



# MFA | INTERACTION DESIGN



Graduate Programs

# Today, interaction designers

are writing the story so the world can participate in the future. Interaction design creates opportunities to shape and guide behavior. It opens doors for experiences and exchanges not possible before. It makes the intangible tangible; it's the discipline that communicates the pragmatic future. And where we stand in the history of the future is a tremendous opportunity for the design of interactions.

The Interaction Design program at SVA is a response to these chances for interaction. With an increase in design's possibility for influence, designers are negotiating a whole new set of circumstances. Designers find themselves influencing the future of products and services, education, journalism, health care, banking, cities, and more.

Where once we were considering interfaces and interactions on screens, we're now considering how these expressions tie into bigger systems. We live in a world where we carry hospitals in our pockets and banks in our watches, and find out about earthquake warnings from Twitter and birth announcements on Facebook. As data is more readily available and designers are informed by new formal and informal mechanisms for connecting, we are aware we are part of something bigger.

The MFA in Interaction Design is as much about invention as it is about the everyday. It requires students to be intimately attentive to human behavior and to think more holistically about the products and services they create. Students in the program collaborate to design pragmatic futures, and are afforded the connections and latitude to apply those designs in real-world contexts. They collaborate with local and international partners to develop critical discussion about interaction design's role in the pragmatic future. We believe that in order to inherit the pragmatic future, you have to walk through the gate of interaction design. We invite you to be part of it.

—Liz Danzico, chair



# About the Program

The MFA Interaction Design program explores the strategic role of interaction design in shaping everyday life and intends to increase the relevancy of design to business and society so designers can make a difference. The definition of “difference” is something only students know—a personal exploration only they can do—and the program is designed to support that exploration over two years.

The program is collaborative. In a studio environment, students explore prototyping a range of experiences that cross visual, conceptual and technical boundaries. Grouped in transdisciplinary teams, students work both in the studio and in the field to create inventive solutions to real-world problems.

The program is people-focused. We focus on teaching how people relate to one another through the products and technology we explore. Together with open lectures in the studio and joint experiments with the New York City community, the MFA Interaction Design program becomes a model and center point for interaction design in the city. The program's faculty comprises the profession's most exciting designers, who culminate their professional days by teaching graduate courses in the evenings.

The program is curated. During the first year, students advance through the concepts and methods of interaction design, starting with an understanding of people and the

environments that drive their needs, goals and experiences. Course materials consider these social constructs and human experiences as the basis for approaching problems across media. During the second year, students apply the concepts and methods from the first year of study to shape their thesis projects. It is in the second year that students develop deeper business acumen through coursework and direct relationships with New York organizations. Optional summer internships with top companies are available between the first and second years.

The program is practice-based. The MFA in Interaction Design is a professionally focused program aimed at training graduates to become practicing designers, entrepreneurs and contributors intending to make a difference. Upon graduation, students are prepared to take risks, invent new forms with business and academia, participate in strategic decision-making involved with the creation of interactive products and services, and equipped with tools and methods to make smart choices no matter where they find themselves. Alumni of the program have proceeded not only to found their own initiatives, but also to become some of the brightest minds at today's best-known companies: Apple, Facebook, frog design,

IDEO, Johnson & Johnson, R/GA, Reuters, Twitter, Yelp, and more.

The program is your story. The courses are highly demanding, highly selective and highly rewarding. The program will ask students to have a vision and make choices to align with that vision. Students study concepts central to interaction design, including design research, human-computer interaction, interface design, graphic design, information architecture and ubiquitous computing. Each class becomes a community and each choice a commitment with a story to build upon. The program seeks to cultivate interaction design as a discipline and further its visibility as a community of practice.

Degree candidates must successfully complete 60 credits, including all required courses, with a cumulative grade point average of 3.0. A residency of two academic years is required. In the final semester, each student will complete a thesis project, which must be reviewed and approved by the thesis committee and the department chair in order for the student to be eligible for degree conferral.

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Abhinav Sircar's (MFA 2019) *Medicube* builds upon the existing innovation of multi-dose packaging by pharmacies like PillPack. It is an IoT-connected medicine dispenser with a built-in voice assistant that provides patients with personalized, timely medicine reminders along with necessary information.





