research Phase after:

- Completing with a passing grade (at least a B) all courses as specified in the curriculum for the first 2 semesters of the program.
- Receiving a passing grade for a research proposal submitted at the end of the second semester.

During the Research Phase, candidates conduct design research in regular consultation with their Advisory Committee. Candidates can only advance to a subsequent year of the research phase after receiving a passing grade for presentation at Fall and Spring Progress Reviews. Candidates who do not receive a passing grade can resubmit for an Ad Hoc Review at the Intensive prior to the commencement of the next Fall Semester.

Electives

PhD students may take elective courses from outside the School of Design, at the discretion of the Director of Doctoral Studies. To avoid overloading, you are required to consult on your elective choices with the Director of Doctoral Studies, prior to making your final sections.

All courses to be counted toward graduation must be taken for a letter grade. Grades are factored into the student's QPA in compliance with the university's grading policies, detailed at <https://www.cmu.edu/policies/>.

Department Policy on Double Counting Courses

The School of Design does not double count courses.

Department Policy for Courses Outside the Department/College

Students may take elective courses within and outside the School of Design and within Carnegie Mellon University. The Director of Doctoral Studies, and the Graduate Program Coordinator are available for consultation on electives. Guidance on course selection will be based upon the goals of the program and of the student, with the intent of providing a well-rounded set of courses over the duration of the program. Students must ensure that all courses apply toward graduation requirements. Approval does not ensure that the student will be able to enroll in courses in other departments; rather, it means that the course may apply toward the student's graduation requirements should the student be able to enroll in the class.

For electives taken outside the school, including independent study, the procedure is as follows:

The student should attempt to enroll directly in all courses. If the student cannot enroll, they should attempt to be placed on the waitlist. Students who are unable to enroll directly should contact the course instructor (email is usually fine) and explain the circumstances regarding their reasons and eligibility (prerequisites and/or background) for taking the course. If the instructor gives the student permission to take the course, the student should make sure to get the approval in writing, then send it to the appropriate department administrator to complete

enrollment. Students should be aware that sometimes instructors will give “permission,” but this does not mean that they know there is space in the class; the department administrator then could be forced to deny enrollment due to space limitations.

The student may at any time in the above process check with the Graduate Program Coordinator to see whether any class has remaining space or has special restrictions on enrollment.

Independent Study/Directed Research

For a Design independent study, a student must complete the application on the School of Design Student Resources page:

<https://design.cmu.edu/resources/student-resources/independent-study-application>

To take an independent study course in a department other than Design, the student should contact that department’s office and follow their procedure for independent study registration.

Course Exemptions

Granting of course exemptions and/or waivers for required coursework is highly unusual. However, if circumstances arise that warrant consideration inquiries can be directed to the Director and Program Coordinator.

Protocol for Evaluation of Transfer Credit

In general, the Design doctoral program does not accept transfer credits from institutions outside of Carnegie Mellon. On occasion, though, doctoral level course work completed at a different institution will be considered for transfer credit by the Director of Doctoral Studies and the Doctoral Committee. The Director and the Committee will review the student’s coursework and research in order to determine possible advanced placement consideration. Transfer credit will only be considered for grades of B or better. In cases where the outside institution only offers the option of a Pass grade, the Pass will also be considered. Grades will not appear on the CMU transcript, only course credit.

Also on occasion, a course taken at another Pittsburgh institution, through the University’s Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education (PCHE) agreement, may be counted with the approval of the Director of Doctoral Studies.

Teaching Requirements/Opportunities

Graduate students are required to have a certain level of fluency in English before they can instruct in Pennsylvania, as required by the English Fluency in Higher Education Act of 1990. Through this Act, all institutions of higher education in the state are required to evaluate and certify the English fluency of all instructional personnel, including teaching assistants and interns. The full university policy can be reviewed [here](#).

The fluency of all instructional personnel will be rated by Language Support in the Student Academic Success Center to determine at what level of responsibility the student can TA. In addition to administering the International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Test (a mandatory screening test for any non-native speaker of English), Language Support in the Student Academic Success Center helps teaching assistants who are non-native English speakers develop fluency and cultural understanding to teach successfully at Carnegie Mellon. Visit the [Student Academic Success Center](#) website for additional information.

Research Requirements/Resources

All candidates are required to make presentations about the progress of their research at the Fall and Spring Progress Reviews. There will be a Review Panel present at these presentations, at least one of whom is not on the candidate's Advisory Committee. Candidates do not present at their first and last semester but must attend all reviews.

