

Academic Assessment Plan

MDES in Communication Design

May 2025

Program Goals (3-4)

(Program goals are broad general statements of what the program intends to accomplish and describes what a student will be able to do after completing the program. The program goals are linked to the mission of the university and college.)

1. The program will prepare designers to build a better world through design that strengthens their community, the state of Arkansas, and beyond.
2. The program will prepare students for emerging roles the field can play in involving communities in participatory design processes that generate equitable and sustainable solutions to design problems.
3. The program will prepare students to advance their professional practice as culturally responsive designers and bring community-centered mindsets to leadership positions in any industry or sector.
4. The program will produce graduates who are qualified to pursue careers in design education to further inform and define the discipline.

Student Learning Outcomes (6-8)

(Student Learning Outcomes are defined in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students will know and be able to do as a result of completing a program. These student learning outcomes are directly linked to the accomplishment of the program goals.)

1. Students will explore power sharing and ethical relationships between designers and communities in solving social problems
2. Students will frame scenarios in which design intervention shapes preferable consequences in a variety of contexts
3. Students will explore the various technological and visual strategies that inform design decisions and applications across different types of problems
4. Students will develop a perspective on design, assessing the evolution of the field and its role in society
5. Students will evaluate and select design methods appropriate to the task and the collaborative and participatory goals of the program
6. Students will apply storytelling methods to construct compelling design narratives and arguments supported by evidence and citation

7. Students will demonstrate equitable and culturally responsive attitudes that define leadership in teaching and practice
8. Students will interpret and apply theories and principles from design and other fields in writing and studio work
9. Students will demonstrate how research contributes to framing design problems by articulating various lenses through which to view seemingly ambiguous situations

Process for Assessing each Student Learning Outcome

(A process must be defined and documented to regularly assess student learning and achievement of student learning outcomes. The results of the assessment must be utilized as input for the improvement of the program.)

1. Timeline for assessment and analysis

(Must include specific timeline for collection and analysis of assessment data.)

Direct Methods are assessed by the full graphic design faculty in the School of Art at the end of every academic semester.

Indirect methods are monitored by Director of Graduate Studies, Director of the School of Art, Dean, and Provost through the Annual Report and the fields of study through external achievements of students continuing in the design fields. The Annual Report is submitted in July.

2. Means of assessment and desired level of student achievement

(Must include at least one direct and one indirect method of assessment for each learning outcome.)

Direct method:

It is a policy of the Graduate Council at the University of Arkansas that every master's student will be reviewed annually by their degree program for progress toward a degree. Students in the Master of Design in Communication Design will participate in a review each semester to cover progress in completing courses at a level that indicates success throughout the program.

1st Semester (Fall): Fall Salon and Student Showcase

Students in the first year of the program participate in a salon to showcase their work. The atmosphere is casual and students have an opportunity to speak with the faculty, answer questions, and discuss their interests

2nd Semester (Spring): Spring Salon and Student Showcase

Students in the first year of the program participate in a salon to showcase their work. The atmosphere is casual and students have an opportunity to speak with the faculty, answer questions, and discuss their interests

3rd Semester (Fall): Thesis Proposal Presentation

Students in the second year prepare and present a project proposal to the faculty, as part of their Thesis Prep course. Faculty ask questions, offer guidance and evaluate a student's progress as they enter their final semester

4th Semester (Spring): Final Oral Examinations

Students participate in Oral Exams halfway through their last semester. During this exam, students demonstrate the depth, scholarship, and organization of their Final Project and Thesis so that their Thesis Committee is confident in their ability to complete the work.

Indirect Method:

MDES students are required to maintain a 2.85 or higher GPA overall, or will be placed on academic probation. After two consecutive semesters on academic probation, the student may be dismissed from the program and/or lose their GA.

3. Reporting of results

(Must at least report annually to the Dean of college/school.)

Based on findings from assessment, a summary will be provided to the Dean's office via the department chair each July in the Annual Report.

Annual Academic Assessment Report

MDES in Communication Design

May 2025

Report annually to the Dean of the college/school the following:

- **Results of analysis of assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**

Salon reviews were conducted at the end of the fall and spring semesters with the first year students in the program (6), with all graphic design faculty (9) serving as reviewers. We saw significant achievements in their work, demonstrating strong research skills, multiple successful interdisciplinary and community projects, strong demonstration of collaborative skills, and an advanced exploration and improvement of formal skills. All students in the program were found to be making satisfactory progress toward their degrees.

Students in the second year of the program (5) participated in a Fall Thesis Proposal review. We observed students to have significantly developed research plans and trajectories that were achievable, maintained the high standards of the program, and exceeded expectations. Halfway through the Spring semester, students in the second year (5) participated in a Comprehensive Exam, similar to a thesis defense. During this exam, students present their progress to their committee of three faculty members. At this point, faculty members ask questions and provide critical feedback. All students passed their final exams.

- **Any changes to degree/certificate planned or made on the basis of the assessment and analysis**

N/A

- **Any changes to the assessment process made or planned**

The MDES degree program has been approved to change from a thesis option to a non-thesis option which will go into effect for the 2025/2026 catalog. The following course names have also been edited to reflect the change:

GDES 63606 Graduate Final Project Research

GDES 63909 Graduate Final Project