# Serving with UX Design

Much of Shane Strassberg's (MFA 2017) professional life has been spent getting different perspectives on human interaction. From being a vacuum salesman, a horse-racing photographer, a bartender and even a U.S. Marine, all the experiences that he's gained have laid the foundation for where he is today: a UX designer for the U.S. Digital Service. ►



Early in his career, Shane became disillusioned with his education in broadcast journalism. Being a native New Yorker, the events of 9/11 made a deep impact on his life, and after taking up various odd jobs out of school, Shane ended up enlisting in the U.S. Marine Corps. Having felt incapable of structuring his career, he was motivated in part by a desire to regiment himself and to organize his ambitions as a professional. “I always had lofty goals, but I couldn’t break them down,” Shane says. “Joining the Marine Corps was to teach myself how to get to that.”



After serving two tours in Iraq, and being party to one of the worst battles of the war, Shane was affected by the inhumanity of the conflict. Upon returning to America, he was determined to use the G.I. Bill to continue

his education—but this time he was interested in obtaining a better understanding of humanity. Shane received a master’s degree in anthropology and attended some design courses, eventually discovering UX design. In connecting with other veterans working in tech, he developed a deeper interest in the intersection of technology and culture, which led him to SVA—the alma mater of his grandfather (and fellow veteran), Bernie (SVA was then called Cartoonists and Illustrators School).

Once Shane joined the MFA Interaction Design (IXD) program, he began using his research to find ways in which design could aid people and, ideally, reduce conflicts. “I



ABOVE, FROM LEFT: Shane Strassberg in fatigues; with his grandfather, Bernie. Shane’s grandparents met at the Cartoonists and Illustrators School, now SVA. OPPOSITE: A design Shane helped create for a digital platform for NYC Veterans.

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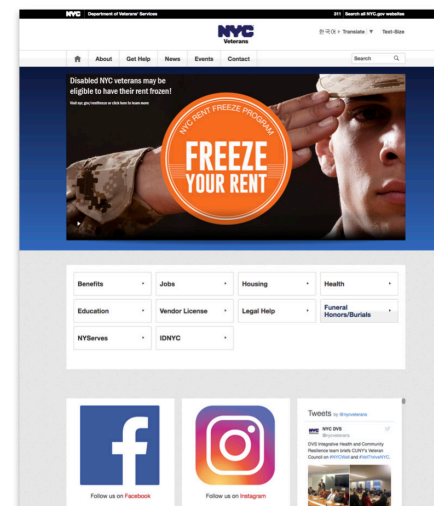

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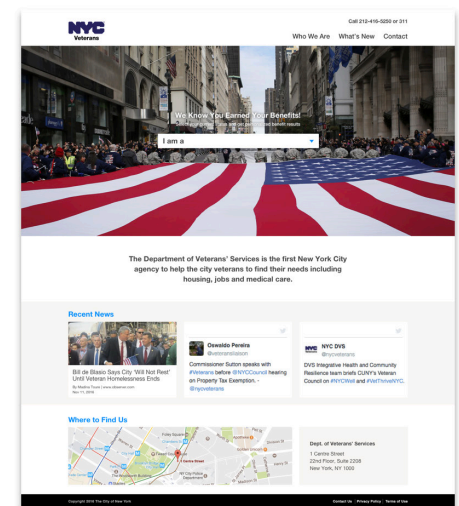
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## AS-IS



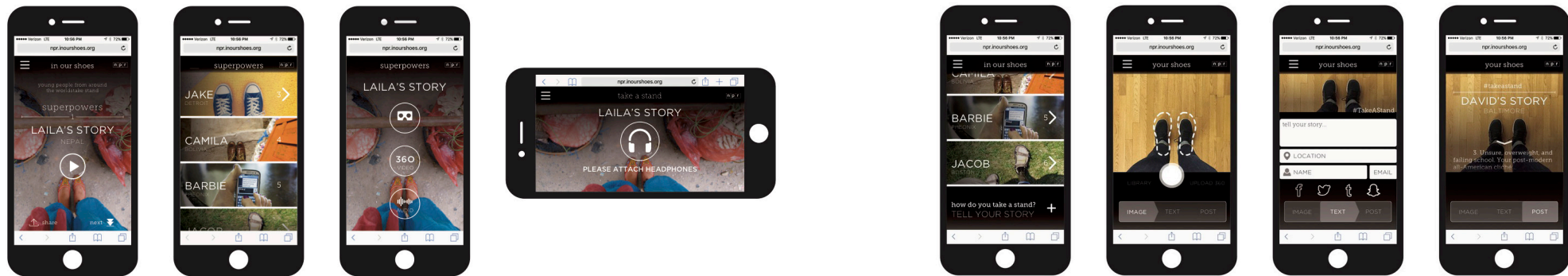
## TO-BE





had an internal feeling of just wanting to help communities or help people,” he says. “I’m not coming into this to work [to get] into the best technology and design firms; that’s not my goal. My goal is to use this and apply it somehow to make the world a better place.”

