



MFA

# Design for Social Innovation



# Why DSI?

Social design is the creation of new social conditions—in cities, corporate cultures or communities—resulting in increased creativity, equity, social justice and inclusivity; greater resilience; and a healthy connection to nature. It is relevant to every business, government, city, community and individual. It uses systems design, critical thinking, human-centered design, strategy, game mechanics, social change, collective leadership, imagination and beauty to move people to think differently and become more resilient and resourceful themselves. This is what our program is about—what we teach and what our students are out in the world doing. It's the design of systems, and the relationships between people and things, instead of only the things themselves.

Here's why the MFA Design for Social Innovation (DSI) program is unique:

**It's a balance of the academic and practical.** Social design is a practice that can be mastered only by practicing it. This is an experience-based program where you'll learn to think critically, explore, iterate and measure. You'll also have a robust résumé before you graduate.

**We define design broadly.** And the curriculum reflects that. You'll study with a group of pioneering practitioners who have worked in development, health care, media, tech, government, game design, research, business strategy and innovation, and social design. We are now STEM certified, too.

**We live diversity.** Students have come to our program from 28 countries and counting. Cross-cultural literacy is one of the skills that employers look for, and it's a key aspect of the program here. We're in the heart of New York City, and it simply doesn't get more diverse or exciting than that. Our lecturers are inspiring global experts in science, business, philanthropy, entrepreneurship, health and some things that have not yet been heard of. Our students are connected to an unmatched network of potential partners by the time they leave school.

**It's about creative collaboration and leadership.** Our students join us because it fulfills a deep need that nothing else can—to go out and create change, disrupt the status quo, work with communities and use their own powers of creativity to bring something to life that has not existed before. They are remarkable people—curious, unpredictable and visionary.

**We impact the future.** If you want to know what a DSI MFA will do for you, take a look at what our alumni are doing. They are working in industry, government, non-profits and NGOs, education, at creative consultancies and as founders of their own enterprises.

This is a two-year degree. It takes that long because we take the discipline and rigor seriously. If you do too, please browse our website ([dsi.sva.edu](http://dsi.sva.edu)) and talk to our students, faculty and alumni to learn more.

—Miya Osaki, chair

# About the Program

In the first year, students are immersed in social innovation in all its forms, from corporate programs, non-profit organizations, foundations and social entrepreneurs, and across a broad range of issues, including food, equity and justice, ethics, poverty, wealth creation, health and the environment. Skills such as change design, communication design, game design, social movement design, mapping, modeling, visualization design, leadership and entrepreneurship are covered. Classes include lectures, client projects and creative assignments.

A principle second-year goal is the creation of a thesis. With the help of a team of mentors and advisors, students will identify and research an issue of their choosing, then develop a thorough understanding of the context and challenges. They will write a proposal that captures their recommended solution, and then design it fully in a form

ready to be implemented. Each thesis must be reviewed and approved by the thesis committee and the department chair for the student to be eligible for degree conferral. Another key second-year initiative is the creation of a for-profit enterprise, culminating in a presentation to potential funders.

Throughout the two-year program, the Guest Lecture Series is curated to inspire new thinking and dialogue about the vast variety of ways to create a career in design for social innovation. Speakers include business leaders, environmentalists, indigenous leaders, field workers, researchers, academics, shamans, poets, artists, musicians, policy makers, physicians, astronomers, physicists, human rights activists and other innovators in social design.