Resources and Regulations Governing Research at Carnegie Mellon

- [Office of Sponsored Programs](#)
- [Office of Research Integrity & Compliance](#)
- [Intellectual Property Policy](#)
- [Policy on Restricted Research](#)
- [Human Subjects in Research Policy](#)

Internship/Co-op Requirements and Opportunities

There are no Internship/Co-op requirements for the PhD in Transition Design degree.

International students are required to consult with the Office of International Education for eligibility for work authorization before starting or seeking an internship/co-op or consulting opportunity. International students will benefit from proactively reviewing OIE guidance regarding off-campus work authorization. Off-campus work authorization processing times can take several weeks or months, and international students will benefit from starting the off-campus work authorization process as early as possible. Resources to Explore Potential Internships:

- Faculty Recommendations
- Career and Professional Development Center

SECTION 8: Dissertation Preparation & Requirements

PhD Completion Requirement

The School of Design does not require a qualifying exam.

The PhD is completed when the Advisory Committee approves acceptance of the design research documentation on the advice of the External Examiner. A candidate's design research documentation can only be sent for external examination after receiving approval from the Director of Doctoral Studies to do so.

There are two forms of examination on our doctoral program: "doctoral defense" and "external review." In most cases, students take the "doctoral defense" option, in which candidates defend their dissertations before their Advisory Committee, one External Examiner and an audience of their peers. For the "external review" option, candidates have their final dissertations sent for external review by two External Examiners. These examiners then submit independent reports on the documentation to inform the decision of the Advisory Committee.

Candidates can recommend appropriate academics to be their External Examiner(s), but the final decision about examiners lies with the Director of Doctoral Studies.

In all cases, examiners will be asked to review the design research documentation with respect to:

- validity of the research strategies
- originality and significance of the findings
- quality of the documentation

All members of the examination team (External Examiners, and the Advisory Committee) will be asked to determine whether the work:

- is of doctoral quality as is
- requires minor amendments that the examiner need not review
- requires more significant amendments that the examiner needs to review
- requires substantial reworking for later re-examination

External Examiner's reviews are only recommendations. Final determination of the acceptability of the Design Research Documentation lies with the Advisory Committee. All exams are chaired by the Director of Doctoral Studies, who signs-off on the outcome.

PhD Criteria Completion and Certification

Doctoral degree candidates are certified for the doctoral degree when the Advisory Committee approval is obtained, and all required documentation is submitted. Documentation requirements can be obtained from the Graduate Program Coordinator.

Doctoral students are only eligible for doctoral hooding in May; participation in the graduation ceremony is optional.

Statute of Limitations

Full-time Design PhD candidates are expected to complete all degree requirements in four years. Once this time-to-degree limit has lapsed, the person may resume work towards a doctoral degree only if newly admitted to a currently offered doctoral degree program under criteria determined by that program. Students continuing beyond the four years will be registered for 5 units per semester, and charged accordingly.

Under extraordinary circumstances, such as leave of absence, military or public service, family or parental leave, or temporary disability, a school or college may, upon the relevant department's recommendation and with the written approval of the Dean, defer the lapse of All But Dissertation status for a period commensurate with the duration of that interruption.

As outlined in the Doctoral Student Status Policy

<https://www.cmu.edu/policies/student-and-student-life/doctoral-student-status.html> students will complete all requirements for the Ph.D. degree within a maximum of ten years from original matriculation as a doctoral student, or less if required by a more restrictive department or college policy. Once this time-to-degree limit has lapsed, the person may resume work towards a doctoral degree only if newly admitted to a currently offered doctoral degree program under criteria determined by that program.

Students, who are pursuing the Ph.D. degree as part-time students for all semesters of their program, as approved by their program, may also appeal to their program or department for extension of the time to degree limit.

Residency Requirements and Expected Timeline for Meeting Milestones

Students in the PhD program who have been awarded teaching fellowships must be in residency at CMU throughout the four-year program. Full-time PhD students are expected to complete the program in four years.

ABD Students in Residence

All But Dissertation (ABD) students In Residence receiving any financial support (such as tuition, stipend, fees or health insurance, whether full or partial), tied to activities that are

integral to their doctoral program that is paid by or administered by the University must be enrolled for at least thirty-six units to maintain full time student status and all subsequent student privileges. Exceptions to the thirty-six-unit enrollment requirement may be granted by the Provost.

