

MFA

# Interaction Design

# Interaction design used to write the story

so the world could see the future. 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 opportunities 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 opportunities for interaction. With an increase in design's possibility for influence, designers are negotiating a whole new set of opportunities. 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, 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 are 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 have 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. It 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 must 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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*Readi is a smart home companion that displays the time and weather while acting as a lamp and Bluetooth speaker. It becomes an emergency communication dashboard when flipped over, providing a walkie-talkie channel, national weather alert and FM radio. Designed by students David Al-Ibrahim, Elushika Weerakoon and Kohzy Koh.*





CASE STUDY

Kohzy Koh, David Al-Ibrahim  
& Saba Singh

# Wonderful Behaviors Thesis Exhibition Festival

David Al-Ibrahim at the end-of-year thesis exhibition.

The [SVA MFA Interaction Design \(IXD\)](#) program trains students to research, analyze, prototype and design concepts in their business, social and cultural contexts in order to shape everyday life. To put it another way, interaction design's potential to guide behavior allows designers to create the practical future. Pretty heady stuff, but how does it shake out in a practical course of study?



During the first year of the program, students engage mostly in collaborative work. By assessing what each person is interested in, who's good at what, and who wants to improve skills in various areas, the class gradually becomes a closely linked hive of creative minds working toward individual goals. There are critiques, events, workshops and software demonstrations to round out the foundation of the program. By the second year, students begin working more independently on their thesis projects.

There is no way to define a "typical" IxD student; the program draws from a wide range of backgrounds and professions. From the class of 2017: Kohzy Koh studied economics; David Al-Ibrahim holds an undergrad degree in rhetoric; and Saba Singh studied business administration. What all three have in common is an abiding curiosity about the

way technology functions to both mirror and shape our daily lives, and a wish to create design products that fill a specific need while providing joy to the users.

Not surprisingly, thesis projects explore a number of routes through the design landscape. For example, Singh undertook a process to geolocate memories. "My thesis developed a way for us to leave behind memories in specific locations around the globe so that our descendants could stumble into them and be notified that someone, like their grandmother, has left behind a story located right where they're standing," she says. Al-Ibrahim collaborated with the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to bring Eric W. Sanderson's book *Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York City* to life, focusing on the sounds of four locations around the city as they were

BELOW: Kohzy Koh (left) discusses his thesis. RIGHT: Saba Singh with a virtual reality set.







centuries ago. He produced his thesis, “Calling Thunder,” in a variety of formats: audio, 360-degree video and virtual reality. *New York Times* coverage of the project included an online video plus a written article.

The MFA students graduate with a very strong awareness of user-centered design and a deeply felt philosophy of putting people first. “The technology-agnostic approach to problem-solving makes this program unique,” Al-Ibrahim says. Koh adds, “You would think that putting the needs of the user or first

concept is pretty straightforward in the field of interaction design, but surprisingly, it’s a growing conversation. People in this program become really comfortable having the conversation and learning that the right solution to a problem is what makes it most effective for the user.”

Asked if there is one thing they’d like to tell prospective applicants about IxD, members of the group all began to answer at once. Singh said, “The program will transform you into a healthy skeptic of design.”

Al-Ibrahim summed up their experience this way: “The program is going to break your bones and allow you to reset them. You will have to put in as much as you want to receive during that healing process. It does a very good job of teaching and distilling intuition for what will NOT work. The challenge is to find the opportunities for what will work, and continuing to bring excitement and joy to the world, not just having a critical eye for what will fail.”

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The thesis exhibition was held at the Highline Loft in May 2017.

# 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
Code Literacy	3
Fundamentals of Physical Computing	3
Research Methods	1.5
Service Design and Transformation	3
Strategic Innovation in Product/Service Design	3
<b>FIRST YEAR/SPRING</b>	
Crafting User Experiences	3
Design in Public Spaces	1.5
Entrepreneurial Design	3
Framing User Experiences	1.5
The Foundations of Systems Design	1.5
Smart Objects	1.5
Thesis Preparation Series	3
<b>SECOND YEAR/FALL</b>	
Design Management	3
Future Wearables	1.5
Public Interfaces	3
Thesis Development	6
Urban Fictions	1.5
<b>SECOND YEAR/SPRING</b>	
Content Strategies	1.5
Leadership, Ethics and Professional Practices	3
Narrative and Interactivity	1.5
Selling Design	3
Thesis 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 USER EXPERIENCES

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 bodystorming. 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.