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Pragya Mahendru, thesis project for Spring Health, Paul Polak's enterprise in Odisha, India, delivering clean drinking water to rural villages



# Putting Social Design to Work for Global Health

After getting his BFA in Graphic Design in 2007, Bruno Silva worked in traditional advertising, but after several years, “I got really jaded with the industry,” he says. “I wanted to do something that had more meaning.” During college he had taken a class with Cheryl Heller called “Design for Good.” “We did a little bit of social-good work, which at the time was called corporate social responsibility,” he explains. “That’s when I started wanting to do more of that kind of work.” He eventually left advertising for a job at an education tech company ▶



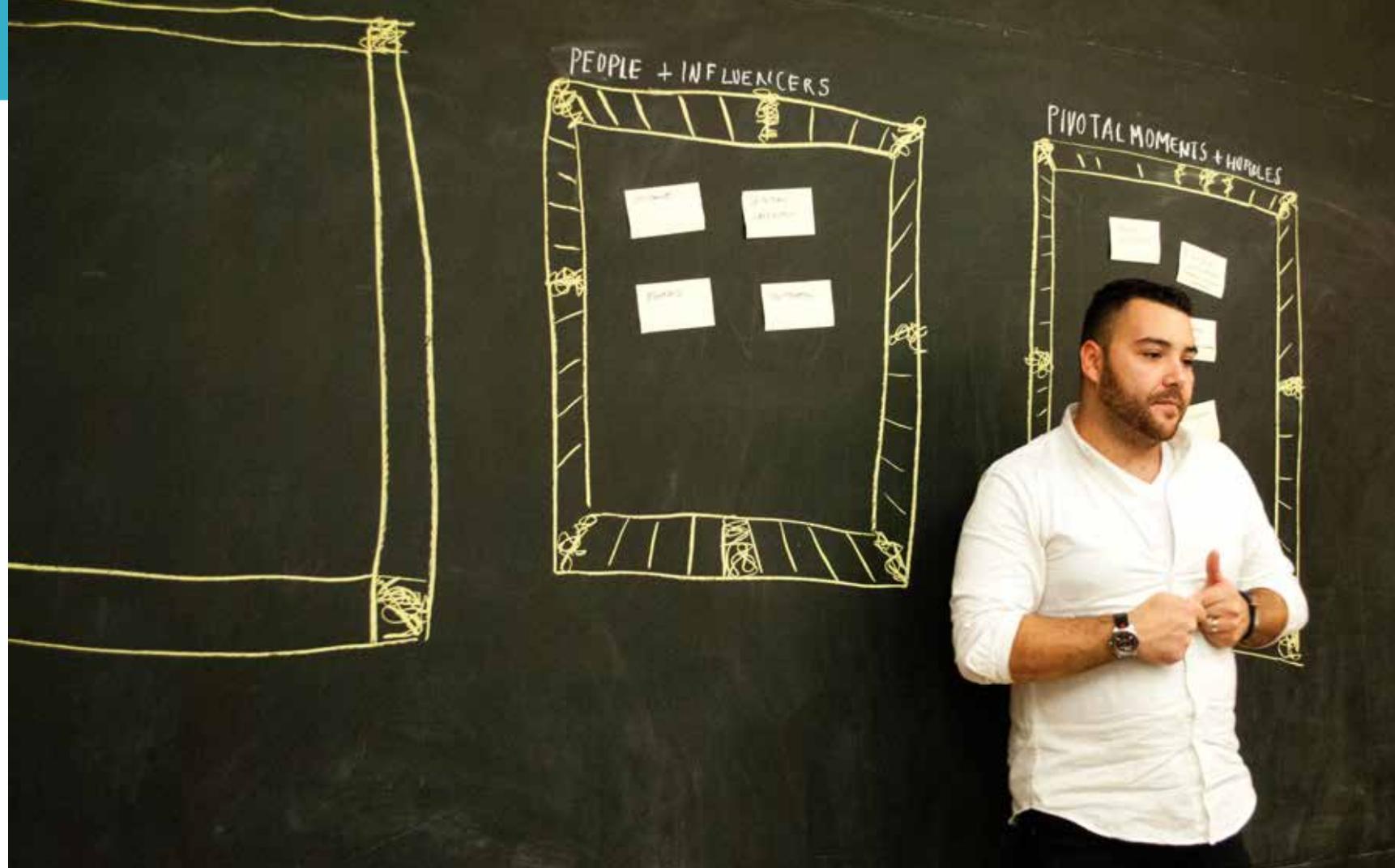
He had kept in touch with Heller over the years, so he heard about the DSI program that she had started. He then decided to come back to SVA and get his master's.

