

PHD IN TRANSITION DESIGN

School of Design, Carnegie Mellon University

DESIGN THEORY & PRACTICE

Year 1, Fall

“Design Theory & Practice” advances understanding of how different methods inform different kinds of research and practice. Through a total of 15 sessions spanning 15-weeks, you will explore the intersections of theory, practice and praxis, to develop a holistic understanding of design research as both a theoretical and practical process. Coursework includes the design of praxis methods to shape your own inquiry, and deepen your research practice.

Topics

Research Of Design; Research For Design; Research By Design; and, Design Praxis

TEACHING DESIGN

Year 1, Fall

“Teaching Design” focuses on planning, conducting, reviewing, and revising learning experiences in academic and professional contexts. Meeting weekly, we will study learning theories and instructional design approaches. You will apply your discoveries to design of learning objectives, outcomes, instructional activities, performance measures, formative assessments, and summative evaluations, to create innovative and effective teaching and learning experiences.

Topics

Investigating Learning Theories; Learning and Teaching Contexts; Defining/Addressing Learning Gaps; Knowledge and Skill Acquisition; Motivation, Attention, and Memory; and, Iterating Instructional Design

ECOLOGICAL WORLDVIEW

Year 1, Fall

An “ecoliterate” mindset is the starting point for Transition Design. Indeed, to be ecoliterate is to understand the principles through which natural systems flourish and to apply these principles to society, so that we too may flourish without compromising or destroying the natural systems on which we depend. Spanning 15-weeks, this seminar class focuses on key themes of ecoliteracy to help us navigate our social, ecological, and existential crises.

Topics

Place and Bioregions; Goethean Science; Living Systems and Gaia; Relationality and Context; Radical Holism; and, Everyday Life and Infrastructure

TRANSITION DESIGN

Year 1, Spring

“Transition Design” drives design-led, systems-level change towards socially and ecologically sustainable, convivial and equitable place-based lifestyles. Spanning 15-weeks, with two classes each week, this course explores multi-level wicked problems to establish mutually beneficial relationships between people, the natural environment and the designed world; repositioning designers as agents of sustainable change.

Topics

Living Systems @ Wicked Problems; Mindsets @ Postures; Theories of Change; Visions; and, Transition Designing

EXPERIENTIAL FUTURES

Year 1, Spring

“Experiential Futures” equips you with the tools and methods to vision and model system-level change, over time. Spanning 7-weeks, you will explore future-focused design practices, coupled with training in futureing and foresight techniques and methods. Coursework includes the development of a ‘Time Machine’—an immersive, future scenario for storytelling and research activation developed in collaboration with others.

Topics

World Modeling; Futuring @ Foresight; Emerging Design Practices; Design Pedagogy; and, Sustainable Futures

FRAMING PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

Year 1, Spring

“Framing Proposals for Change” introduces techniques to support you in framing research projects geared toward steering sustainable change in the world. Spanning 7-weeks, this course helps you frame research contexts, define research questions, plan methodological approaches, and speculate upon outcomes and their impacts. Coursework is the development of a PhD Proposal; a paving the way for the rest of your PhD.

Topics

Framing Research Problems; Building an Argument; Planning your Project; Keeping it Open; and, Writing a Research Proposal

RESEARCH I, II, III, IV

Years 2 @ 3

“Research I, II, III, IV” provide a 2-year period of deep, reflective and self-directed research. Across this sequence of courses—spanning 4 semesters—you work closely with your Advisory Committee to build upon your Research Proposal and Literature Review. During this phase you will deepen your literature review, undertake field research, develop practices and begin pulling together your research into a coherent body of work.

Topics

Fieldwork; Design Research Practice; Research Pilots @ Prototypes; Dissertation Planning; Project Development; and, Peer Review @ Critique

DESIGN WRITING WORKSHOP

Year 3, Fall

“Design Writing Workshop” deepens your connection with the craft of design writing via a cross-section of academic, journalistic and creative styles. Spanning 15-weeks, this practical hands-on course helps you develop your style, structure and confidence in design writing. Writing is a creative process where ideas are explored, discovered and expressed. Coursework includes developing a full PhD dissertation outline.

Topics

Conference Papers @ Journal Articles; Design Criticism; Podcasts @ Digital Publishing; Transformational Design Curricula; and, Developing a Literature Review

CODA I, II

Year 4

“Coda” provides the critical space for divergent research themes to coalesce into a clear and conclusive body of research. You will assemble your dissertation ready for examination in May of the final semester. Dissertations can be entirely written (60–80K words), or a body of written and practical work (40–60K words, by negotiation). Final work must be an original contribution to knowledge, advancing the field of Transition Design.

Topics

Distilling Research Findings; Finding Voice; Making your Point; Coalescing Divergent Themes; Dissertation Production; Editing @ Refining; and, Defense Prep

