



## FAQ

### Visual Communication Design

Department of Visual Arts | Stellenbosch University

<http://www0.sun.ac.za/visualarts/>



**The Department of Visual Arts at Stellenbosch University offers a four-year BA degree in Visual Arts and Design with the option to specialise in **Visual Communication Design**.**

The Visual Communication Design course offers an environment that allows for an exchange of ideas and cross-fertilisation between the different study streams in the Department of Visual Arts, and other departments and faculties on campus. This creates a rich and rewarding learning experience for our students.

**What is visual communication design?**

In today's competitive and information-rich world, visual communication design is indispensable. From the moment we wake up most of our experiences, actions, perceptions and decisions are informed and controlled by design. On a daily basis, the faces of clocks, our street signs, magazines, books, posters, advertisements, package labels, logos and branding, ATM interfaces, film, television and websites help us to access vital information about the world around us.

Featuring a broad range of media and formats, each of these visual messages is designed with a specific function, purpose and audience in mind. This is the creative domain of designers of visual communication.

**Visual communication design is a broad term encompassing graphic design, information design, instructional design, visual storytelling and various products of cultural and visual information.**

**Knowledge of both historical and contemporary developments in art and design thinking as well as visual and cultural theory assist students to understand a larger world of ideas and to challenge their own assumptions.**

**Our pursuit of excellence involves focusing on user-centered design and understanding how to work collaboratively with specialists from other fields.**

**Students master both hand (analogue) as well as digital techniques of production.**

**While technological developments are constantly advancing design tools, the real pursuit for designers remains the same: To create content and meaning, and to make a positive contribution towards society.**

## **The Visual Communication Design course**

**Our aim is to develop a broad understanding in students of the role, purpose and possibilities of design.** Our Visual Communication Design course focuses on teaching students to generate meaning by organising and shaping information within specific social and cultural contexts. A multi-disciplinary approach to design directs these processes.

Our course aims to educate visual communication designers who can contribute to the advancement of the discipline as well as the development of social and cultural contexts and environments. We also encourage students to express themselves in their own specific language and to use their work to engage in dialogue and adopt an investigative and reflective approach to media. Taking up a critical position empowers students to conduct their art-making and design practices with necessary confidence and accountability.

Our **Visual Communication Design programme** evolves continuously while also preserving the core design methodology of critical thinking, theory, practice and exploration. Both traditional and emerging technologies are integrated into the broader studio experience. This will help you to focus on your particular strengths, as well as to nurture your individual design interests, sensibilities and vision. Solid grounding in design principles, visual language skills, and a range of methods and techniques will enable you to confidently work with open boundaries while questioning the consequences and sustainability of design at the same time.

**Dedicated lecturers bring decades of teaching and professional experience to the programme, and visiting designers and critics add varied and global perspectives to the studios.**

**We teach a comprehensive set of visual, verbal and textual approaches as core foundation to the field.**

**Our approach to design will allow you to acquire a broad set of transferable skills like critical thinking, creative problem solving, visual, cultural and social literacy as well as social innovation.**

### **What will you learn?**

**Our approach to design is to tackle real-world and abstract problems hands-on, hearts-on, and minds-on.** There are no shortcuts or ready-made solutions to great design. You will learn to embrace an intensive design process: in-depth exploration, experimentation, research and even play. By asking questions, and trying out different combinations and possibilities, you will learn to design through doing.

Such an immersive approach will help you to think in terms of concepts and to take a critical approach to content. It will also teach you to give form to your ideas, developing your own visual language, and to take responsibility for your chosen points of departure.

Our course offers extensive opportunities to investigate the various possibilities of expression available to designers, including the full potential and applications of a range of media. The course also allows opportunity for acquiring know-how in terms of finishing and crafting designs professionally. **You will work on both individual and group projects. Group discussions and formal presentations develop confidence and will help you to motivate your design decisions as well as to engage in constructive debate and dialogue.**

### Digital Production Adobe Creative Cloud

- InDesign • Photoshop
- Illustrator • AfterEffects
- Lightroom • Adobe XD
- FinalCutPro • HTML/CSS

- ### Drawing Illustration Printmaking
- Etching • Silkscreen
  - Lithography

### Photography New Media

- ### Graphic Design
- Branding & logo design
  - Packaging • Campaign design • Print & new media • Web design
  - Social media • Information design • Instructional design • Experience design
  - Exhibition design • Art direction • Copywriting

- ### Typography
- Layout, editorial & publication design • Poster design • Handlettering
  - Book design • Book making & book binding

- ### Visual narrative & storytelling
- Comics & graphic novels
    - Picture books
  - Motion graphics
  - Video & sound

The **first year** is a foundational year. All students, irrespective of field of specialisation (Visual Communication Design, Fine Arts or Jewellery Design), follow the same curriculum. There are two practical modules: **Integrated Art and Design** and **Drawing**. In these modules a range of fundamental art and design concepts such as the basic elements, principles and techniques in drawing, typography, image-making, photography, printmaking, three-dimensional art and design, motion design, narrative, and digital production will be covered. The major theoretical module in this programme, **Visual Studies**, introduces critical concepts while simultaneously broadening the social, cultural and creative visual fields. Then there is also a choice between the following general BA modules: **English Studies**, **Afrikaans en Nederlands** or **Sociology**.

In **second year** the practical modules for the intermediate level of the Visual Communication Design course are: **Integrated Art and Design** (this includes print-making, photography and Digital Production), **Drawing** and **Visual Communication Design**. In the Visual Communication Design module foundational skills learnt in the first year will be applied in more specialised contexts such as visual identity design, editorial design, digital design, packaging design, narrative illustration, etc. You will continue with Visual Studies as well as your BA module of choice.

