



**DES 594A: Master's Thesis**

**Units: 2.0**

**FA23—Tue—Time: 3:00 – 5:40 pm**

**Aug 21 – Nov 28, 2023**

**Final: Dec 12, 3 - 5 pm**

**Contact Hours:**

3 hrs 20 min contact hours per week

Average 6 hr outside of class per week. (For each unit of in-class contact time, the university expects two hours of out of class student work per week.)

**Program:** USC Roski MFA in Design

**Online Location:** Zoom

**Location:** 113B&C @Mateo Complex, Corner of Palmetto St & Mateo St, 113B

**Instructor:** Laurie Burruss

**Office:** By appointment on Zoom TBD

**Office Hours:** Friday, 12 - 2 pm, Tue, 2 - 3 pm

**Contact Info:** Email [lburruss@usc.edu](mailto:lburruss@usc.edu), cellphone (626-485-3325), Skype: cosmodog52, etc. Timeline for replying to emails/calls (24 hrs)

**IT Help:**

Timmy Chen, [timmyc@usc.edu](mailto:timmyc@usc.edu), At Mateo Studio  
Hayk Avetisyan, [havetisy@usc.edu](mailto:havetisy@usc.edu), Watt Hall 116

## Course Description

*Master's candidates who are writing a thesis and have completed all course work for the degree are to be registered in Thesis 594 each fall and spring semester, for a minimum of two semesters (594a and 594b). After 594a and 594b, a student must register and pay for 2 units of 594z each fall and spring semester until the student completes and/or defends the thesis, makes any committee-required revisions and submits all graduation forms and the thesis to the university. Guidelines and a list of required graduation forms are available on the Graduate School [website](https://classes.usc.edu/term-20233/registration/grad-students/). <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20233/registration/grad-students/>*

These courses 594 (AB) Master's Thesis, are required for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Design. The purpose of these courses is to complete a capstone project in the area of design, culminating in the students' experiences in the MFA Design Program and validating them as master practitioners. Based upon the candidates' thesis proposal and thesis work, the students work closely with their Chair and committee throughout their second year. In the final two semesters of study, degree candidates produce a substantial thesis document and an exhibition that is displayed on campus. In addition, students are required to give a public presentation on their thesis prior to graduation.

The goal of the thesis research can be twofold. To provide the candidate with:

1. The opportunity to focus on a deep investigation of a single subject framed within the context of learning and through art and design. An essential characteristic of this approach to the thesis is in how it provides evidence of the candidate's ability to move beyond description to analysis and how she/he is able to place the subject of investigation within the realm of scholarship.
2. The opportunity to make sense of their journey through the program in a more autobiographical and documentary manner.

The purpose is to conceive of the MFA thesis not merely as an academic exercise but also contributing to the development of a reservoir of knowledge, skills, and understandings that will inform the candidate's future professional practice as a designer.

The breakdown of the course is as follows:

- 50% - Thesis writing.
- 35% - Creating and presenting design projects for inclusion in an exhibition that support the thesis before the faculty
- 15% - Design thinking, research skills, and project management and communication with the Thesis Committee.

## Learning Objectives

On completion of this course, students in **Design 594A: Master's Thesis** will:

1. Design and execute a meaningful research project that demonstrates the design practice and uses the knowledge and skills learned in this program.
2. Undertake the research process and be aware of research obligations and pitfalls.
3. Articulate research or project objectives clearly, situate research within an academic or scholarly context, state positions and evidence clearly, assess validity of claims, evidence, outcomes, and results.

4. Utilize the Microsoft Office software suite and a bibliographic reference manager competently and efficiently to produce documents that meet USC Thesis guidelines and show your work to advantage.
5. Narrate the research process clearly in the form of a formal multi-chapter master's thesis manuscript, structured according to the approved USC Graduate School Thesis Formatting Guidelines (<https://graduateschool.usc.edu/current-students/thesis-dissertation-submission/manuscript-formatting-guidelines/>)
6. Describe your master's research clearly and succinctly, in written, visual, and oral forms, to faculty, mentors, and potential sponsors.

**Recommended Preparation:** Design training, education, and/or practice; oral, written, and visual communication skills; presentation skills.

### **Course Notes**

The preparation and defense of your master's thesis is the culminating experience in Roski MFA Design Program. Students are expected to work with a high level of self-motivation. Successful students exercise initiative and exhibit strong communication skills in working with their advisors and committee members.

This course requires individual effort that is overseen by the course instructor, your Thesis Advisor. Weekly meetings will be held to discuss progress and review submitted documents. Once the research and necessary analysis and results compilation are completed, then individual thesis chapters will be written and revised iteratively until the document is ready for submission to the Thesis Committee. If the committee agrees, then a final Defense meeting of your thesis will be held. Following successful completion of the Defense, the manuscript is revised a final time and once approved, can be uploaded.

Upon successful completion of the thesis, the In-Progress (IP) grade received will be converted to Passing (P).

### **Description and Assessment of Assignments**

There are no formal assignments in this course. In consultation with the course instructor, your Thesis Advisor, students develop a personal work schedule with specified deliverables. Weekly or bi-weekly individual meetings will be held online to discuss submitted deliverables and revise the work plan if needed.

