

Stanford's Design Program FAQ's

NEW! Portfolio/Case Study Book Return Policy:

Q: Will I receive my portfolio or case study book back after the application process is completed?

A: Due to the increased volume of portfolios (or case study book) it is no longer our policy to ship portfolios to applicants after they are reviewed and the application process is completed. If you would like yours back it will be available for pick up around the beginning of April and no later than May 15th, 2011. If you live in the U.S. you may also have your portfolio or case study book returned by mail through FedEx. If you choose this option, make sure the packaging used to ship it to us is reusable and follow the instructions below to arrange pre-paid pickup through Fed Ex **Ground** service. **Mail options are not available outside the United States.**

FedEx Ground Service Instructions –

- 1.) You will be notified when your portfolio is ready to be mailed. (around the first part of April)
- 2.) Set up an account with FedEx by calling 800-503-1428 or online at www.fedex.com
- 3.) Fed Ex **Ground** service is the only FedEx service that allows for the type of pick-up you need to arrange. Once your account is created, call for a **Fed Ex Ground call tag** 800-463-3339 to arrange for FedEx to pick up the package at the following address at least one week from the date you call.

Kristen Taylor
Stanford University
Terman Engineering Center, Rm 538
380 Panama Mall Rd.
Stanford, CA 94305-4021

- 4.) Notify Kristen that you have ordered a pick up by fax (650-723-3521) or e-mail (kristenk@stanford.edu) the "Portfolio Return form" at least one week in advance of the pick up date.

Q: I've heard about Stanford's Design Program, sometimes called the Product Design Program, and also called the Joint Program in Design, and I'm interested in learning more about the program?

A: Thank you for your interest in the Design Program at Stanford. This program is a joint program between the Department of Mechanical Engineering and Department of Art. If you are interested in earning an MFA, you will apply to the Art and Art History Dept. If your goal is an MS, you will apply to the Mechanical Engineering Department. Each application process is different so refer to the appropriate Department for specific information. Your application will include a portfolio and the portfolio requirements differ between the two departments.

The first thing to do if you want information on applying to our program is to spend some time on our web site at <http://www-design.stanford.edu/PD/> . The program has no printed materials but instead uses the website to relay information about the program to prospective students. Also, please read over the Mechanical Engineering Design Division site at <http://design.stanford.edu/index.html> and the main Stanford Graduate School site at http://www-me.stanford.edu/academic_programs/grad/index.html . These will answer most of your questions about graduate student life at Stanford and how apply on-line. And please read through the rest of this FAQ before you email us.

The best way to find out if our program is right for you is to visit the campus for an information session specifically designed for prospective students. These sessions are offered in the fall quarter and offer the opportunity to meet professors in the program and visit with the current graduate students in their design space known as the "Loft." Information regarding the dates of these sessions and how to RSVP are available on the website in July prior to each fall quarter. We strongly recommend that students interested in applying to the MS side of the program plan to attend one of these sessions prior to applying to the program. Information discussed in the sessions will be applicable to both MFA and MS applicants however, the application and portfolio requirements discussed at these meetings will only be applicable to MS Applicants. MFA applicants are welcome to attend but need to contact the Art Department or refer to their website (<http://art.stanford.edu/graduate/mfa-ms-design/>) for the applicable requirements for this side of the program. If you are interested in applying for an MFA, please contact Jill Davis at jmdavis@stanford.edu in the Art Department for further information about the application process and requirements.

Unknown
Field Code Changed

Q: Can you please send me a brochure or other information about Stanford's Design Program?

A: We do not send out printed information on our program. However, we have recently updated our website and you can find out everything you might want to know about the Design Program specifics by doing your research there. Stanford also has an extensive array of informational websites that are worth looking through for background.

Q: How much does it cost to attend the Design Program?

A: The cost of attending any program at Stanford is determined annually by the University. You can find more information about tuition, housing, and other costs for undergraduate and graduate study at the following websites:

The University Registrars Office: <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/registrar/>

Graduate Admissions: <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/gradadmissions>

Q: Is financial aid (fellowships /teaching assistantships) available for students pursuing MS in product design?

A: The Master's program is two years long. There are a limited number of fellowships offered to incoming MS students based on academic excellence. These can be applied for with the Mechanical Engineering Department but the deadline is accelerated. Refer to the ME website for more information. The Design Program also has a large number of

classroom assistantships and all design graduate students serve as teaching assistants in their second year to help pay for part of their education. The CA'ships cover tuition for a number of units as well as a stipend. Other details about financial aid for graduate students is available at <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/finaid/grad/>

Q: When can I apply to the program? What are the deadlines?

A: It's important to note that we require students to have at least one year of life experience after receiving their undergraduate degree before applying to the program. The average time out of college before applying is about 4 years.