Since completing his degree in 2017, Shane has found himself once again serving the United States—but this time through the U.S. Digital Service (USDS). The USDS is an agency of the U.S. government that is using design to better the lives of citizens, which is the way Shane prefers doing his part for the nation. “I want less conflict in the world,” he says. “I think we can do that through good research and good design. We can solve a lot of problems—on local, national and international scales.”



**TOP:** NPR: *In Our Shoes* VR allows users to step into the middle of a story to gain vivid insights into people’s lives.

**BOTTOM:** Link NYC Safe City solution to allow people in danger to connect to the closest LinkNYC to get attention of people nearby who may offer help.

# Curriculum/ Sample Program

In the MFA Interaction Design program, students work both individually and collaboratively on the practical application of the concepts and methods that the program advances.

FIRST YEAR/FALL	CREDITS
A History of Design	1.5
The Fundamentals of Physical Computing	3
Hello World: The Logic of Interaction	3
Research Methods	1.5
Service Design and Transformation	3
Strategic Innovation in Product/Service Design	3
FIRST YEAR/SPRING	
The Advanced Fundamentals of Graphic Design	1
The Advanced Fundamentals of UX	1
Conversation Design	1.5
Crafting Interactions	3
Design in Public Spaces	1.5
Entrepreneurial Design	3
Framing User Experiences	1.5
Smart Objects	1.5
Writing Basics	1
SECOND YEAR/FALL	
Design Management	3
Future (Im)perfect: : Exploring the Hidden Ethics of Emerging Technologies	1.5
Future Wearables	1.5
Public Interfaces	3
Thesis I: Development	6
SECOND YEAR/SPRING	
And One More Thing . . .	3
Form, Content and Behavior	1.5
Leadership, Ethics and Professional Practices	3
Narrative and Interactivity	1.5
Thesis II: Presentation	6

# Course Offerings

This is a sample of our recent course listings. For our full curriculum, please visit: [sva.edu/interactiondesign/curriculum](http://sva.edu/interactiondesign/curriculum).

## A HISTORY OF DESIGN

A review of critical movements in design from the second half of the 20th century to the present is the focus of this course. We will consider how much of the craft that designers have valued historically is important for what we do today. Using insights grounded in history, students will evaluate what separates good design from “other” design in digital media, and review case studies of why certain products and companies have risen triumphant over others. Students will visit centers of design in New York City and learn to use them as resources for research, exploration and experimentation.

