University of Massachusetts Amherst
Masters of Fine Arts in Studio Arts
Handbook 2014

INTRODUCTION:
The University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst) is the flagship campus of the University of Massachusetts system.

The Department of Art, Architecture, and Art History maintains facilities in four separate buildings: the Fine Arts Center, which houses the main offices, the Animation and Art Education studios, and the Architecture + Design Program; the Studio Arts Building (SAB), completed in 2008; Clark Hall, which houses some faculty studios; and Bartlett Hall, where the Art History Program is located.

GENERAL FACILITIES:
The Department provides extensive facilities in Studio Arts: Foundations and Art Education classrooms, Mac and PC computer classrooms, a digital output facility, and studios in animation, black-and-white photography, printmaking, painting, drawing, plaster, clay, metals, and wood. Some facilities require specialized orientation, and most require periodic training in Environmental Health and Safety regulations.

GENERAL:
The Master of Fine Arts in Studio Arts is a 60-hour program that emphasizes both theory and practice in the production, history, and teaching of visual art. The program requires a 60-credit, three-year on-campus residency. Incoming students enroll in the fall. The Department maintains facilities for the following disciplines:

- Animation
- Intermedia
- Painting
- Interdisciplinary Studies
- Printmaking
- Sculpture
- Photography
- Ceramics

Our program is interdisciplinary, and we encourage performance and work across disciplines. Students admitted to the program are not required to work only in designated areas. We encourage students to work across disciplines.

STUDENTS ADMITTED:
The MFA program admits approximately six – eight students per year, providing a community of eighteen students in total. The faculty reviews applications as a whole, not by discipline.
ADMISSIONS: To satisfy minimum standards for the University, applicants need at least a 2.75 cumulative average and a Bachelor’s degree from an accredited four-year undergraduate institution. Foreign students need the equivalent of a baccalaureate degree and need to pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFEL) in order to be considered for admission. The Graduate Record Exam (GRE) is not required.

APPLICATIONS: Applicants to the MFA program must file an application with the Graduate School, providing the requisite transcripts and two letters of recommendation. In addition to these standard admission materials, applicants must submit a resume, statement, and portfolio directly to the Studio Arts Program of the Department. The resume should emphasize any exhibition and teaching experience. (Portfolio instructions are given below.)

VISTING THE DEPARTMENT: Admission to the MFA program is based primarily on the quality of the portfolio. Interviews are not required, although visits can be helpful to inform the applicant about the program. Appointments can be made through the Graduate Office of the Studio Arts Program at (413) 545-1903 or by contacting the Graduate Program Director.

PORTFOLIO GUIDELINES: A portfolio of 20 images should demonstrate a cohesive body of work, independent thought, and the diversity of your experience in the visual arts.

Portfolios should be uploaded onto the listed website.

MAILING ADDRESS: Graduate Program Director Studio Arts Program Department of Art, Architecture, and Art History 355 Fine Arts Center University of Massachusetts 151 Presidents Drive, Office 1 Amherst, Massachusetts 01003-9330

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 1ST (Fall admissions only) The Studio Arts Program does not have rolling admissions.

INTERNATIONAL The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is required
APPLICANTS: of those applying from countries whose native language is not English. Further information about the TOEFL can be obtained by contacting the Graduate Admissions Office of this University or from the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey 08540 (USA).

MFA PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS: MFA students must take a minimum of 60 graduate level credits in the major area, including the 18-credit masters thesis, and 24-27 in other areas. The Art History requirement (3 credits) must be taken as a graded course, not as pass/fail or audit; the requirement may not be completed as an independent study. The MFA has a required sequence of courses that must be taken during the first two years, including the Graduate Seminar, (“Grad Block”), TA Workshop, and Visual Culture.

Coursework in the major area should be at the 600 and 700 levels. Courses at the 500 level can be used only for work outside the major area. Courses of Independent Study (ART 696 and 796) are encouraged, though when taken in the major area they may not duplicate work done for the Graduate Seminar course. Twenty-one credits of Independent Study is the maximum allowed. Graduate Teaching Assistants are required to take the 1-credit teaching workshop (ART 691G), which is geared towards teaching studio classes at the college level. The workshop is required during the first year a student holds a Teaching Assistantship.

REVIEWS: During their first and second years, or before approval for beginning the Master’s thesis, graduate students are subject to review by the entire faculty. These reviews or ‘critiques’ occur at the middle and end of the fall and spring semesters. The duration of the mid term critiques is forty-five minutes per student, and the final critiques are one hour.