## 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

Entrepreneurial Design provides a real-world setting for students to: launch, iterate, seek out advice and feedback from others, and learn to make their own decisions. The course takes a broad definition of entrepreneurship (from coffee shops to tech startups) and focuses on the emerging opportunities that come from living and working in an increasingly networked world, while challenging the students to think of themselves not as designers but as creators.

*Major Tom is a compelling game for children who are struggling to read. The game applies researched educational strategies to help kids better grasp letter-sound relationships through color, phonetics and word patterns. Designed by Paola Rangel (Class of 2017).*

## FUTURE WEARABLES

Students in this course will develop lifestyle products that enhance everyday life through a new device or enhanced addition of a core device. They will be encouraged to emphasize displays in new places and new inputs with an emphasis on emerging technology such as AR/VR or other immersive experiences. The challenge is to deliver appropriate data in an unobtrusive way.

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF SYSTEMS DESIGN

This course presents frameworks for modeling interaction in terms of structure and context, augmenting traditional discussions of form and syntax. We will collaboratively address questions that are fundamental to design practice. What is a system and what are the different types? How do we interact with systems and what are the different types of interaction? Systems may act independently, interact with other systems, learn and even converse. What do such systems have in common and how can we describe them? How can we measure their limitations? The course explores the integral structures and coherent processes for the design of effective artifacts, communications, collaborations and services. Students will apply frameworks for steering design processes and/or design outcomes based on their own interests, encompassing domains as broad as education, health and wellness, and sustainability.

## 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 class will move through electrical theory, circuit design, microcontroller programming, sensors, and complex output, including motors, video, and inter-communication between objects.

## LEADERSHIP, ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

Creative business practices ethical standards, and effective networking are the cornerstones of this course. Through studio tours, students observe examples of successful practice. Case studies will illustrate the importance of creating viable and responsible business models. Through studio tours, guest lectures, case activities and small group activities, 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 the business of design management.



## 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 learn 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 create 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.

## CODE LITERACY

Students will write and share homegrown code in this course. Like the slow food movement, the class advocates the benefits of using locally grown produce (code) and skillfully judging the origins of globally produced food (code-libraries/snippets). Students are given time to learn the craft, exploring how it relates to their unique skill sets and interests. At minimum, they learn how to code as well as use other people's code efficiently. At best, the craft will grow its roots into their perception of systems and processes and ultimately enrich their creative processes.

## 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 to equip them with tools and methods for generating innovative options and making smart strategic choices.

## THESIS PRESENTATION

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

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*Epitaph*, an interactive installation, explores how we can extract the rich information that a tree will experience in its lifetime. When a user places a finger on an individual ring, it activates and plays a corresponding soundscape. Designed by students Alex Frankel, Azu Romá and Kinjal Shah.

## URBAN FICTIONS

Current technologies that digitize our cities, such as the omnipresence of mobile phones, their created "data trails," and the access to information in the form of data will influence our urban behaviors in ways that are unforeseen and yet unprecedented. The devices themselves and the networks they run on have become ubiquitous personal computing devices that help us navigate and interact with the city while, at the same time, creating increasingly revealing behavioral traces wherever we go. Throughout the course students will be guided through hands-on data-visualization exercises of a variety of datasets that they, as a class, are creating through their daily routine in the city. Inspired by this experiential understanding of their own patterns and behaviors, students will further speculate around the future impact of this data- and knowledge-ubiquity by telling data-driven future "interaction stories," exemplified by scenarios and storytelling.



# Where We Work

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

“ I’m very much interested in technology and what we can do with it, but my interests lie in what we can do with it together, as people, and what that means to us. Which I really think is the core of the program.”