There were 25 students in his class. "It was a very diverse group. Some had backgrounds in user experience design, others had worked in non-profits or in the social sector," he recalls. "The program itself was very collaborative. There were a lot of opportunities, and we were encouraged to work in groups."

Upon graduation, Heller gave Bruno a recommendation for an opportunity at Mount Sinai. He now works as director of design and product development for the hospital, as well as its Arnhold Institute of Global Health. "I split my time designing the primary care system at Mount Sinai Hospital and all the clinics, and the other 50% of my work is developing services and products for global health, primarily implementing technology in low resource settings and taking that learning and bringing it back to a domestic setting," he says.

His work for the Arnhold Institute has taken him around the globe. "I travel a lot. We work on winning grants," Bruno explains. "We spend a lot of time on the ground, setting up sites. We work with other organizations and governments, like the ministries of health in other countries, in order to adopt strategies that might fulfill the needs they have." Currently he is working on a project on the border of Senegal and Gambia monitoring malaria, a primary care project in Liberia, and a project in Guatemala monitoring patients for malnutrition and maternal health.

Back at Mount Sinai, he spends a lot of time in clinics, trying to best understand and meet patient needs. "We use standard design research, and we translate that into services and products that can improve the primary health care system," he says. "We have to design strategies that connect doctors to the patients so they can monitor them regularly and make sure they're not returning back to



the hospitals and clinics, or most importantly the ER."

The research aspect to his work appeals to him. "In advertising, you always end up working long hours and weekends, and often based on very subjective input. The difference with what we do here is that everything is validated with research," he says. "So you can say this is what the user needs are and this is the reason why we're doing it—rather than a creative director just coming to you and saying 'I don't like this color or this typeface.' So at the end of the day, even if I'm working long hours, at least I know that the rewards of it—whether it's for me or the

beneficiaries—are worth it. There's a good value to it, rather than just enticing someone to consume something they may not need."

And what are some concrete examples of the awards of that hard work? "We have a platform we're working on called Atlas—it's a digital tool that helps identify patients at risk, and communities that may be missing access to health care services, and we help connect them to care," he says. "In Guatemala alone we have increased the capacity of their health care system over 16%. We have impacted 20,000 to 30,000 lives."

Bruno Silva during his time at MFA Design for Social Innovation.

# Designing a Way to Measure the Impact of Design

In January 2017, DSI launched an initiative to measure the impact of social design on human health. We convened the Measured Summit, a symposium that brought together leaders and practitioners from corporations, the social sector, foundations, technology firms, measurement experts and designers to begin a conversation about measuring the impact of social design on health. Our initial goal was to clarify what social design is, develop a shared understanding of how it is being used by leading organizations and practitioners, understand current evaluation methods, and gain alignment on the questions that need to be answered in order to bring rigor and discipline to its application.

Now, with the support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and other partners, we are launching a second phase of the Measured initiative: an online resource that will publish case studies and best practices for anyone wanting to measure and scale social design's impact. All content will be made available at no cost to anyone wishing to evaluate their own impact and improve it.

Measured Advisory Board Meeting with representatives from The Gates Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Community Solutions, John Snow Inc., Praekelt, PACT, The Medicines Company and The Patient Revolution; 2017.



# Curriculum/ Sample Program

Degree candidates must successfully complete 60 credits, including all required courses, with a cumulative grade point average of 3.0. A residency of two academic years is required.