PROBATION: A student may be placed on probation by the Program and may not receive a graduate assistantship if his or her GPA is lower than 3.0. The Program may also place a student on probation if work is deemed unsatisfactory following either the mid term or final review.

MASTER’S THESIS: The Master’s thesis (ART 799) occupies the student’s last two semesters. The thesis involves a solo exhibition, a written thesis, and an oral defense; candidates work with a thesis committee consisting of three graduate faculty, selected by the student. The student will further select a ‘chair’ that will serve as the main faculty mentor during the final thesis year. Upon its selection in
the first semester of the final year, the thesis committee assumes responsibility for reviewing the student’s work.

The thesis consists of a one-person exhibition, a 15-20-page thesis paper, and an hour-long oral examination with all members of the thesis committee present.

**THESIS EXHIBITION:** The thesis exhibition is the final step necessary for the MFA degree. Each candidate is required to mount a one-person exhibition of his or her work. This exhibition takes place during the student's last semester and is usually installed at the Herter Art Gallery on campus. With approval of the student's committee, the exhibition may be held in an alternative venue. Students are responsible for printing and distributing exhibition announcements. The announcement must contain the phrase, “in partial fulfillment of requirements for the MFA degree.”

**WRITTEN THESIS:** The written thesis is a critical essay that focuses on final supportive statement in consultation with the thesis committee and distributes it to committee members one week in advance of the thesis exhibition opening.

1. The thesis abstract includes a title page (with signatures of the committee members and the Graduate Program Director), a table of contents, a bibliography, and a copy of the thesis exhibition announcement. Three weeks prior to the final submission, the abstract must be format-checked by the Graduate School.

2. The MFA thesis is 15-20 pages in length. It includes an analysis of the student's artwork, a summary of research related to the work, and a discussion of new directions in the work. The student's thesis committee resolves the exact content and the structure of the thesis in advance.

3. Upon approval by the thesis committee, the exhibition and the statement are installed for public view. If the exhibition is incomplete or insufficient, the thesis committee may disapprove installation of the thesis exhibition and establish remediation requirements and deadlines.

4. Three copies of the thesis with illustrations must be submitted to the Graduate School. One bound copy will be returned to the Department’s permanent archive.

**ORALS:** The oral examination is an hour-long discourse between the MFA candidate and the thesis committee. The form of this examination is a formal discussion about the outcomes of the
exhibition, and the ideas, formal constraints, and historical precedents that have gone into the formation of the work during the past three years leading up to the culmination of the thesis show.

After an hour-long conversation, the MFA candidate will leave the gallery while the thesis committee discusses the work of the candidate.

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**GRADUATE STUDIOS:**

Graduate studios are located in the Studio Arts Building and Clark Hall. The Department Chair, in consultation with faculty, makes assignments of studios based on need, seniority, and space limitations.

Graduate students are not required to keep a studio in the Studio Arts Building or Clark Hall, but if they wish to have an assigned studio they are required to maintain the space in accordance with the contract they will sign. Comprehensive cleanup is required before leaving a studio.

Students may not alter the existing architectural elements in the studios or facilities. Students must observe all safety standards in the use of tools and equipment.

Non-UMass activities are not allowed on the property. Alcoholic beverages are not allowed in the building. Smoking is prohibited in all state buildings.

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**VISITING ARTISTS:**

Each semester, the Visiting Artists Program brings to campus prominent and emerging artists from around the country and the world. This includes both long-term (3-5 days) and short-term (1-2 days) visits. Visiting artists present a public lecture and meet with students for individual critiques. Please check the website for a list of past visiting artists.

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**FURTHER INFORMATION:**

Please visit the comprehensive Graduate School website at [http://www.umass.edu/gradschool/](http://www.umass.edu/gradschool/).

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**CAMPUS GALLERIES:**

A number of galleries on the UMass campus offer opportunities for students to exhibit their work and to view contemporary work:

Herter Art Gallery, Trevor Richardson, Director
University Gallery, Loretta Yarlow, Director
Student Union Art Gallery, Brendan McCauley, Manager
TRANSFER CREDIT: FROM ANOTHER INSTITUTION: Up to 6 credits may be transferred from another school. Courses must be graduate level, cannot substitute for any program requirements, and cannot have been taken more than three years before enrollment in the graduate program here. Courses already counted towards a degree cannot be used as transfer credit.