ABD students In Residence who are not receiving any financial support (such as tuition, stipend, fees or health insurance, whether full or partial), from the University tied to activities that are integral to their doctoral program should consult their college policy to determine the number of units that they must be registered to maintain full-time student status and all subsequent privileges. ABD students In Residence who are pursuing their doctoral degree on a part time basis and are not receiving any financial support (such as tuition, stipend, fees or health insurance, whether full or partial), from the university tied to activities that are integral to their doctoral program should consult their college policy to determine the number of credits they must be registered for in order to maintain part time student status and all subsequent privileges.

ABD students who are employed by the University in a capacity independent of their educational program and are pursuing a doctoral degree part time, may register for the number of credits required by their department in order to remain in part time status so long as they are not receiving any financial support (such as tuition, stipend, fees or health insurance, whether full or partial), tied to activities that are integral to their doctoral program by their college, school or department. Questions about eligibility for tuition benefits should be referred to the Benefits Department.

PhD Dissertation

Over the three years of the research phase, candidates will produce a substantive and multifaceted body of work that documents research undertaken; articulates the new knowledge that has been demonstrated by that work; establishes the validity of what has been discovered; and communicates the significance and relevance of that work and new knowledge to different stakeholders. Dissertations can be entirely written (60—80K words), or a body of written and practical work (40—60K words, by negotiation). Your final body of work must demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge, advancing the field of Transition Design.

The submitted nature of the body of work will also depend on the kind of research undertaken, but will comprise of:

- a written dissertation validating the research and establishing its originality and significance.
- a durable record of any practice work (designs, designing or other process work undertaken)

SECTION 9: Department Policies & Protocols

Department Policy for Withdrawing

Students taking courses must follow the procedures and deadlines for adding, dropping, or withdrawing from courses as identified on the academic calendar. Information can be found at <https://www.cmu.edu/hub/registrar/course-changes/index.html>.

Note: There is a separate calendar for add/drop of doctoral level courses.

Doctoral students who wish to leave the program are expected to discuss their plans with the Director of Doctoral Studies in a timely manner. Forms and procedural information can be found here: <https://www.cmu.edu/policies/student-and-student-life/tuition-fees-adjustment.html>

New Policies / “Grandfather” Policy

Policies are sometimes changed when the School of Design believes new rules offer improvements to the programs. However, students currently enrolled in a degree program that is affected by a change in policy may choose to be governed by the older policy that was in place at the time of their matriculation. In cases when degree requirements are changed and certain courses are no longer offered, the school will choose a compromise that allows those students to satisfy the original requirement.

Time Away from Academic Responsibilities

The School of Design follows the University’s Academic Calendar for vacation and “no class” days each semester.

SECTION 10: Grading & Evaluation

Grading Scale/System

All courses offered by the School of Design graduate programs are graded on the Graduate Student Grading Standard described in full at www.cmu.edu/policies/student-and-student-life/grading.html.

Department Policy for Incompletes

Carnegie Mellon students are expected to complete a course during the academic semester in which the course was taken. However, if the instructor agrees, a grade of “I” (incomplete) may be given when a student, for reasons beyond their control, has been unable to complete the work of a course, but the work completed to date is of a passing quality and the grade of incomplete provides no undue advantage to the student over other students. In awarding an “I” grade, an instructor must specify the requirements for completing the work and designate a

default letter grade in case the student does not follow through.

Students must complete the required course work no later than the end of the following academic semester, or sooner if required by the instructor. The instructor must record the permanent grade by the last day of the examination period of the following semester, or the registrar will administratively assign the default grade. Note that an incomplete grade in a prerequisite course will prevent the student from taking the next course in the sequence.

Satisfactory Academic Standing

According to University policies, generally, sanctions resulting from an Academic Action (e.g. probation, suspension, or drop) take effect immediately, regardless of whether an appeal is filed. In exceptional circumstances, however, the Dean or the Provost may elect to hold sanctions in abeyance pending the resolution of the appeal. Review the [Summary of Graduate Student Appeal and Grievance Procedures](#) for details. If the decision is not overturned, the student is not entitled to a refund of tuition or student fees incurred during the semester in which the appeal was being considered. Students can appeal any/all of these decisions.

Students who demonstrate inadequate progress toward their degree will be placed on academic probation. They will have one opportunity to repeat each course in which the minimum acceptable grade was not earned. Courses may be repeated the next time they are offered, either the next semester or the subsequent year. Academic probation is intended to notify a student of significant and/or continuous performance issues and to suggest that immediate steps be taken to correct the cause.