	<b>CREDITS</b>
<b>FIRST YEAR / FALL</b>	
Disruptive Design: Research and Insights	3
Environmental Ethics	1
Fundamentals of Design for Social Innovation	3
Global Guest Lecture Series I	3
Mapping and Visualization Design	3
Technologies for Designing Change I	1
Understanding Natural and Social Systems	1
<b>FIRST YEAR / SPRING</b>	
Communication Design	3
Creative Writing for Social Designers	1
Games for Impact	3
Global Guest Lecture Series II	3
Introduction to Thesis	3
Technologies for Designing Change II	2
<b>SECOND YEAR / FALL</b>	
Global Guest Lecture Series III	3
Leadership and Entrepreneurship I	3
Metrics and Data Visualization I	3
Thesis Consultation: Research, Writing, Presentation	6
<b>SECOND YEAR / SPRING</b>	
Global Guest Lecture Series IV	3
Leadership and Entrepreneurship II	3
Metrics and Data Visualization II	3
Thesis Consultation: Implementation	6

# Course Offerings

A sample of our course descriptions follows.  
All course descriptions can be found online at:  
[dsi.sva.edu/program/curriculum](http://dsi.sva.edu/program/curriculum).

## COMMUNICATION DESIGN

In this course, students learn to use language and both verbal and visual communication skills to engage, persuade and shift behavior, through story writing and telling, cogent logic and public presentations. The class is based on developing a personal voice as well as working with external clients and organizations to design communication as a system with intentional impact on outcomes. The class culminates with presentations to external clients.

## DISRUPTIVE DESIGN: RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS

Students explore how to meaningfully connect user and audience understanding to strategies for enterprise and social change. While discussing the processes, thinking and practices of primary, ethnographic-based research, students investigate how to collect compelling user stories as they come to understand the nuances of behavior, culture and emotion in the lives of their audiences.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

In a series of three workshops, students use systems thinking and creativity to explore the intersection of sustainability and design, including discussions on economics and quality-of-life indicators, how to distinguish problems from symptoms, and unpacking the operating principles for life on Earth.

## CREATIVE WRITING FOR SOCIAL DESIGNERS

The maxim that all change begins with language is true in the visual arts to the same extent that it is anywhere else. Yet social impact designers—who make their professional careers developing initiatives that change lives, often with enormous public consequence—are often not taught how to write. Both the design and social innovation fields are rife with argot and clichés that deaden meaning instead of uncovering it. The goal of this class is to give social designers access to the power of creative writing in order to more fully understand themselves, and combine that self-knowledge with writing that will infect and inspire their audiences.

TOP: Thesis Consultation: Research, Writing, Presentation, 2017. BOTTOM: Chuyao Geng and Ishita Jain's thesis project, Conversation, connects college students with canners to humanize canning and save the future of local recycling.

MFA DESIGN FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION



## FUNDAMENTALS OF DESIGN FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

This course explores the skills needed to be an actor in social innovation, including change models, facilitation, relationships, team building and leaning into uncertainty. Structured as part lab and part discussion, students complete readings, journal assignments and activities related to interaction, dialogue, capturing and observing data, writing research and facilitation plans, and developing relationships. At the end of the course, each student facilitates a group discussion with different representatives from part of a system, with the goal of helping the group see the system through multiple vantage points to shift to a collective intention and prototype new solutions.

## GLOBAL GUEST LECTURE SERIES

This lecture series expose students to the lives and ideas of some of the most important people defining social innovation in the world today. Speakers are curated to inspire new thinking and dialogue on various opportunities for careers in social innovation and how design plays a role in each of them.

## LEADERSHIP AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP I AND II

The core of this yearlong course is the launch of start-ups in student teams, through which theory and practice on entrepreneurship, leadership, collaboration and business models are melded. Topics covered include customer identification, development, and channels; articulating and testing hypotheses; collaborative leadership and team dynamics; creating minimum viable products; revenue models; and resilience.

## GAMES FOR IMPACT

Games designed to address social and political issues are one of the fastest growing categories in the “serious games” movement. This course incorporates game theory and analysis with hands-on development of social impact games: interactive experiences that integrate socio-political events, values and messages into their design and game mechanics. Working in teams, students take on game projects from concept to a functional prototype, and refine their projects through several iterations, ending with presentations to a jury of experts.

