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# 2009 Academic Summit

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at the intersection of communication design  
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## Educational Program Summary Outline

# University of California Davis

## Program Summary

The "Exhibitions" track in the Design Program at UC Davis is comprised of three 10-week upper division undergraduate courses and an internship at the UC Davis Design Museum. Open to junior and senior design majors, it bridges other tracks in interior architecture and visual communication. Students can opt to focus their studies in exhibitions or elect to take the courses to supplement their other studies. Course pre-requisites include design foundation courses in graphic design, spatial planning and design history. Because students are at an R1 university they are expected to minor in other disciplines and approach projects in a critical and exploratory way. The means and methods for each course are explored through lectures, field trips, studio and non-studio assignments, critiques and fieldwork.

### Exhibition Design (DES 185)

Design of cultural and commercial exhibition environments. Exhibition research, concept development, object selection and spatial planning. Design of display furniture, object staging, architectural finishes, exhibition interpretive strategies and graphics.

### Environmental Graphics (DES 186)

Design of informational and directional graphics for the built environment. Application and integration of typography, imagery and symbols into the architectural landscape. Developing universal wayfinding and graphic navigational systems to help people find their way.

### Narrative Environments (DES 187)

Design of storytelling environments and multi-sensory experiences for cultural, commercial, entertainment and public spaces. Interpretive planning and design for specific exhibit audiences. The manipulation of objects and the communication of complex ideas in the exhibition environment.

### Design Museum Internship (DES 191)

Studio based experience designing, building and working in an exhibition environment.

## Faculty

Tim McNeil, Associate Professor and Director, UC Davis Design Museum and principal at Muniz/McNeil Design.

## Course Goals

Basic goal of the program: To introduce students to the communication and placement of objects, ideas and information in spatial environments. Main topics explored:

- Design context and history
- Exhibition development and storytelling
- Spatial analysis, staging and placement
- Human centered and universal design
- Interpretive exhibit methods and strategies
- Wayfinding and message development
- Sustainable design and communication of environmental issues
- Materials, color and lighting
- Typography and imagery in the environment
- The visitor experience



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## Lesson Plan Outline

### Exhibition Design (DES 185)

In teams of two, students work together for the entire course and select an exhibition topic to research and develop a related object list. They then focus on the planning and design of an exhibition space, the process follows a professional design studio model through four specific phases: (1) developing an exhibition narrative (what is the story?), (2) spatial planning and object placement (how will you tell the story?), (3) exhibition staging and object interpretation (what will the story look like?), (4) information delivery and graphics (how will you communicate the story?).

Each phase introduces information organization, sketch visualization, architectural drawing, model making and rough prototyping, object display and conservation, exhibition design presentation standards and techniques. The process and final design intent is documented in a professional presentation book.

#### Summary of Assignments:

1. Developing an Exhibition Narrative: big idea, object list and concept studies.
2. Spatial Planning: scale model, final object placement and floor plan.
3. Exhibition Staging: object interpretation and display, elevations, materials and finishes.
4. Information Delivery: exhibition graphic identity and promotional signage system.

#### WEEK 1: Introduction to Exhibition Design

##### Lectures:

- 0.1 What is Exhibition Design?
- 0.2 Course Overview
- 0.3 Exhibition Design 101

Studio: discussion and project work.

#### WEEK 2: Developing a Narrative

##### Lectures:

- 1.1 Exhibition Planning and Curatorial Practice
- 1.2 Exhibition Design Case Study

Studio: project work and in-class assignment

Field trip to collection storage

#### WEEK 3-4: Spatial Planning

##### Lectures:

- 2.1 Spatial Planning and ADA
- 2.2 Interpretative Methods Overview
- 2.3 Sustainability and Exhibition Design

Studio: guest lecture and critique

#### WEEK 5-6: Object Staging

##### Lectures:

- 3.1 Object Enhancement and Conservation
- 3.2 Exhibit Staging
- 3.3 Display furniture, architectural details, materials and finishes
- 3.4 Construction and installation specifications

Studio: project work and critique

Field trip to San Francisco museum

#### WEEK 7-8: Information Delivery and Graphics

##### Lectures:

- 4.1 Delivering Information
- 4.2 Exhibit Graphics
- 4.3 Exhibit Graphics Production



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Studio: project work, in-class assignment and critique.

WEEK 9-10: Final Design Intent

Studio: process book and final design critique.

Environmental Graphics (DES 186)

Students are introduced to the basic design concepts for graphics in the built environment through a series of assignments ending in a final project. These assignments are explored through the study of wayfinding, large format images, universal symbols, typographic scale, and concluding in the design of a signage system for a particular environment. The process follows a professional environmental graphics design studio model starting with schematic design and ending in design development (design intent). The process and final design intent is documented in a professional presentation book using environmental graphics presentation standards and techniques.

