

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

The 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 cultural studies, feminist and queer theory, as well as critical race theory, and environmental criticism. Situated in the context of a 21st-century art school, Critical Studies also 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.

COURSEWORK:

Critical Theory 1 + 2 + 3 = 9 credits
Cultural Studies =3 credits
Critical Writing & Visual Culture =3 credits
Creative Nonfiction Writing = 3 credits
Environmental Criticism =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

Environmental Criticism

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

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS:

CRIT 501 Critical Theory 1: Introduction

This course will introduce students to foundational concepts, thinkers, and trajectories in critical theory with the aim of understanding what critical theory is, what it's critical of, and how students can best utilize it in their own scholarly and creative interests. Critical theory is oppositional to white supremacy, capitalism, and cis heteropatriarchy; its critiques concern the structural, the psychoanalytic, and the embodied; and it is as concerned with building new worlds as it is with challenging the current social order. The course begins by surveying topics such as capitalism, psychoanalysis, and power before turning our attention to race, (settler/de)colonization, gender, sexuality, aesthetics, and affect. At the end of the course, students should be equipped with a strong foundation in the key theoretical and conceptual vocabularies necessary to do so.

CRIT 521 Introduction to Cultural Studies

This seminar takes up 'cultural studies' as an interdisciplinary method of critical inquiry applied across different media, genres, and contexts. Together we will explore cultural studies as a framework for interrogating the politics and aesthetics of cultural production, and for engaging with historical and social questions in various cultural phenomena. Our readings will draw from fields such as Marxism, feminist theory, queer theory, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, and utopian studies, and provide an introduction to various topics in critical theory. We will also analyze a wide range of cultural objects including literature, film, television, architecture, painting, photography, music, and more. Throughout the seminar, students will bring to our discussion connections with their independent research and thesis work.

CRIT 525 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

CRIT 555 Critical Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy, a key course in our graduate program, is tailored for students who are passionate about bringing transformative changes in various educational environments, including college classrooms and community settings. This course combines a strong theoretical foundation with practical, real-world applications, allowing students to deeply understand critical pedagogy and how to put it into practice. The curriculum covers topics like the role of education in society, the connection between teaching and social justice, and how power and resistance play out in educational contexts. Students are involved in a range of hands-on activities that are integral to the course. They will practice how to lead classroom discussions in a way that is dynamic and includes everyone. The course offers students chances to observe and participate in real teaching situations and to build a teaching portfolio. These experiences are designed to enhance their understanding and apply the theoretical knowledge they gain in professional settings.

CRIT 502 Critical Theory 2: Feminist Theory, Queer Theory, Gender, and Sexuality

This seminar interrogates the body as a critical mode of being. It will comprise both: tracing a genealogy of theoretical interventions around identity, community, and institutionality, as well as approaching the contemporary mechanisms through which gender and sexuality are specifically wielded as instruments of embodied power; be they aesthetic, biological, technical, cultural, or otherwise. This will mean thinking through interlocking questions of race, capital, ecology, affect, orientation, computation, disability, and transness as epistemological, topographical, and mediated apparatuses of assembled control. To more effectively do so, we will be working through and against conventional academic tradition, embracing a diverse array of anti-hierarchical scholarship to further our exploration of gender and sexuality and their embodied relation to politics, ethics, and being.

CRIT 522 Environmental Criticism

This graduate seminar will explore a range of methodologies, theoretical perspectives, and case studies rooted in the multidisciplinary field of the environmental humanities. 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 based 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.

CRIT526 Creative Nonfiction Writing

In this creative writing workshop, students will explore the broad genre of creative nonfiction—from memoirs to meditations to personal essays imbued with cultural criticism. We'll venture into the vast world of creative nonfiction in its many forms and approach with curiosity, play, and dedication. Writers will explore the foundations of creative nonfiction through generative writing and drawing exercises, close readings and analysis, and craft study while also learning anti-colonial views of craft, language, and form. This course is designed to support graduate students with developing a strong understanding of creative nonfiction writing and a

solid framework from which to build in future projects whether theses, interdisciplinary artistic work, or creative writing.

CRIT 601 Critical Theory 3: Critical Race Theory, Postcolonial Theory

This seminar explores Critical Race Theory and Postcolonial thought as epistemological and methodological frameworks important in studying structural inequality. The seminar takes as its starting point Critical Race Theory's insistence that racism is pervasive, persistent, and ongoing and examines how racism, colonialism, and imperialism are embedded in institutions, laws, practices, and policies. The seminar acknowledges that race is a social construct with material effects and investigates the roles language, images, and other forms of cultural production play in racism, colonization, and resistance movements. Students will be encouraged to connect assigned texts to their own areas of expertise and research interests.

CRIT 533 Critical Theory Elective: Special Topic

The course provides an exploratory space for students to engage with cutting-edge debates, methodologies, and perspectives in critical theory. Each semester, the course theme will shift, reflecting the ever-evolving landscape of critical studies and the interests of both the students and the instructor. Throughout the course, students will critically examine a variety of themes, with past topics having included "Disability Narratives" and "Affect Theory and Aesthetics." These themes offer a lens through which students can explore broader questions of culture, society, and representation. The course will encourage students to interrogate how these themes intersect with issues of identity, power, and resistance.

CRIT 631 Thesis 1

The first part of the Critical Studies thesis writing sequence is intended to guide and support students as they develop, refine, and propose a master's-level thesis project. The semester begins with each student designing an individualized research plan focused on a particular area of interest. Ten weeks of individual research time will culminate in an annotated bibliography with critical afterword. Using the bibliography as a springboard, students will go on to draft a formal written proposal for their thesis project.

CRIT 632 Thesis 2

The second part of the Critical Studies thesis writing sequence is intended to guide and support students as they draft, revise, and submit their final written work for the MA degree. This course will provide students with opportunities to present, refine, and receive feedback on their thesis work. Regular reviews of drafts will occur in a combination of peer-review workshops and meetings with thesis faculty throughout the semester. Each student will also work closely with a mentor with expertise in their area of investigation. Final thesis work must be approved by the Thesis 2 instructor, the program chair, and the thesis mentor at the end of the semester. All students must also give a public presentation of their thesis research at the end of the semester.

PROGRAM 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.

- Demonstrate graduate level research skills through the thesis process.
- Communicate ideas effectively in written and oral forms for a variety of audiences and stakeholders.
- Develop postgraduate professional practice and collaborative skills.
- Develop an understanding of how critical theory's questions/concerns/theories influence your own research interests (through scholarly research and critical writing).

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, the thesis proposal process, a public presentation of thesis research, and the quality of thesis work as assessed by faculty and mentors.

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 propose their thesis questions and projects, which will be evaluated by a panel composed of faculty and a subject matter expert assigned as a mentor.

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.