NON-DEGREE GRADUATE: Up to 6 credits of work from this University may also be transferred, subject to the University and Department restrictions noted above. Transfer of credit should be initiated by the student and must be approved by both the Graduate Program Director for Studio Arts and the Graduate School.

FINANCIAL AID The types of financial aid available to graduate students include loans, work-study, and assistantships. Awards are based on economic need, and the FAFSA must be filed to determine eligibility.

FAFSA packets are available from Financial Aid Services, 255 Whitmore (413-545-0801), and from most colleges and universities. The recommended filing deadline is March 1st.

WORK-STUDY Being work-study eligible may increase a student’s chances of getting an assistantship, whether from the Department or elsewhere. Work-study at this University can take the form of a graduate assistantship complete with stipend and tuition waiver. We urge all applicants to file the FAFSA. Questions may be directed to Student Employment, 243 Whitmore (413-545-1530).

ASSISTANTSHIPS: Graduate assistantships in the Studio Arts Program are almost always in the form of teaching assistantships (TAs). They augment the Program’s teaching capacity and provide graduate students opportunities for college-level teaching experience. An assistantship includes a stipend plus waivers of tuition and most curriculum and health fees. The average stipend for TAs in Studio Arts is $7,760 per year.

Several factors determine the awarding of TAs: the Department’s overall teaching needs in all three programs, seniority (returning students are given priority), the student’s qualifications and abilities, and the availability of funding. A graduate student...
must also be in good academic standing and complete the teaching workshops in order to hold an assistantship.

**FELLOWSHIPS**

The University offers Diversity Fellowships on a competitive campus-wide basis. Students have to be nominated by the Graduate Program Director for the award that carries a stipend of approximately $16,000 for the first year. This fellowship is non-renewable.

**OTHER FUNDING:**

Opportunities for assistantships may exist in campus galleries and other departments and offices on campus. Teaching through the Division of Continuing & Professional Education is yet another option; the Department assigns instructors for several courses during summer sessions.

**FOREIGN STUDENTS:**

The Office of International Students and Scholars, 467 Hills South (413-545-2843) can provide information on financial assistance and tuition waivers for international students.

**TUITION AND FEES:**

Tuition (academic year) and mandatory fees for full-time students (9 credits per semester) is: out-of-state $19,288; New England Regional $13,526; and Massachusetts resident $10,266. These figures do not include expenditures for housing, books and supplies, transportation, supplemental health insurance, or the one-time Grad Entering Fee of $357. Applicants should check with the Graduate School for updates on tuition and fees or online at [http://www.umass.edu/bursar/files/grad%20fees.pdf](http://www.umass.edu/bursar/files/grad%20fees.pdf).

**AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION:**

**ANIMATION:** The Animation discipline is tailored to meet the interests and self-directed needs of the individual student, and by its very nature are cross-disciplinary. Courses in animation emphasize contemporary production processes and principles of animation that may be applied within classical 2D, stop frame, and digital time-based animation and narrative. An emphasis on experimental, non-commercial applications is central to the pursuit of animation at the graduate level.

**CERAMICS:** The Ceramics discipline is structured so that students participate in seminars and work independently in consultation with faculty until they enter thesis. Knowledge of, and expertise in, all areas of traditional and contemporary ceramic concepts is stressed.

**INTERMEDIA:** This discipline engages the means, methods, and practices of captured image making using digital formats.
With an understanding that the computer itself is a meta-medium, students in more advanced courses are encouraged to incorporate different media into their projects. Theoretical and historical information is presented in relation to technological advances in order for students to think about the computer as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Time-Based explores the creative possibilities of digital video and sound. Coursework focuses on a strong foundation of technical skills in relation to the histories of film and video in their larger cultural contexts. Students will be encouraged to investigate concepts of time (duration, speed, rhythm) in relation to narrative, documentary, and experimental practices.

**DRAWING:** In the 21st century, drawing has taken center stage as a means of communication and mode of expression, no longer second citizen to other formal means of art making. The immediacy of drawing, combined with its broader definitions, makes it an ideal method for artistic expression and experimentation. The drawing studio courses provide exposure to the wide variety of approaches to drawing, including line, form, analysis, and idea. Explored are both objective and subjective visual representations and experiments with a variety of mark-making media. The objective of the drawing curriculum is to have students broaden their visual vocabulary while expanding their method of operation within their individual practices.

