

The two-year MA in Critical Studies program combines the study of critical theory with the practice of creative research, so students learn not only to critique but also to intervene, reimagine, and remake. The program is designed to help students develop modes of thinking, writing, and making that cross disciplinary boundaries.

Critical theory emerged with the Frankfurt School, and due to those thinkers' commitment to knowledge that emancipates, critical theory now includes all theories that expose, critique, and transform oppressive ideologies. The Critical Studies program adopts this broader view. Coursework includes seminars in Feminist, Queer Theory, and Gender and Sexuality studies as well as Critical Race Theory. Critical Studies also offers a seminar in Research for a Creative Practice that claims research as a form of intervention and making. The program culminates in a thesis project so students can make a contribution to their fields based on their own interests and commitments.

Situated in the context of a 21st-century art school, Critical Studies examines overlaps and tensions between critical theory and visual studies and investigates the role critical theory and art can play in transforming institutions and ideologies.

The two-year required course sequence builds from identifying key questions and issues in critical theory and cultural studies to providing students with the methodological, research, writing, and professional skills they need to ask good questions and to investigate areas of inquiry in a thesis project of their own design. The thesis writing occurs during the second year, resulting in both an academic research paper and opportunities for public engagement based on the student's professional interests.

Graduates of the Critical Studies program have gone on to pursue PhDs, Fulbright Fellowships, nonprofit work, arts administration, curatorial careers, education, entrepreneurship, and public scholarship.

SUMMARY OF COURSES:

Critical Theory = 9 credits

Cultural Studies =3 credits

Critical Writing & Visual Culture =3 credits

Creative Nonfiction Writing = 3 credits

Research for a Creative Practice =3 credits

Professional Practice = 3 credits

Electives = 6 credits

Internship/Elective/Independent Study = 3 credits

Thesis Writing = 12 credits

Total Credits = 45

COURSES BY SEMESTER:

Fall Semester 1 = 12 credits

Critical Theory 1: Introduction

Introduction to Cultural Studies

Critical Writing & Visual Culture

Elective (from existing PNCA courses, recommended: CS 555: Critical Pedagogy)

Spring Semester 1 = 12 credits

Critical Theory 2: Feminist Theory, Queer Theory, Gender, and Sexuality

Research for a Creative Practice

Creative Nonfiction Writing

Elective (from existing PNCA courses, recommended: CS 533: Critical Theory Seminar)

Fall Semester 2 = 12 credits

Critical Theory 3: Critical Race Theory

Thesis Writing 1 (Thesis Proposal)

Internship/Elective/Independent Study

Spring Semester 2 = 9 credits

Thesis Writing 2 (Complete Thesis)

Professional Practice

CRITICAL STUDIES COURSES ORGANIZED BY SEMESTER WITH DESCRIPTIONS

Fall Semester 1 = 12 credits

Critical Theory 1: Introduction (3 credits)

This seminar is an introduction to major concepts and questions in critical theory, beginning with key figures in the Frankfurt School and moving through feminism, critical race theory, and postcolonial criticism. The seminar claims critical theory as a creative project of analysis and exposure radically interested in accountability and the material effects of ideas. Because the course is taught in the context of an art school, we explore overlaps and tensions between critical theory and visual studies and investigate the role critical theory and artistic production can play in transforming institutions and ideologies.

Introduction to Cultural Studies (3 credits)

Lawrence Grossberg has written that cultural studies is not about “an object, a method, a theoretical paradigm, etc.” Rather it begins with a “question about the world.” In other words, rather than a discrete discipline, cultural studies is concerned with how methods and conceptual frameworks from critical theory, social sciences, humanities and the arts can be applied to help us understand the ways that language, images, history, and so on shape the world we live in. This seminar will familiarize students with key texts, scholars, and questions that have contributed to the field, from its roots in Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, its transformation of how we study things like youth, class, and popular culture, to current iterations both in and outside of the academy. Students will practice applying these perspectives to their own work and “questions about the world.” Cultural studies is a vital component of the study of critical theory. It provides the “how” to critical theory’s “what” and “why.” That is, it

demonstrates *how* to use cultural theories as practical tools for understanding, impacting, and intervening on the processes of everyday life.

Critical Writing & Visual Culture (3 credits)

This course models the program's combination of critical theory, critical writing, and creative research and investigates practices of looking and the production, circulation, and effects of visual images. Students can expect to attend local performances and exhibits and to read, write, and workshop reviews, interviews, and critical writing for publication in the program's online journal, *Art Discourse*. Together, we will examine the responsibilities of the maker and viewer as collaborators as well as our duties as socially engaged respondents. Each student will present as the discussion lead for a chapter in one of our course texts. Readings may include *The Art of Cruelty* by Maggie Nelson, *Draw Your Weapons* by Sarah Sentilles, and *Listening to Images* by Tina M. Campt in addition to selected reviews, interviews and critical writing by a variety of artists and thinkers in the field.