In **third year** you continue with the same modules as in the previous year. You do, however, not continue with your BA module of choice. At this first advanced level, you are encouraged to **integrate knowledge** across these broad-based subjects (e.g. the application of knowledge and skills through participation in 'real'-life contexts). Projects include working with real clients such as NGOs and communities in and around Stellenbosch. At this level, you are also expected to do an internship at a professional studio or creative enterprise of your choice.

**Throughout the four years of study, our focus remains on design for sustainable future change. Foundational to our programme is design for social innovation through embracing transdisciplinary, participatory approaches.**

In the advanced **fourth year** of the programme you only have two modules: **Visual Communication Design and Theory of Art and Design**. At this level, the Visual Communication Design course culminates in the integration of theory and practice, and the various disciplines and subjects. Through an expanded self-motivated research project you will respond to a social, cultural, environmental or urban problem of your choice. A research article that relates to your practical work will add further rigour and depth to your visual communication design solutions.

**Throughout the course, you will have ample opportunity to select and choose your own themes and topics within strict creative parameters of projects.** From an early stage in the Visual Communication Design course, this flexibility empowers each student to take initiative in honing his or her own language, vision and identity as a designer.

Final year students in the Department of Visual Arts work together closely to curate the annual **GradEx** exhibition to showcase their work in celebration of their graduation.

**It is also not uncommon for our graduates to open their own design studios. Many work as freelance photographers, children's book illustrators, as well as illustrator-writers of comics and graphic novels. To this list we can add that a number of our students even follow careers in journalism, or work as professional artists.**

**Our focus on sustainability has spurred interest in ecology and social design, and several students have continued to pursue these directions. Some graduates refine this interest and further their expertise through postgraduate studies.**

## **Career opportunities**

**Our Visual Communication Design course prepares our graduates to work in almost any field imaginable.** Most of our graduates find themselves in established professions such as design studios and the advertising industry. Here they work as graphic designers, web designers, art directors, copywriters, studio managers, etc. Others work as graphic designers, photographers, illustrators, editors or researchers on books or magazines in the publishing industry.

Some of our graduates pursue careers in education as teachers, or do curatorial work where they plan exhibitions for museums and galleries, or act as educational officers. Our alumni have also carved niches in television, film and animation, working on lighting, on camera, as set designers or as producers. Several of our graduates even ventured into related fields such as urban planning, architecture, interior and fashion design and consultation.

**Our graduates contribute across a broad spectrum towards the visual communication design industry, making an impact on social, cultural and environmental experiences.** Some do it locally in Southern Africa while others work abroad in the UK, Europe, Australia, and the Americas.

**Our course aims to foster life-long learning in people; not simply to train employees to fulfil an organisation's immediate needs. Our Visual Communication Design course fosters ethical and social response in students. Our graduates are also conscious of the importance and role local identities and indigenous knowledges can play within design thinking that strives for a better world locally and globally.**

**The emphasis on the contextual role of design, in-depth investigation and experimentation with media, technology, materials and communication strategies, empower our graduates to respond innovatively and intelligently when conventional practice requires unexpected and radical alternatives.**

## **Touch the future**

The world is in constant change and the role of the designer is changing with it. In our complex and fast-moving world design practitioners of the 21st Century are facing a multitude challenges in a much broader strategic context than ever before.

To solve problems in a global market and to remain competitive and sustainable organisations, institutions and corporations are looking for innovative solutions through design strategies. The growing need for reconciliation of tension between globalisation and cultural identities require broad understanding of issues related to the cognitive, social, cultural, technological and economic contexts and their relation to design.

This expanded field of design requires that upcoming designers should be able to anticipate problems and solutions rather than solving only known problems. By encouraging a way of working that accepts the unknown and the unseen, we focus on optimising the designer's ability to embrace uncertainty and rise to meet the challenges of the future.

**Our emphasis on acquiring multi-disciplinary skills and broad understanding not only raises the level of design expertise and achievement, but also empowers graduates to find their niche in realising opportunities and possibilities.**



## Facilities and resources

Home studios for every Visual Communication Design group with individual desks, drawers and lockers.

**Drawing studio.**

Fully equipped **printmaking**, lithography and screenprinting studios.

**Photography studio** furnished with backdrops and state of the art lighting equipment. New darkroom facilities with enlargers. Medium and large format still cameras, video cameras and sound equipment.

Fully equipped **digital laboratory** with Apple Mac computers, internet access, design software, drawing tablets, flatbed scanners, and colour printers.

We also boast with a lab furnished with a range of **3D-printers** and **laser cutting** equipment.

Fully equipped **bookbinding studio** with large format printer.

**Seminar spaces** with digital projector stations, VCR and sound.

Fully equipped **wood, metal** and **casting** workshops.

**The Stellenbosch University Library with its vast collection of books, maps and documents is an invaluable resource. The Comics and Graphic Novel Collection is of special interest to the Visual Communication Design students.**

**If you can use your own initiative, are intellectually curious, and a playful, inventive, creative thinker, this course is for you.**

### **Prospective students**

**Art or Design as school subject is not a prerequisite for Visual Communication Design.** The successful future designer will, however, need drawing skills, design sensibilities, along with academic skills and critical thought.

Every year, out of approximately 100 applicants, we select 25-30 students to enter the first year level in our Visual Communication Design course.

**The selection is based on portfolio submissions.**

### **Applications**

Information on how to apply as well as the portfolio requirements is available on our website:

<http://www0.sun.ac.za/visualarts/how-to-apply/undergraduate/>

**For more administrative information:**

Annatjie Moolman | +27 21 808 2508 | amm@sun.ac.za

**Further further general enquiries:**

Yumna Williams | +27 21 808 3052 | yumna@sun.ac.za