

Interdisciplinary Design and Media, PhD (Boston)

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: design research, which provides a methodology for understanding the ways design and media touch every aspect of daily life at every level of society; ethical practice, which engages with the humanistic concerns of design and cultural production; and 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

POSTBACCALAUREATE ENTRY

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 five years to complete the program.

ADVANCED ENTRY

Students can petition for an advanced entry, which requires completion of at least 28 semester hours. Advanced entry requires an advanced degree (MS, MA, MFA, etc.) or extensive experience aligned with the research direction of the candidate. While students can qualify for advanced entry upon acceptance, the decision for students to continue in the advanced program is made after the first year, where they have to demonstrate that they do not need additional coursework and can complete the program in four years.

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 their 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 3.000 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 discipline 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 of knowledge production through a variety of potential means: production of digital and physical artifacts, software and hardware applications, games, paintings, documentaries, comics, exhibitions, design projects or products, theatrical productions, musical compositions, performances, or other formats. The work will include a written dissertation that 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.

Program Requirements

Milestones

- Annual review
- Individual path (including advisors)
- Teaching requirement
- Qualifying examination
- Dissertation proposal
- Dissertation committee
- Dissertation defense

Required Coursework

Code	Title	Hours
INAM 7000	Introduction to Research in Interdisciplinary Design and Media	4
INAM 7001	Research Methods in Interdisciplinary Design and Media	4
INAM 7900	Research Seminar	4
INAM 7901	Dissertation Writing Seminar	4
Research Methods Elective		
Complete one research methods elective from this list or in consultation with your advisor:		4
ARCH 6340	Graduate Topics in Architecture	
ARTG 5110	Information Design History	
ARTG 5120	Research Methods for Design	
ARTG 5310	Visual Cognition	
ARTG 5320	Statistics for Design	
ARTG 5620	Notational Systems for Experience	
ARTG 6110	Information Design Theory and Critical Thinking	
GSND 5110	Game Design and Analysis	
GSND 5130	Mixed Research Methods for Games	
GSND 6320	Psychology of Play	
GSND 6340	Biometrics of Design	
GSND 6350	Data-Driven Game Design	
GSND 6984	Research	
INAM 6300	Models for Applied Inquiry in Creative Practice	

JRNL 5400	Media and Advocacy in Theory and Practice
Dissertation	
INAM 9990	Dissertation Term 1
INAM 9991	Dissertation Term 2

Discipline-Specific Coursework

Code	Title	Hours
Complete 28 semester hours of discipline-specific coursework in consultation with your domain-specific advisor and committee members.		28

Program Credit/GPA Requirements

A minimum of 48 semester hours of coursework beyond the undergraduate degree is required.

A minimum 3.000 cumulative GPA and no grades lower than a B in core courses are required.

Plan of Study

Year 1			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
INAM 7000		4 INAM 7900	4
INAM 7001		4 Research methods elective	4
Discipline-specific coursework		4 Discipline-specific coursework	4
		12	12
Year 2			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
Discipline-specific coursework		4 Discipline-specific coursework	4
Discipline-specific coursework		4 Discipline-specific coursework	4
Discipline-specific coursework		4 INAM 7901	4
		12	12
Year 3			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
Qualifying exams		0 Teaching requirement, TA	0
Teaching requirement, TA		0 INAM 9991	
INAM 9990			
		0	0
Year 4			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
Teaching requirement, teacher of record		0 Teaching requirement, teacher of record	0
INAM 9996		0 INAM 9996	0
		0	0
Year 5			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
INAM 9996		0 INAM 9996	0
		0	0

Total Hours: 48

Advanced Entry Program Requirements

Milestones

Annual review
 Individual path (including advisors)
 Teaching requirement
 Qualifying examination
 Dissertation proposal
 Dissertation committee
 Dissertation defense

Required Coursework

Code	Title	Hours
INAM 7000	Introduction to Research in Interdisciplinary Design and Media	4
INAM 7001	Research Methods in Interdisciplinary Design and Media	4
INAM 7900	Research Seminar	4
INAM 7901	Dissertation Writing Seminar	4

Research Methods Elective

Complete one research methods elective from this list or in consultation with your advisor.		4
ARCH 6340	Graduate Topics in Architecture	
ARTG 5110	Information Design History	
ARTG 5120	Research Methods for Design	
ARTG 5310	Visual Cognition	
ARTG 5320	Statistics for Design	
ARTG 5620	Notational Systems for Experience	
ARTG 6110	Information Design Theory and Critical Thinking	
GSND 5110	Game Design and Analysis	
GSND 5130	Mixed Research Methods for Games	
GSND 6320	Psychology of Play	
GSND 6340	Biometrics of Design	
GSND 6350	Data-Driven Game Design	
GSND 6984	Research	
INAM 6300	Models for Applied Inquiry in Creative Practice	
JRNL 5400	Media and Advocacy in Theory and Practice	

Dissertation

INAM 9990	Dissertation Term 1	
INAM 9991	Dissertation Term 2	

Discipline-Specific Coursework

Code	Title	Hours
Complete 8 semester hours of discipline-specific coursework in consultation with your domain-specific advisor and committee members.		8

Program Credit/GPA Requirement

A minimum of 28 semester hours of coursework beyond the graduate degree is required.

A minimum 3.000 cumulative GPA and no grades lower than a B in core courses are required.

Advanced Entry Plan of Study

Year 1			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
INAM 7000		4 INAM 7900	4
INAM 7001		4 Research methods elective	4
Discipline-specific coursework		4 Discipline-specific coursework	4
		12	12
Year 2			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
Qualifying exams		0 Teaching requirement, TA	0
Teaching requirement, TA		0 INAM 7901	4
INAM 9990		0 INAM 9991	0
		0	4
Year 3			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
Teaching requirement, teacher of record		0 Teaching requirement, teacher of record	0
INAM 9996		0 INAM 9996	0
		0	0

Year 4			
Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours
INAM 9996		0 INAM 9996	0
		0	0
Total Hours: 28			