## DESIGN IN PUBLIC SPACES

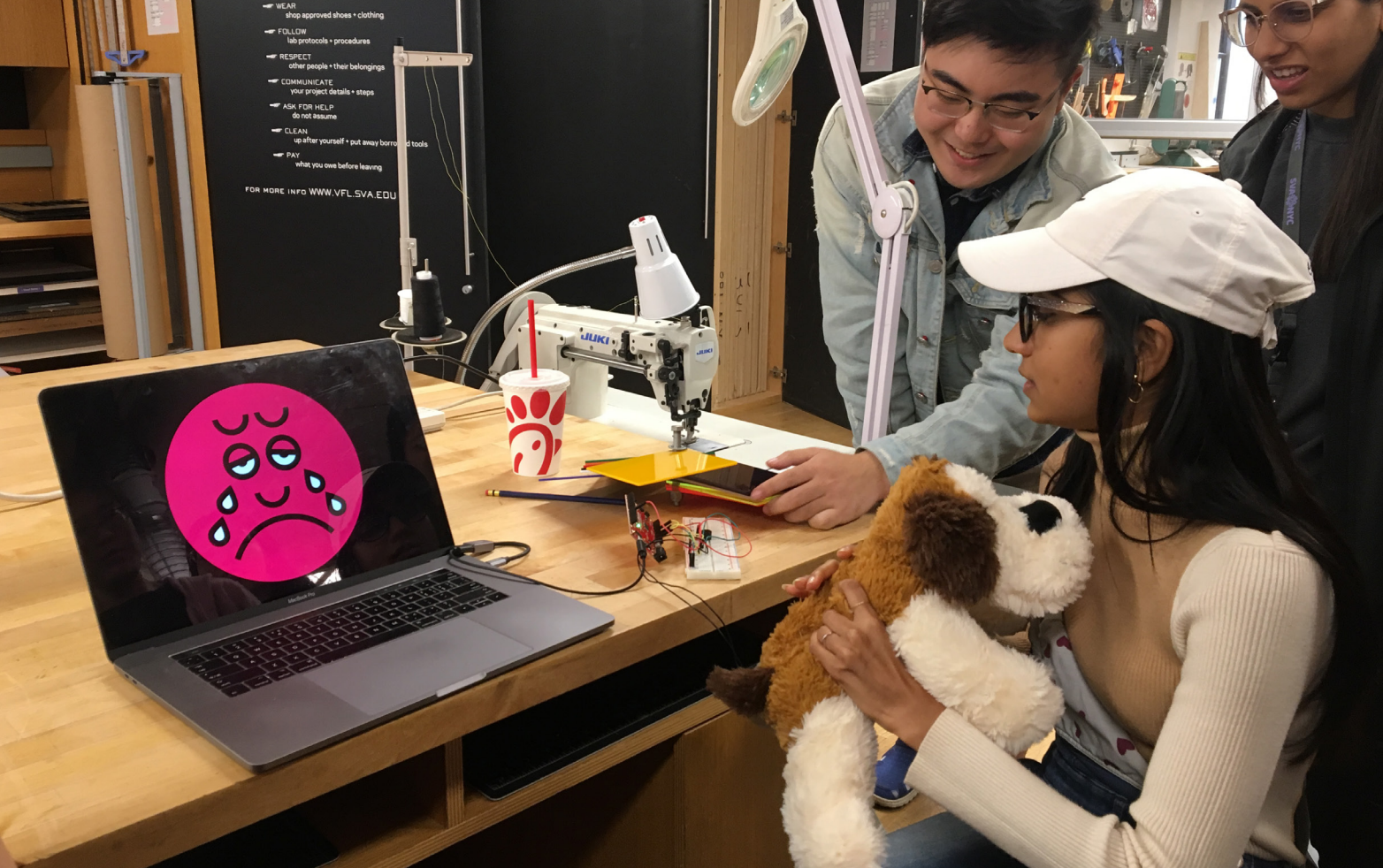
Interfaces are embedded in nearly every aspect of our daily lives—from grocery shopping to banking to reading books. How can we integrate technology with the physical world to create better interfaces and more useful, playful and meaningful experiences? This course explores how interaction design fundamentals apply to physical spaces by surveying branded environments, retail stores, museums, urban settings and corporate venues with specific user goals and design considerations in mind.

## CRAFTING INTERACTIONS

Interaction design concepts can be hard to describe. And the best way to both communicate and improve your design is to prototype it quickly and often. This course examines how to integrate lightweight prototyping activities, as well as some basic research and testing techniques, into every stage of the interaction design process.

A range of methods will be covered, from paper prototyping to participatory design to body-storming. Students will learn how to choose the appropriate method to suit different dimensions of a design problem at different stages in the process, and the pitfalls of each approach. The course is highly collaborative with hands-on prototyping and testing. Working individually and in teams, students will create rapid exercises, with one prototype developed or iterated each week, with the goal of evolving toward more robust ways of expressing ideas in rich interactive form.





Students testing a prototype for The Fundamentals of Physical Computing class in the Visible Futures Lab

## DESIGN MANAGEMENT

Once a product or service is designed, it needs to be managed. Whether as an entrepreneur, a design consultant or an in-house designer, integrating the creative and business sides is rarely easy. This course will illustrate how to mediate between the two, empowering students to merge the design and business aspects effectively. We will examine design in its real-world, contemporary contexts (rather than silos such as product design, web design or mobile design) to realize its broad potential and reach.

## ENTREPRENEURIAL DESIGN

Building on concepts of methods of interaction design, this studio course focuses on needs analysis, framing, prototyping, iteration and collaboration in an applied context. Each student engages in semester-long projects that bring together business goals, user needs and technology.

## FUTURE WEARABLES

Current handsets are immersive, and perhaps too much so. There's an additive, enhanced product that may suggest a better experience: wearables. Students in this course will develop lifestyle products that are an enhanced edition of a core or stand-alone device. They will be encouraged to emphasize displays in different places, new inputs, haptics and staying local. The challenge is to deliver appropriate data in an unobtrusive way.