In the semester of their return, students will remain on academic probation. Academic probation status will be automatically removed if the student earns the minimum grades necessary to return to satisfactory academic status in accordance with School of Design Policies and Procedures. Students are advised that if they return and do not earn the minimum grades necessary to return to satisfactory academic status they will be dropped from the program.

Suspension and Return to Program

Academic suspension is intended to provide a student time to address or rectify issues that are impeding their performance and/or progress in the School of Design in order to successfully continue their studies. An academic suspension will be imposed if a student demonstrates significant inadequate progress towards their degree and will last one semester. Students who return to the program following an academic suspension will have one opportunity to repeat each course in which the minimum acceptable grade was not earned. Courses may be repeated the next time they are offered, either the next semester or the subsequent year.

Suspended students may not register for courses, attend classes, live in student or fraternity/sorority housing, use campus facilities, including athletic facilities, library and computer clusters, participate in student activities, be members of student organizations, or have student jobs. Note, students on academic suspension may participate in a summer campus job if they accepted the position before they were suspended. Academic suspension may also result in any

scholarships, research assistantships and/or financial awards to be rescinded. Students on academic suspension cannot be selected to receive awards.

After a semester suspension, students may petition to return by submitting to the Head of the School of Design a statement that describes the steps they have taken to correct issues of poor performance and their plan for moving through the program successfully upon their return. Students must also complete and submit to the university a Return from Leave form. The Director of Graduate Studies will notify students in writing of their status to return from academic suspension for the subsequent semester.

In the semester of their return, students will be placed on academic probation. Academic probation status will be removed if the student earns the minimum grades necessary to return to satisfactory academic status in accordance with School of Design Policies and Procedures. Students are advised that if they return and do not demonstrate satisfactory progress toward the degree they will be dropped from the program.

Drop from Program/Department/College

Students who earn probationary status for a second semester (consecutive or nonconsecutive) may be dropped from the program. A drop terminates a student's enrollment.

Students will be notified in writing of their drop from the program and may appeal the decision by sending a formal letter stating the basis for appeal to the Head of the School of Design. Students will have an opportunity to appeal a removal decision by the Department Head by sending a formal letter stating the basis for appeal, with appropriate documentation, to the Dean of the College of Fine Arts. The university appeals procedures can be viewed at: <https://www.cmu.edu/graduate/policies/appeal-grievance-procedures.html>.

Review the Summary of Graduate Student Appeal and Grievance Procedures. Students can appeal any/all of these decisions.

SECTION 11: Funding & Financial Support

Statement of Department Financial Support

Some candidates accepted to the full-time Design PhD program will be offered teaching fellowships which cover all tuition costs for the 4-year duration. Candidates whose studies extend beyond the expected 8 semesters will not be eligible for further financial support. Candidates are responsible for health insurance costs and university fees. Candidates who are unable to teach must pay their own tuition and fees.

Candidates who are awarded teaching fellowships will also be offered a modest stipend for the 4-year duration. This means that candidates will be expected to teach the equivalent of 1 course per semester, except in their first and last semester of candidacy. The nature of the courses taught will be negotiated with candidates based on their existing expertise and the School of Design's needs. The coursework component of the degree program provides instruction in teaching. In most cases, candidates teaching will evolve from Teaching Assistantships to Co-Teaching to Teacher of Record. Faculty with formal evaluations closely mentor all teaching.

Professional track (self-funded) candidates are responsible for payment of their own tuition fees. In year one, students must pay the full 36 units per semester. Once transferred to ABD the tuition for years 2-4 are equivalent to 14% of the base tuition for the year. The sudden drop in tuition fees is because the first year is a fully taught year with a heavy course load, whereas the subsequent three years are spent in reading and research. In addition to a reduced tuition fee, domestic professional track candidates benefit from a low-residency mode and are not required to be located in Pittsburgh.

Graduate students who find themselves in need of immediate funds for emergency situations should contact the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs
www.cmu.edu/student-affairs/index.html to inquire about an Emergency Student Loan.