***** Please note, the application for admission for admittance in 2011 has recently changed. The deadline for all application materials other than the portfolio is Tuesday, December 7th. Portfolios are due January 12, 2011.**

Q: Do you have a GPA requirement for admissions?

A: Stanford is a selective university and expects that all graduate students will be able to demonstrate academic excellence prior to admission; however, we do not have a specific GPA requirement for admission. The admissions committee considers your overall academic preparedness (previous degree(s), undergraduate GPA, GRE scores, etc.), portfolio, recommendations, statement of purpose, and life experiences after receiving your bachelors degree as part of the admissions process.

Q: How much design experience do I need before applying?

A: We're looking for a balance of design potential and design experience in incoming students. The application process uses the statement of purpose, portfolio, academic preparation, recommendations, and life experience prior to applying to develop a sense of this.

Q: What do I need for a complete application?

A: You need the following:

- Transcripts (2 original copies of each university attended on year or more)
- Statement of Purpose (IMPORTANT: Please indicate in the first sentence of your statement of purpose which program, MFA or MS, you are interested in.)
- Three letters of recommendation
- Graduate Record Examination results. No other test score (ex. GMAT) may be substituted to fulfill this requirement
- TOEFL results are required for all applicants whose first language is not English
- A design portfolio (a physical portfolio, not a reproduction)

Q: What do you want to see in the Statement of Purpose?

A: In some ways this question answers itself. Stanford's Design Program is one of a kind. No other program that we know of combines the elements of art, engineering, psychology, ethnography, and business quite like we do. Because of this, most of our applicants only apply to the Stanford Design Program because they are seeking something special, a real "fit" to their unique personality. If you apply, you are probably

one of those people. You have a reason that you've decided to come to Stanford to study design in our radical, multidisciplinary program. We want to know what that reason is.

What we do not want in the statement is a recapitulation of your resume, work, and educational experience. Instead use this opportunity to tell us what you are passionate about and how Stanford can uniquely create a place for you to realize that passion.

Q: How important is the Statement of Purpose?

A: It is as important as your portfolio. Everyone on the admissions committee reads it and a strong, clear Statement is a must for admission.

Q: Why do I have to submit a portfolio? What should it contain?

A: The Design Program is not a skills teaching program. We are a masters-level program that teaches design thinking, creativity methodology, a human centered-ethnographic approach to design, strategic innovation, and design leadership. Therefore, students who enter the program should have already mastered design skills such as quick idea sketching, product rendering, prototype building, and quick visualization techniques like storyboarding and video production. The portfolio is intended to help us assess the development of these skills and your underlying visual and artistic abilities.

A physical portfolio is required. We do not require a digital copy. Other than its physicality there are no specific guidelines on the kind of portfolio you submit or how many pieces should be in the portfolio. Think of the portfolio as your vehicle to demonstrate who you are and how you think. Given this, each portfolio is expected to be unique. However, please do not provide too large of a portfolio with repetitive examples of the same media, process, or end product. We are looking for breadth as well as depth and will judge the quality of your presentation and its appropriateness by your editing and selection.

Your portfolio should be about your design process, your design thinking, the types of design and subjects you're interested in. It should demonstrate your ability to visualize things. It should show us how you develop new and innovative solutions. These solutions can be in almost any area but we are particularly interested in new products, services, environments, information, and smart spaces. It should have an example or two of completely finished pieces of artwork/craftwork (2D or 3D) that you are passionate about. It should express your independent thinking on the subjects that you think are important.

NEW!

Q: Are there alternatives if I do not have a Portfolio?

A: MS applicants may submit a "case study book" in lieu of a portfolio. A portfolio is typically a collection of your best pieces of art, design, and engineering, and it is a tried and true way to demonstrate your creativity. However, given the change in focus of our curriculum toward more design thinking, strategic innovation, and design leadership, a portfolio may not be the best way to present your unique set of skills. We are adding the new case study format to the admissions process because we want to make sure that design thinkers and developing leaders have the best opportunity to show us why they

should be considered for our program. A traditional portfolio might not capture important information about their candidacy. For instance, we think that case studies are a particularly useful way to demonstrate a holistic portrayal of the way you approach thinking and problem solving. Case studies are a great way to explain your creative process and can include all the “messy prototypes” and “important failures” that just don’t fit in the portfolio format. Case studies are also one good way to show us non-design projects that emphasize your leadership skills and your strategic thinking.

A case study is typically a one or two page description of a project. It should include some description of the original problem and lots of visual information about the process that resolves it. We are not looking for a lot of writing. As designers, we prefer case studies that are more like narratives or storyboards, not like research papers, but some writing may be necessary to frame the story for the reviewers.