Summary of Assignments:

1. Finding Your Way: sign audit and wayfinding analysis.
2. Communicating A Sense of Place: large scale graphic application for a building exterior that communicates the buildings purpose and what happens on the inside.
3. Directional Messages: full size freestanding sign mock-up that directs people to three locations.
4. Informational Messages: family of pictograms/symbols for a given topic/location.
5. Final project: comprehensive sign system for an external client that includes a location plan, vocabulary of sign types and detailed specifications.

WEEK 1: Introduction to EGD and Wayfinding

Lectures:

- 0.1 What is EGD?
- 0.2 Course overview
- 1.1 Wayfinding and Mapping Principles

Studio: project work and critique

WEEK 2-3: Human Factors

Lectures:

- 2.1 Human Factors
- 2.2 Typography, Color and Grids
- 2.3 Universal design and ADA

Studio: project work and critique

WEEK 4-5: Maps and Symbols

Lectures:

- 3.2 Maps and Symbols
- 3.3 Assignment 4 overview

Studio: project work and critique

Field trip to signage fabrication firm.

WEEK 6: Materials and Fabrication

Lectures:

- 4.1 Materials and Fabrication
- 4.2 Case studies and best practice

Studio: project work and critique

WEEK 7-9: Sign System (Schematic Design and Design Development Phase)

Studio: project work and critique

WEEK 10–11: Sign System (Final Design Intent)



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Studio: project work and critique  
Final project process book, presentation and critique.

#### Narrative Environments (DES 187)

A variety of methods are available to convey content and shape spatial environments. Multi-sensory tools such as graphics, objects, sound, audio, light, video, touch and role playing can be used to varying degrees to create experiences that extend from the contemplative to the highly participatory. This course introduces a range of design techniques and methods, and how they are appropriated into a storytelling environment. A series of projects tackle the fluid boundaries between public art and public design, and the emergence of the experience economy, where culture, commerce and entertainment are packaged for public consumption in a variety of hybrid display venues.

Each project ramps-up in terms of complexity and duration and is explored using professional exhibition design standards and techniques that introduce spatial and information organization, problem solving methods, sketch and computer visualization, model making, prototypes, and object staging principles.

#### Summary of Assignments:

1. Evaluative study of a narrative environment.
2. POP product display for a retail or commercial environment.
3. Multi-sensory audio and image experience for a cultural environment.
4. Narrative based discovery and interactive exhibit for an entertainment environment.
5. Final project: narrative environment for a campus public space or external client.

#### WEEK 1: Introduction to Narrative Environments and Interpretive Methods

##### Lectures:

- 0.1 What are Narrative Environments?
- 0.2 Interpretive Exhibit Methods overview
- 0.3 Course overview

Studio: project work

#### WEEK 2: Commercial Environments

- 1.0 Interpretive Exhibit Methods: Contemplation
- 1.2 Exhibition Design 101

Studio: project work and critique

#### WEEK 3: Cultural Environments

##### Lectures:

- 2.0 Interpretive Exhibit Methods: Sensory
- 2.1 Spatial planning/ADA

Studio: project work and critique

#### WEEK 4-6: Entertainment Environments

##### Lectures:

- 3.0 Interpretive Exhibit Methods: Discovery and Interaction

Studio: project work and critique

Field trip: exhibition design firm

#### WEEK 7-10: Public Environments

Studio: research, project work and critique.

Final project process book, presentation and critique



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## Final Report

- Hard to teach courses in ten weeks. Graduate level required.
- Access to hands-on very important but not always easy.
- Large class sizes. Pressure to increase student numbers.
- Mixture of interior architecture and visual communication students is best.
- Working in teams is stressed and results in the best work.
- Internships over summer really help.
- Many students benefit from the introduction but only a few want to pursue as a career.
- Interiors students struggle with communicating information.
- Graphics students struggle with thinking in 3-D and getting their hands dirty.
- The best students are those that can traverse both 2-D and 3-D, and are eager to learn and explore the content. You have to love content to excel in this field.

My goal is to encourage students to work across the design disciplines. UC Davis students tend to be really good at concept and creative ideas, but lack technical skills due to limited time (2 years) and available resources.

Currently going through a rethink of the entire undergraduate design curriculum to create a more fluid (liberal arts rather than professional school) and less track-based structure. The exhibition track is being used as a model for this approach because it traverses design disciplines and is research driven.

## Samples of Student Work