## FORM, CONTENT AND BEHAVIOR

Content is often an afterthought in the interaction design process. This course, held at the end of a student's time at SVA, seeks to correct that. We'll look at how design can guide content creation, whether on Twitter or at *The New York Times*, talk through editorial power structures, and look inside existing files and digital content forms to understand why the digital world can be resistant to change. We'll also discuss the discipline of content strategy and how it is applied to improve digital products. Simultaneously we will make, edit, and distribute a class podcast about student thesis projects, and learn as much as we can about creating and syndicating content in the modern world of giant media platforms.

## LEADERSHIP, ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

Creative business practices, ethical standards and effective networking are the cornerstones of this course. Case studies will illustrate the importance of creating viable and responsible business models. Through studio tours, guest lectures, case activities and small-group exercises, students will observe and critique examples of successful, flawed and failed practices. Upon completion of this course, students will be equipped to describe and cite examples of creative business practices, ethical standards and effective networking in design management.

## THE FUNDAMENTALS OF PHYSICAL COMPUTING

This class is a practical hands-on exploration of physically interactive technology for the designer. Students will learn how to interface objects and installations with the viewer's body and ambient stimuli such as motion, light, sound or intangible data. Starting with the basics using the open-source Arduino platform, the course will move through electrical theory, circuit design, microcontroller programming, sensors and complex output, including motors, video and inter-communication between objects.



## HELLO WORLD: THE LOGIC OF INTERACTION

Hello World is traditionally the very first program people write when they are new to a programming language. It's used to test programming syntax, implementation and sanity. The goal of this class is to provide students with a primer on understanding the world of computer hardware and software and designing with code. Students grow the tools they need to read and understand source code, critically think about software applications and write their own programs. They start with a foundation in programming and build applications of increasing complexity as the course progresses. By the end of the semester, students will have the skills to speak the language of (almost) any machine using fundamentals from Python, JavaScript and C.

## RESEARCH METHODS

User-centered design begins, by definition, with an understanding of users. In this course, students will learn how to model interaction by conducting qualitative and quantitative research into users' behaviors, attitudes and expectations. By exploring ethnographic techniques, usability testing, log analysis, surveying and other research methods, students will discover how to engage user feedback effectively at every stage of the design process. We will also address how to conduct secondary research into published literature and other sources that can inform thesis projects and beyond.

## SMART OBJECTS

The ubiquity of embedded computing has redefined the role of form in material culture, leading to the creation of artifacts that communicate well beyond their static physical presence to build ongoing dialogues with both people and each other. This course will explore the rich relationship among people, objects and information through a combination of physical and digital design methods. Beginning with an examination of case studies, students will gain a sense of the breadth of product design practice as it applies to smart objects. Through a combination of lectures and hands-on studio exercises, we will investigate all aspects of smart object design, including expressive behaviors (light, sound and movement), interaction systems, ergonomics, data networks and contexts of use. The course will culminate in a final project that considers all aspects of smart object design within the context of a larger theme.

## STRATEGIC INNOVATION IN PRODUCT/SERVICE DESIGN

The design of interactive products and services differs from other forms of design in important ways. Developing the context for successful user experiences requires designers to think more holistically about the business models for the products they create: how the value proposition to customers and users unfolds over time; what's being "sold" and where the costs of production and management occur; and how to engage, complement and benefit from other services that intersect with what is being offered. This course will help students become more effective at understanding and describing the strategic decisions involved in the creation of interactive products and services, and equip them with tools and methods for generating innovative options and making smart strategic choices.

## THESIS II: PRESENTATION

Selecting the appropriate format for a fully functional thesis project is critical to its success. It should include proof of concept that shows the depth of research and application, and also demonstrate the research, strategy and artifacts that have been gained through second-year course work. Each student must present a thesis project to be approved by the thesis committee and the department chair.

## AND ONE MORE THING...

In this course, you'll get help figuring out what kind of designer you want to be, on what type of career path and at what sort of organization—agency, nonprofit, start-up, established business and so on. Each week, experienced interaction designers will visit for Socratic question-and-answer sessions that probes their positions, their successes and failures, and the way these relate to one another. There will also be in-class exercises to learn more about each other and track where students think they're headed professionally, and why. Through these interviews and activities, they'll develop a stronger sense of which jobs and which types of institutions might work best for the role they want. Students will be set to design the greatest interactive experience of them all: their professional life.