Elective (3 credits)

Spring Semester 1 = 12 credits

Critical Theory 2: Feminist Theory, Queer Theory, Gender, and Sexuality (3 credits)

Approaching feminist and queer theories as tools for questioning power and analyzing the construction of difference, this seminar critically investigates genders and sexualities as contested categories of social and cultural analysis that influence institutions, economies, cultures, and political systems. Our texts will be interdisciplinary and intersectional, focusing on how sexism, heterosexism, and cissexism interact with other forms of oppression, including classism, racism, able-ism, size-ism, imperialism, and xenophobia. The seminar will combine required content with opportunities for intense engagement with specialized topics the student chooses to explore more deeply related to their thesis work. Students will be encouraged to connect assigned texts to their own areas of expertise and research interests

Research for a Creative Practice (3 credits)

The seminar in research for a creative practice provides a framework for students to pose questions and incorporate graduate level research methodologies into ongoing inquiry. The emphasis is on research as a process of critical engagement for observing

connections between seemingly disparate ideas, planning future actions and strategies, and asking better questions. The seminar introduces students to writing as a multi-stage, process driven creative practice, and encourages inquiries that cross the boundaries of discipline and genre. The seminar prepares students to write their thesis projects. Over the course of the seminar, students will learn writing and revision techniques. Students develop professional skills for clearly communicating research ideas with theoretical and methodological rigor to various stakeholders.

Creative Nonfiction Writing (3 credits)

In this writing workshop, students will explore the broad genre of creative nonfiction—from small-scale constraint based writing exercises to the personal essay to academic articles to art reviews to non-narrative poetry and beyond. Through a variety of writing exercises, experiments, and reading assignments, we will play with language, content, and form. Emphasis is placed on experimentation and argument as means to develop a personal vocabulary while initiating a self-directed writing practice. A series of visiting writers will assist us in this work. The course is designed to support graduate students preparing for thesis writing, visual artists who use language and text in their work, and creative writers.

Elective (3 credits)

Fall Semester 2 = 12 credits

Internship (3 credits)

Students will design a credit-bearing internship to supplement their scholarly work.

Critical Theory 3: Critical Race Theory, Postcolonial Theory (3 credits)

This seminar explores Critical Race Theory and Postcolonial Theory as analytical frameworks that provide epistemological and methodological approaches to the study of structural inequalities. The seminar takes as its starting point Critical Race Theory's insistence that racism is pervasive, persistent, and ongoing and examines how institutional racism, colonialism, and imperialism are embedded in institutions, laws, practices, and policies. The seminar approaches "race" as a social construction with material effects (racism) and investigates the roles language, images, and other forms of cultural production play in racism, (de)colonization, and resistance movements. The seminar will combine required content with opportunities for intense engagement with specialized topics the student chooses to explore more deeply related to their thesis

work. Students will be encouraged to connect assigned texts to their own areas of expertise and research interests.

Thesis Writing 1: Thesis Proposal (6 credits)

This thesis workshop seminar is intended to support students as they propose and begin to write a successful master's thesis for the Critical Studies program. During the fall term, students will make a public presentation of their proposed projects, which will be evaluated by a panel composed of faculty, artists, and community stakeholders. The thesis (20-40 pages) will be both critical and constructive; that is, it should reveal, challenge, and dismantle systems of oppression, while also reimagining possible ways forward.

Spring Semester 2 = 9 credits

Thesis Writing 2: Complete Thesis (6 credits)

This course will provide students with opportunities to present, refine, and receive feedback on their written work. Regular reviews of drafts will occur in a combination of writing workshops and meetings with the professor throughout the semester. Each student will be provided with an additional mentor with expertise in their area of investigation. Final thesis work will be approved by the instructor, program Chair, and thesis mentor at the end of the semester.

Professional Practice (3 credits)

In this workshop-based seminar, students develop effective professional strategies to successfully pursue a chosen career path upon completion of the Critical Studies program. The course helps students identify opportunities for achieving meaningful career objectives and for making a contribution as a critical citizen. Students learn concrete professional skills: curriculum vitae formatting, email and communication etiquette, letter writing, interviewing, public speaking, job search resources, portfolio development, and how to apply for opportunities (which may include PhD programs, teaching positions, publications, grants, fellowships, internships, residencies, or exhibitions). The objective is to prepare the future Critical Studies graduate to identify, plan and pursue a strategy for meaningful career development and a rewarding professional life in which their talents translate into a significant critical cultural contribution.

CS 555: Critical Pedagogy (Elective)

This course will provide students with the tools needed to foster transformative learning experiences in academia as well as sites of community education. We will engage with feminist, queer, indigenous, anti-racist, inclusive, and critical pedagogies, as well as active and embodied learning. This course will emphasize practical skills for applying these theoretical frameworks to actual classroom or workshop settings. We will pay particular attention to facilitating difficult conversations related to positionality, equity, and social justice. Students will develop a statement of teaching philosophy, create an original syllabus, facilitate conversation, and lead group activities.