—Katie Koch, MFA 2011

# 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

**Munawar Ahmed**  
founder, Blueprint Design

**Christopher Cannon**  
data journalist, information  
designer, Bloomberg Graphics

**Gary Chou**  
founder, Orbital

**Drew Cogbill**  
senior producer,  
Small Planet Digital

**Chappell Ellison**  
senior content strategist, Hugu

**Paul Ford**  
author; co-founder, Postlight

**Eric Forman**  
principal and founder,  
Klank Studios

**Daniel Goddemeyer**  
designer, Studio  
United Situation;  
co-founder, Postlight

**Erica Heinz**  
UX and product  
design consultant

**Carrie Kengle**  
co-founder, Area of Effect

**Bruno Kruse**  
co-founder, Area of Effect

**Criswell Lappin**  
founder, WellNow  
Design + Consulting

**Jodi Leo**  
executive director of user  
experience, Critical Mass

**Roger Mader**  
growth strategy,  
Ampersand Partners

**Karen McGrane**  
founding partner,  
Bond Art + Science

**Renda Morton**  
executive director of product  
design, *The New York Times*

**Joshua Musick**  
creative director, frog design

**Victor Ng**  
senior art director,  
*The New York Times*

**Jill Nussbaum**  
design manager, Facebook

**Jason Severs**  
director, experience design &  
strategic initiatives, Verizon

**Marshall Sitten**  
vice president of  
communications, Citi  
Community Development

**Ted Southern**  
president, CEO,  
Final Frontier Design

**Neil Wehrle**  
senior director of user  
experience, SmartThings

**Christina Xu**  
director of operations,  
Breadpig; director and  
president, Institute on  
Higher Awesome Studies

**Jeffrey Zeldman**  
founder, executive creative  
director, Happy Cog Studios



# 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, *Feltron Annual Report*; co-creator,  
Reporter and Daytum apps

**Bethany Fong**  
senior interaction designer,  
accessibility lead, Google

**Jason Fried**  
founder, Basecamp

**Raul Gutierrez**  
founder, CEO, Tinybop

**Usman Haque**  
designer, entrepreneur,  
director, Umbrellium

**Scott Heiferman**  
co-founder, CEO, Meetup

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

**Seth Johnson**  
design advocate and client  
facilitator, IBM Design

**Giorgia Lupi**  
co-founder, design  
director, 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**  
acting 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 Inc.

**Winslow Turner Porter III**  
director, producer,  
creative technologist

**Steve Portigal**  
principal, Portigal Consulting

**Marc Rettig**  
principal, Fit Associates

**Mark Shepard**  
architect; curator,  
"Toward the Sentient City"

**Charlie Todd**  
founder, Improv Everywhere

**Talin Wadsworth**  
product designer, Adobe

**Chris Woebken**  
independent designer

**Dona Wong**  
author; vice president,  
digital strategy and  
communications, Federal  
Reserve Bank of New York

**Milica Zec**  
film and virtual  
reality director

# Application Process

## APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

For 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)
- Statement of Intent/Personal Statement
- Résumé
- Letters of Recommendation
- Official College Transcript

Some applicants may be required to submit the following:

- Proof of English Proficiency
- Copy of Permanent Residency Card
- Declaration of Finances
- Verification of Finances
- Foreign Transcript Evaluation

## DEPARTMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

For specific guidelines about these requirements, visit: [sva.edu/grad/deptreq](https://sva.edu/grad/deptreq)

- Portfolio
- Case Study (encouraged, but not required)

## 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).

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“ 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 the programs in 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 the programs in Art Therapy; Branding; Digital Photography; Directing; Fashion Photography. Data required by the U.S. Department of Education on “Gainful Employment” for each of the above programs may be found on each individual program page at [sva.edu/ge](http://sva.edu/ge).

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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 305, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503-4014.

The Master of Arts in Teaching in Art Education program is 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.AR designed by student Kohzy Koh.



# School of Visual Arts

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