### **Grading Breakdown**

Since there are no assignments, there is no assignment grades in this course. Completion of this course is determined when each member of your Thesis Committee digitally signs the Approval to Upload form. This form is signed after successful completion of the oral defense and acceptance by each committee member of the thesis document.

### **Assignment Submission Policy**

Any required items that have due dates will be submitted in Blackboard or Google Drive. Material may also be delivered electronically by email (including sending me a URL for Google Drive) or if an artifact delivered to the studio on the appropriate due date.

### **Grading Timeline**

I give regular feedback throughout the semester to make sure you are meeting your scheduled benchmarks and thesis committee meetings.

**Additional Policies**

Please inform me (email or text) regarding the following: late assignments, missed classes, attendance expectations, use of technology in the classroom, etc.

## Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

In consultation with the course instructor, each student will develop an individual work schedule for the course. This schedule will be uploaded into Bb/Google Drive at the beginning of the semester and revised as needed as the work progresses. In addition, each graduate will meet with their Thesis Committee a minimum of 3 times during the Fall semester and 2 times during the Spring Semester for a total of 5 meetings. The following schedule allows time for the design project work to be completed in addition to the thesis preparation, revision and defense (oral).

Date	Tasks
<b>Week 01</b>  08/25	Prepare work schedule; meet with advisor.  Research an MFA project/thesis from another top design school to share at WK 02 Class.  Create Thesis Schedule – See Project Management Schedule for Sept 2023 – May 2024
<b>Week 02</b>  08/29	Thesis Committee Meeting – share schedule, thesis outline and design goals  Former Design Graduate shares process and practice.
<b>Week 03 – 06</b>  09/05, 09/12, 09/19, 09/26	Continue to write and create design projects for thesis; meet with Thesis committee when 50% complete
<b>Week 07 – 12</b>  10/07, 10/10, 10/17, 10/24, 10/31, 11/07	Prepare thesis draft  Mid Term Review?
<b>Week 13</b>  11/14	Share thesis draft with Thesis Committee
<b>Week 14 – 15</b>  11/21, 11/28	Final revisions; share with Thesis Committee
<b>FINAL</b>  12/12	Oral and visual presentations
<b>Spring</b>	Upload final thesis by appropriate deadline

All Thesis Committee meetings should include all persons and may be conducted online. Do **NOT** conduct one-on-one meetings for your written Thesis and Exhibition defense and DES approvals.

Additional Individual meetings with Thesis members are acceptable and part of your on-going work in DES 520 Individual Studies.

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

### Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### Support Systems:

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086*  
[eeotix.usc.edu](http://eeotix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*  
[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](http://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776*  
[osas.usc.edu](http://osas.usc.edu)

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

*USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710*

[campussupport.usc.edu](http://campussupport.usc.edu)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)*

[ombuds.usc.edu](http://ombuds.usc.edu)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

*Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-3340 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)*

[chan.usc.edu/otfp](http://chan.usc.edu/otfp)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

See the [CCO Resources](#) page for most current version.

*For any assignment/project that uses AI, please include the following document:*

**AI & LLM USAGE:**

Student Full Name:

Assignment:

Class:

Date:

Tools used:

*Please identify Generative AI and LLMs application in this assignment (Check **all** that applies):*

\_\_\_\_\_ **IDEA GENERATION:** One of the common challenges in writing research papers, essays, or projects is coming up with a compelling and relevant title or topic. An AI model can help generate ideas based on a few keywords or an abstract of your work.

\_\_\_\_\_ **RESEARCH AND STUDYING:** These tools can provide additional information and clarification on various topics. They can provide succinct summaries of complex materials or help you explore diverse perspectives on a topic. However, it's important to remember that AI should be used as a supplementary tool and not replace primary sources or thorough research.

\_\_\_\_\_ **WRITING ASSISTANCE:** They can also help in drafting essays or other writing assignments by generating ideas or helping you structure your thoughts. This can be particularly useful for generating outlines or brainstorming ideas.

\_\_\_\_\_ **PROOFREADING AND EDITING:** Some language models can provide grammar and style suggestions for your writing. They can spot potential errors and suggest improvements. While not perfect, they can be a useful tool in refining your work.

\_\_\_\_\_ **CODING HELP:** Some advanced LLMs, like GPT-4, have been trained on a variety of coding languages and can assist in debugging or suggesting code snippets. This can be a helpful resource when you're stuck on a coding problem or need to understand a new concept.

Language Learning: If you're studying a foreign language, LLMs can be helpful tools for practice. They can generate phrases in the language you're learning or even offer translations. This can provide a valuable supplement to your traditional language study.

\_\_\_\_\_ **SIMULATION AND ROLE-PLAYING:** In subjects such as history or philosophy, generative AI can help you simulate dialogues with historical or fictional characters, providing an engaging way to learn and understand their perspectives.

\_\_\_\_\_ **DATA ANALYSIS AND VISUALIZATION:** Generative AI can help automate some aspects of data analysis, and can assist in creating visual representations of data. This can be especially helpful in fields that involve heavy data analysis, such as economics, sociology, or any of the sciences.

\_\_\_\_\_ **GROUP STUDY (Study Partner, Teammate):** LLMs can also assist in a group study scenario by serving as a neutral entity answering questions or facilitating discussions.

1. In a few sentences write why did you decide to incorporate AI in your assignment?
2. How did AI help you with accomplishing your assignment objective?
3. Could you have completed this assignment without use of AI?