CS 533: Critical Theory Seminar (Elective)
(Rotating Topics)

SAMPLE TOPICS

Disability Narratives

This course introduces graduate students to theoretical models of disability studies (social, medical, cultural, etc.) through an interdisciplinary practice of reading, writing, and revising works of theory, criticism, and creative writing on the theme of the body. Students can expect to investigate the role of politics, the mind, and culture in how normative standards are determined and enforced on all bodies and how we may subvert these standards through writing. Reading for the course will include Alice Hall's *Literature and Disability*, Ilya Kominsky's poetry collection *Deaf Republic*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and supplemental work including criticism by leading theorists in the field such as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Mike Oliver, and Lennard J. Davis.

Performance Studies

Performance studies is the interdisciplinary investigation of how we make use of our bodies in play, ritual, protest, and every-day life as well as in more traditional "framed" performances such as theater, music, and dance. It is the study of the cultural impact of these actions. Together, through reading and writing we will interrogate performative notions of gender and sexuality, race, and (dis)ability in both daily life and time-based-art. Students can expect to read and respond to prominent scholars from the field such as José Esteban Muñoz, Peggy Phelan, and Barbara Browning. While physical performance is not required, there will be opportunities to both research and make work at the intersection of performance theory and practice.

Manifold Ecology: Environmental Perspectives and Experiments

This graduate seminar will explore a range of theoretical perspectives and case studies rooted in the multidisciplinary field of the environmental humanities. Over the course of the semester, we will guide our curiosity by considering the "connective ontology" that animates contemporary ecological thinking. Particular subjects we will engage may include some or all of the following: Queer Ecology + Ecofeminism; New Materialism; Animal Studies; Eco-phenomenology;

Multispecies Anthropology; Environmental Justice; Ecological Imperialism; and Postcolonial + Indigenous Ecologies. In addition to discussing readings in theory and fiction, we will also experiment with alternative methods of accessing/experiencing interconnection that go beyond traditional academics. Such methods may include guided somatic exploration, collaborative research, and other innovations we will conceive together. In all of our work we will grapple with the complex, partial, and sometimes murky relationships that persist between human and other-than-human ways of knowing, being, and meaning-making.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

The goal of the MA in Critical Studies is to produce creative critical thinkers prepared to address pressing contemporary issues located at the intersection of cultural production and critical theory. Graduates of the program develop the research, writing, and communication skills necessary for rigorously investigating forces shaping contemporary culture with imagination, creativity, and collaboration.

Critical Inquiry

- Write clearly and persuasively
- Approach theory with confidence, flexibility, and well-informed skepticism
- Think clearly, creatively, and critically

World View

- Develop an understanding of how critical theory's questions/concerns/theories influence your own research interests
- Analyze the material effects of ideas
- Expose, critique, and transform oppressive ideologies

Professional Practice

- Demonstrate advanced individual and collaborative abilities to design and complete research projects
- Develop graduate level research skills
- Communicate ideas effectively in written and oral forms
- Develop postgraduate professional practice and collaborative skills
- Apply for grants/internships/fellowships or other relevant professional opportunities

Studio/Research Practice

- Read, comprehend, and critically analyze texts from a variety of disciplines
- Complete interdisciplinary research project that is accountable to community stakeholders
- Learn how to prepare thesis work for publication so the research is outward facing and relevant to a variety of audiences, while also making a contribution to the field
- Claim research as a process of critical engagement and creative practice

METHOD OF EVALUATION

The success of the Critical Studies curriculum will be measured by tracking increased student abilities to read, research, write, and communicate, and to apply critical thinking and creative research skills to complex problems that matter. Students' writing and research skills will be evaluated in seminars, first year review, two public presentations of thesis research, and the quality of thesis work as assessed by faculty and community stakeholders. Courses will be evaluated by students through written feedback and evaluations.

First Year Review

Students will meet individually with the Chair of the Critical Studies program in the middle of the second semester of the program. Before the meeting, students will submit a self-evaluation and a portfolio of written and creative work completed during the first year of study that represents their best work, progress, and challenges. The Chair and the student will then meet to: discuss the portfolio; identify strengths and areas for growth; evaluate performance in classes and as a member of the community; discuss progress on the thesis project; and chart a plan for completing coursework and the thesis project.

Thesis Proposal Review & Evaluation

In the first term of the second year, students will make public presentations of their proposed thesis questions and projects, which will be evaluated by a panel composed of faculty, artists, and community stakeholders.

Thesis Review & Evaluation

Final thesis work will be evaluated by the program Chair, thesis instructor, and thesis mentor at the end of the final spring semester. This thesis committee will help students determine the next shape(s) their thesis work should take and the best venues for its distribution.

Exit Interviews

Upon completion of the program, students will have exit interviews with the Chair of Critical Studies to discuss the program's strengths and what can be improved.