**PAINTING:** The Painting discipline offers students the opportunity to develop their creative skills in the painting medium while working with professional artists. Emphasis is placed upon the independent development of the personal, expressive needs of each student.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** The Photography discipline is designed to meet the needs of students who are self-directed and emphasizes the link between photography (in all its applications) and the critical issues of contemporary visual practice. Students are encouraged to develop technical expertise through work on projects that are cross-disciplinary, drawing on the wide resources of the University.
PRINTMAKING: Students are encouraged to experiment and test the limits of both conventional and digital printmaking practices in relation to the realization of their individual ideas and interests. Students are exposed to a wide range of techniques and approaches to the multiple with the emphasis on strategies for creating unique prints, hybrid prints, and editions. Facilities and instruction are available in intaglio, stone and plate lithography, offset lithography, photographic processes, silkscreen, relief, archival large format pigment printing, monotype, and book arts.

SCULPTURE: The Sculpture discipline is based on the self-directed needs of the individual student. Every effort is made to provide and provoke inquiry into the field of sculpture and to bring about artistic excellence. Facilities include plaster, wood, and metals.
## Required and Recommended Courses for MFA Programs

### 1st Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Course Description</th>
<th>Number of Credits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall</strong></td>
<td>Grad Block Seminar (required): ART 791C</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grad Drawing (recommended): ART 601</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching Workshop (required): ART 691G</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Electives such as NYPOP ART 691A or other</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Spring</strong></td>
<td>Grad Block Seminar (required): ART 791C</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate Forum (recommended) ART 670</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching Workshop (required): ART 691G</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Electives such as NYPOP ART 691A</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Electives such as Contemporary Critique ART 697</td>
<td>1</td>
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### 2nd Year

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Course Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall</strong></td>
<td>Grad Block Seminar (required): ART 791C</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Electives such as NYPOP ART 691A</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other Electives</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Electives such as Contemporary Critique ART 697</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Spring</strong></td>
<td>Grad Block Seminar (required): 791C</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intro to Visual Culture ART 689, (required)</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Electives such as NYPOP ART 691A</td>
<td>3</td>
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### 3rd Year

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<th>Course Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fall</strong></td>
<td>Thesis: 799 A,B, C, D, G, P</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Spring</strong></td>
<td>Thesis: 799 A, B, C, D, G, P</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Any Term</strong></td>
<td>Additional Course Requirements:</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Art History Course</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Contemporary Critique ART 697 1 credit</td>
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- All students are required to participate in the area reviews, which are conducted at mid semester and end of semester.

## More about Requirements

- **Credit Distribution:** based on 60 credits:  
  - Major Area: 33-36
  - Outside: 27-24

- **Independent Study Limit:** 21 credits (does not include 799/thesis).

- **Thesis:** 18 credits, generally split 9 credits each over final two semesters.
• **Art History requirement:** Minimum of one 3 credit graduate-level course, preferably taken during first or second year.

• **Introduction to Visual Culture:** Requirement, 3 credit graduate level course.

• **Teaching Workshop:** 1 credit course required each semester for one year for new TAs unless specifically exempted for prior teaching experience.

• **Grad Block Seminar:** Required each semester for first two years.

• **Remaining coursework** generally consists of recommended courses, independent study (in or out of major area), and electives.

**Highly Recommended Courses for the MFA in Studio Arts**

Grad Drawing (Art 797G)
NYPOP: New York Professional Outreach Program (ART 691A)
Contemporary Critique (ART 697)

**General Reminders**

Courses that can be taken more than once: Advanced Drawing, Advanced Drawing Problems, Grad Drawing, Grad Forum, NYPOP, Independent Study (even the same alpha-coding).

500-level courses in major area cannot be counted for graduate credit.

**BUT**

Outside the Department, at this University and the other Five Colleges, graduate credit may be awarded for the following coursework:

• 400-level in other UMass departments (but not the Studio Arts or Art History programs): no more than 6 credits allowed (approval of the Graduate Program Director for Studio Arts is required).

• 300-level and above at Smith, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Amherst colleges (approval of the Graduate Program Director for Studio Arts is required).

To register in Five College courses, all students fill out the form available through their SPIRE account and follow the instructions given there for submission of the form.

To secure graduate credit for Five College courses, the student must ask the instructor to email Lisa Furtek at lfurtek@art.umass.edu confirming that arrangements have been made for graduate credit. Further, the student must ask the instructor to send a memo at the end of the semester stating that the student did do graduate level work and noting the final grade.