Stipend

Teaching Fellowships receive a 9-month stipend. Graduate student stipends may be subject to U.S. federal, state and local income (wage) taxes and required withholdings. This Policy explains the U.S. federal, state and local income (wage) taxation and withholding for graduate student awards given by the university:

<https://www.cmu.edu/policies/student-and-student-life/tax-status-of-graduate-students-awards.html>

Health Insurance Requirement

SHIP is the University's Student Health Insurance Plan. By default, all students are enrolled in SHIP unless they submit a waiver to University Health Services. If you elect to enroll in CMU's Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP), the university will cover 100 percent of the premium cost for your individual coverage. While you have the opportunity to purchase partner, spouse, or dependent coverage under the SHIP plan, the university's support will be limited to the individual coverage amount.

Note: The health insurance credit is a non-qualified scholarship, and is considered taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to all students who receive it.

If your enrollment status or location changes in the spring and you choose to enroll in the university health plan for the spring semester (during the open enrollment period in January) then a prorated credit will be applied to your student account to correspond with the individual health insurance premium cost charged.

Department Fees

Students are responsible for the university's technology, student activities, health insurance and transportation fees. Course materials are not provided by the school.

Travel Conference & Research Funding

Our goal is to support student requests for travel funds to conferences in the United States or abroad. However, travel awards are limited, based on funds available each year. Here are some considerations:

For full-time students who wish to attend a conference, the School may provide up to \$1,000 per person, per academic year, for travel, lodging, and/or conference fees. Other expenses such as food are not supported by this fund.

To apply for conference-related funding, the student should write a brief email to the Director of Doctoral Studies explaining the specific nature and scope of the conference, how attending will advance your doctoral research, whether you will make a formal presentation, and the expected costs for reimbursement. Any special circumstances should also be explained. Copy the Graduate Program Coordinator and the Business Manager to your email requests. Requests should be submitted as far in advance as possible. Requests received too late may be declined. When you have accumulated receipts to equal or exceed the reimbursement amount, fill out a reimbursement form and submit it, along with the original receipts, to the School Business Manager.

A student may receive support no more than once in an academic year. This support begins when a student starts the program and ends at graduation.

Priority is given to students presenting papers at conferences and to students who have not received travel support in the past from the School. In all cases a travel grant will be in the form of a reimbursement. In other words, funds will be provided after the trip, based on receipts submitted to the Business Manager in the Design Office.

Payment Schedule

Please refer to the Human Resources Payroll Calendar for the specific stipend payment dates.

Additional Sources of Internal & External Financial Support

University Conference and Professional Development Funding is a funding application process provided by GSA and the Provost's Office for students, student work groups or groups to attend conferences, whether as a participant or as a presenter. The process is managed by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs. Students can find more information about the application process and deadlines at:

<https://www.cmu.edu/graduate/professional-development/index.html>.

U.S. citizens and permanent residents may complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online. Information about the federal student aid programs may be found at <https://www.cmu.edu/sfs/financial-aid/graduate/index.html>

Students will receive consideration for a Federal Direct Student Loan by completing the FAFSA and the funding comes directly from the federal government to the university. Students planning on borrowing a subsidized or unsubsidized loan for the first time are required to complete a Federal Direct Loan Master Promissory Note and Federal Direct Loan Entrance Counseling. Graduate students are eligible only for unsubsidized loans.

Availability of Summer Employment

In general, Design doctoral students are not obligated to the School in the summer semester. Domestic students may pursue work on or off-campus; international students can only pursue work on campus. During the fall and spring semesters, students supported by a teaching stipend are fully obligated to the School of Design and must negotiate any additional work with the Director of Doctoral Studies. Doctoral students not receiving a teaching stipend are eligible to apply for grant support, if the weekly work commitment does not exceed 20 hours. In all cases, work commitments should not impede progress toward the degree.

International students are required to check with the Office of International Education (OIE) to determine eligibility before pursuing any internships.

Department Policy on Outside Employment

Outside employment is permitted with proper authorization from the School of Design and the Office of International Education. Students who hold employment positions should ensure that their work does not interfere with the operations of the School of Design and that their actions adhere to Carnegie Mellon University's community standards.

Requirements for the Continuation of Funding

If you are receiving a stipend, are hired as a teaching or research assistant, or are planning to have a position with CMU then Employment Eligibility Verification is required. Form I-9 must be completed within 3 business days of beginning work for any type of compensation (stipend or employment). Additional details are highlighted below. To ensure compliance with federal law, Carnegie Mellon University maintains the [Employment Eligibility Verification \(I-9\) Policy \[pdf\]](#) covering the university's I-9 and E-Verify requirements.

Every individual receiving a stipend from CMU or employed by CMU must comply with the I-9 Policy by completing the Form I-9 within three business days following the first day of stipend start date/employment.