A student creates an affinity diagram in preparation for her Research Methods class.



# Faculty

To learn more about the faculty members and to read their biographies visit: [sva.edu/interactiondesign/faculty](http://sva.edu/interactiondesign/faculty).

**Liz Danzico**

chair, co-founder,  
MFA Interaction Design; vice  
president of design, NPR

**Jonathan Bloom**

senior conversation designer,  
Google

**Angela Chen**

interaction designer, design  
director

**Jenny Clark**

associate director, product  
design, argodesign

**Chappell Ellison**

lead content strategist, Hugu

**Paul Ford**

writer; co-founder, Postlight

**Eric Forman**

principal, founder,  
Eric Forman Studio

**Daniel Goddemeyer**

interaction designer

**Carrie Kengle**

co-founder, Area of Effect

**Tanya Kraljic**

voice UX conversation  
designer, Google

**Bruno Kruse**

co-founder, Area of Effect

**Criswell Lappin**

head of design, BigtinCan

**Lisa Lurie**

product designer, IBM

**Roger Mader**

co-founder, managing  
partner, Ampersand

**Karen McGrane**

managing partner,  
Bond Art + Science

**Hirumi Nanayakkara**

director, product marketing,  
The Knot

**Maziyar Pahlevan**

graphic designer

**Niamh Parsley**

senior product designer,  
Flatiron Health

**Krystal Persaud**

founder, Group Hug

**Matt Raw**

vice president, design,  
*The New York Times*

**Kristin Salomon**

senior electrical engineer,  
littleBits

**Jason Severs**

chief design officers, Droga5

**Marshall Sitten**

senior vice president, director  
of communications and ser-  
vice design, Citi Community  
Development

**Ted Southern**

president, CEO,  
Final Frontier Design

**Luke Stern**

co-founder, Game of Phones

**Sam Wander**

product designer, Facebook

**Neil Wehrle**

senior director of design,  
SmartThings

**Adriana Valdez Young**

design strategist, Openbox

**Jeffrey Zeldman**

creative director, Automattic;  
co-founder, An Event Apart

**Wenting Zhang**

senior experience designer,  
Adobe

# Where We Work

**Amazon****Capital One Labs****Dropbox****Electronic Arts****Etsy****Facebook****frog design****Goldman Sachs****Google****Instagram****Johnson & Johnson****Memorial Sloan Kettering  
Cancer Center****Sidewalk Labs****Spotify****Square****The New York Times****Tile****Twitter****WeWork****WhatsApp****Yelp**



# Lecturers, Mentors & Thesis Advisors

**Ryan Avent**

senior editor, economics  
columnist, *The Economist*

**Daniel Burka**

design partner,  
Google Ventures

**Frank Chimero**

graphic designer,  
teacher, writer

**Dennis Crowley**

co-founder, foursquare

**Tina Roth Eisenberg**

founder, CreativeMornings,  
Tattly, swissmiss

**Nicholas Felton**

author, *The Feltron Annual  
Report* app; co-creator,  
Reporter and Daytum.com

**Bethany Fong**

senior interaction designer,  
accessibility lead, Google

**Jason Fried**

co-founder, CEO, Basecamp

**Raul Gutierrez**

founder, CEO, Tinybop

**Usman Haque**

designer; entrepreneur;  
creative director, Umbrellium

**Scott Heiferman**

co-founder, CEO, Meetup

**Steven Heller**

author; co-chair, MFA Design,  
co-founder, MFA Interaction  
Design, School of Visual Arts

**Seth Johnson**

design director, IBM

**Giorgia Lupi**

co-founder, Accurat

**Ellen Lupton**

author; educator; senior  
curator, contemporary  
design, Cooper Hewitt

**Chelsea Mauldin**

executive director,  
Public Policy Lab

**Jeff Merritt**

head, Internet of Things,  
World Economic Forum,  
Center for the Fourth  
Industrial Revolution

**Mari Nakano**

design director,  
NYC Mayor's Office for  
Economic Opportunity

**Craig Mod**

writer, designer, publisher

**Peter Morville**

author; founder, president,  
Semantic Studios

**Matt Mullenweg**

founder, CEO, Automattic

**Winslow Turner Porter III**

director, producer,  
creative technologist

**Steve Portigal**

principal, Portigal Consulting

**Marc Rettig**

managing principal, Fit  
Associates

**Mark Shepard**

architect; curator,  
“Toward the Sentient City”