A case study book will contain a series of these case studies and may also include an overview or explanation of how each individual case is related to a larger theme. Of course, you are going to ask “how many cases?” and we are going to answer “it’s hard to say.” In general, six to eight examples, each illustrating different aspects of your work should be plenty. However, you may have completed one or two very large and comprehensive projects that demonstrate a variety of your skills and you may want to focus on these. In this example, two (or even one) case studies might be sufficient. These are likely to be multi-page, multi-topic studies, so their organization and clarity become even more important.

There is no preference given in the admission process to either a portfolio or a case study book. Either is equally acceptable. Choose the format that you think will be the best way to represent your skills and your potential. We welcome both.

Inevitably someone will ask, “Can I do a hybrid of the portfolio and a case study book?” The answer is yes.

Q: I’m not yet a designer and do not have a body of work to make up a portfolio or case study book per se. Are their classes I should take to build up my portfolio before I apply to the Design Program?

A: Any courses that help you develop your visualization skills are beneficial. You might look for classes that fall into the following rough categories:

1. Sketching/drawing/animation/filmmaking – As we design, we primarily use sketching and storytelling as a way to communicate our ideas to ourselves, to other designers, and to people we’re designing for. Any class that helps you get confident in your ability to get your ideas down on paper is great. Look for classes that cover things like quick sketching, storyboarding, flash animation, filmmaking, etc.
2. Other visual arts courses - Painting, sculpture, furniture making, design, are examples of courses that would help demonstrate your mastery of two and three-dimensional ideation. Follow your own interests here. We are looking to assess your

skills in areas of your own interest. We assume that you will create a body of work for your portfolio that you are passionate about.

3. Classes in leadership or entrepreneurship – These might include courses covering business plan writing, strategic thinking or classes that involve you in team-based project work where you can hone your leadership skills and come away with evidence of success.

Q: I do not have any formal art or design training but I do have experience in designing products. Can I apply for the program?

A: Your experience designing products could be considered an appropriate background. An appropriate undergraduate degree is generally required for application to either the MS or MFA program. However, we value experience in design and that is why we require applicants to submit a portfolio of their prior work. It is important to note that we require students to have at least one year of life experience (work, travel, etc.) after their Bachelors degree before applying. The average applicant has four years of experience before applying.

Q: Can I get transfer credit for graduate level classes taken elsewhere?

A: Yes, it is possible and likely that you can transfer units from another university. You will want to get your proposed courses pre-approved by Stanford's transfer credit office. To start this process, go to the Old Union general information window on the first floor and ask for a transfer credit pre-approval form. With this form, you will want to describe the courses that you plan to take. It is especially helpful for the transfer credit office if you pair the proposed course with a similar course at Stanford. After you submit this form you will be contacted by someone in that office who will help you through the approval process. If the courses are approved, you should be able to use the courses to fulfill the appropriate Masters degree requirement.

Q: Does Stanford have a PhD option in Design, Design Thinking, or Product Design? I would like to apply for this if possible.

A: There is no PhD in the Design Program at this time. There are, however, a number of design-related PhDs at Stanford, including many areas of PhD study in the Design Division of the Mechanical Engineering Department. Information on these programs can be found at <http://soe.stanford.edu/home/index.html>.

Q: Once I am admitted, what is the difference between the program of the Art Department MFA and the School of Engineering MS? They are both referred to as the Design Program.

A: The admissions process and entrance requirements vary according to which department you apply for admission and this depends on your background and interest. However, once on campus all Design Program students work in the same design studio called the “Loft”, take all of the same core design courses, and work on the same types of projects regardless of their home department. The students take different electives, some more technical and some not, but that is really an individual choice. This is truly a collaborative program and once the students arrive and begin working it is hard to tell them apart.

Q: I do not have an undergraduate engineering degree and I want to apply to the MS program in the DESIGN PROGRAM. Is this possible and, if so, what engineering courses do I need to take prior to admission?

A: No, it is not possible to apply to the MS side of the program without a BS in an engineering related field. The best thing to do if you do not have a BS degree and would like to apply to this side of the program is to obtain a BS degree and then apply.

Q: I want to do other graduate study. Is there a Design minor available?
No.

Q: Is it possible to receive an MS in the Design Program if I'm already a MFA student in Design?

A: It is possible, but rare, to transfer from the MFA to MS program in the Design Program. This requires approval from Engineering faculty. If approved, there are two general steps involved:

1. Complete an authorization petition that must be approved by both departments. The form is called the Graduate Program Authorization Petition and it is available on the Registrar's site (<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/registrar/pdf/gradproauthpet.pdf>).
Note: Any funding the student might have from the Art Dept will not transfer over to ME.
2. Work with the Engineering faculty to decide what additional course work you need to complete for the MS. The additional course work required will depend on your background, but it is typically the same courses we require those with non-engineering degrees to take before applying.

Q: Do you accept exchange students?

A: Stanford does not have any exchange programs for visiting students. The Design Program does not have an exchange program with any other Universities.