**Charlie Todd**

founder, Improv Everywhere

**Talin Wadsworth**

principal designer, Adobe

**Chris Woebken**

independent designer

**Dona Wong**

author; senior vice president,  
digital strategy and  
communications, Federal  
Reserve Bank of New York

**Milica Zec**

film and virtual  
reality director

# Application Process

## APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

For a full list of application requirements and detailed instructions, visit:

[sva.edu/grad/howtoapply](https://sva.edu/grad/howtoapply)

- Online Application and \$80 Application Fee: [sva.edu/apply](https://sva.edu/apply)

## DEADLINES

For information on application deadlines, visit: [sva.edu/grad/timeline](https://sva.edu/grad/timeline)

## IMPORTANT LINKS

- FAQ: [sva.edu/grad/faq](https://sva.edu/grad/faq)
- International students: [sva.edu/grad/intl](https://sva.edu/grad/intl)
- Tuition and fees: [sva.edu/tuition](https://sva.edu/tuition)
- Visit SVA: [sva.edu/grad/visit](https://sva.edu/grad/visit)

# Contact Us





We encourage applicants to visit our department. Contact us directly to schedule a department tour or sign up to attend an Information Session. For more information and to register, go to: [sva.edu/grad/visit](http://sva.edu/grad/visit).

If you have any questions about the application process, contact Graduate Admissions at 212.592.2107 or email: [gradadmissions@sva.edu](mailto:gradadmissions@sva.edu).

MFA Interaction Design  
136 West 21st Street, 3rd floor  
New York, NY 10011

**Liz Danzico**, chair  
**Steven Mayer**, director of operations  
**Rodel Oiga**, senior systems administrator  
**Naomi Barth**, communications and project coordinator  
**Eric Forman**, student advisor, head of innovation, faculty

**Tel:** 212.592.2703  
**Fax:** 212.592.2135  
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**Department site:** [interactiondesign.sva.edu](http://interactiondesign.sva.edu)

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 [vimeo.com/svaixd](https://vimeo.com/svaixd)

“ I love the word interaction:  
it can be about the designer’s  
interaction with the medium or the  
user’s interaction with the design.”

—Kohzy Koh, MFA 2017

## ACCREDITATION

The School of Visual Arts has been authorized by the New York State Board of Regents ([www.highered.nysed.gov](http://www.highered.nysed.gov)) to confer the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Advertising; Animation; Cartooning; Computer Art, Computer Animation and Visual Effects; Design; Film; Fine Arts; Illustration; Interior Design; Photography and Video; Visual and Critical Studies; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts on graduates of programs in Art Education; Critical Theory and the Arts; Curatorial Practice; Design Research, Writing and Criticism; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching on graduates of the program in Art Education; and to confer the degree of Master of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Art Practice; Art Writing; Computer Arts; Design; Design for Social Innovation; Fine Arts; Illustration as Visual Essay; Interaction Design; Photography, Video and Related Media; Products of Design; Social Documentary Film; Visual Narrative; and to confer the degree of Master of Professional Studies on graduates of programs in Art Therapy; Branding; Digital Photography; Directing; Fashion Photography.

The School of Visual Arts is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education ([msche.org](http://msche.org)), 3624 Market Street, Suite 2 West, Philadelphia, PA 19104, 267.284.5000. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The School of Visual Arts is an accredited institutional member of the National Association of Schools of Art and Design ([nasad.arts-accredit.org](http://nasad.arts-accredit.org)).

The Interior Design program leading to the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interior Design is accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation ([accredit-id.org](http://accredit-id.org)), 206 Grandville Avenue, Suite 350, Grand Rapids, MI 49503-4014.

The School of Visual Arts' Department of Art Education is currently pursuing accreditation of its educator preparation programs by the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP).

Pursuant to Section 52.21 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, the educator preparation program offered by the School of Visual Arts is considered to be continuously accredited for purposes of meeting the New York State requirement that all such programs maintain continuous accreditation. The School of Visual Arts' Master of Arts in Teaching in Art Education program was previously accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

The Master of Professional Studies in Art Therapy degree program is approved by the American Art Therapy Association, Inc., and as such meets the education standards of the art therapy profession.

## CREDITS

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COVER: StreetSmart VR designed by Kohzy Koh, MFA 2017



# School of Visual Arts

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