## INTRODUCTION TO THESIS

In this course, students investigate a variety of topics, researching each to the point of confirming their own interest and the viability of the concept. Exercises in problem definition, audience identification, research and barriers to change help students test their own hypotheses. Criteria include demonstration of need on the part of the audience, a clear articulation of concept and metrics for success. By the end of the semester, students have a fully vetted topic for their thesis.

RIGHT, TOP AND BOTTOM: Entrepreneurship Workshop, 2017.



## MAPPING AND VISUALIZATION DESIGN

This course teaches mapping and visualizing systems in order to facilitate a journey from thinking to making. Readings, discussions and weekly “experiments” are employed to investigate how mapping and modeling techniques can help develop sustainable frameworks of action. The course helps students visualize and articulate their thinking, explore planning and communicating solutions, and develop new models of engagement and action.

## UNDERSTANDING NATURAL AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS

This course teaches understanding of social and environmental issues in the context of the complex human communities and natural systems in which they exist, both online and on the ground. Issues from climate change, health, national security, personal identity and social justice are examined in the context of the players and places that impact humanity and the environment. In addition to online communities, study includes the interwoven dynamics of business, not-for-profit organizations and public agencies.

## TECHNOLOGIES FOR DESIGNING CHANGE

In this making course, students will explore a range of methods and techniques for taking a concept to completion using design and physical computing. The class will focus on digital and physical prototypes as a method of testing and learning. This learning will support the systematic design decisions that determine the quality, impact and outcome of social design.

## METRICS AND DATA VISUALIZATION

This yearlong course looks at the theory and practice of gathering and visualizing data by integrating the identification of metrics into ongoing student projects and evaluating metrics from case studies in order to understand their strategy. In the fall, the course focuses on data and visualization for exploration: asking useful questions and engaging in purposeful discovery. In the spring, students study data and visualization for explanation: how various tools and techniques help us communicate with and influence others. Guest lecturers include data scientists, financial modelers and corporate social responsibility experts.

## TECHNOLOGIES FOR DESIGNING CHANGE II

From Skynet to Hal 9000 popular culture has cast Artificial Intelligence (AI) as the catalyst of the apocalypse, but what if AI could help humanity instead of dooming it? This course explores Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning and how these technologies might be applied to global issues. We will look at the history of AI from the works of Alan Turing to Elon Musk and examine the current state of the technology, how it fails and where it succeeds. Students will be introduced to IBM Watson’s technology and have access to the APIs. A background in computer science is not necessary. The course will culminate in a project to design and prototype an Artificial Intelligence application for social good.

“There’s no way I would be doing what I’m doing without DSI. There’s so much that I owe to this program; I wouldn’t have a portfolio; I wouldn’t be able to articulate it. I wouldn’t feel comfortable calling myself a designer.”

—Meghan Lazier, MFA 2015, product designer, Federal Reserve Board



# Notable Alumni

Please see our website for how our alums are putting social design to work: [dsi.sva.edu/alums-at-work](http://dsi.sva.edu/alums-at-work).

**Manolo Ampudia**  
project director, Uncommon Design Strategy

**Gina Kim**  
product designer, ACLU

**Rhea Rakshit**  
vice president, product and UX design, Sourcemap

**Ivan Boscariol**  
government innovation consultant, EloGroup, Brazil

**Akshata Malhotra**  
interaction designer, Peterson Center on Healthcare

**Josh Treuhaft**  
senior experience strategist, R/GA Portland

## Faculty

Go online to [dsi.sva.edu/faculty](http://dsi.sva.edu/faculty) for biographies on our faculty.

**Miya Osaki**  
chair

**Archie Lee Coates IV**

**Anne LaFond**

**Kobla Asamoah**

**Alison Cornyn**

**Caroline McAndrews**

**Siri Betts-Sonstegard**

**Hannah du Plessis**

**Karen Proctor**

**Maggie Breslin**

**Nicholas Fortugno**

**Natalia Radywyl**

**Mattie Brice**

**Jeffrey Franklin**

**Marc Rettig**

**Asi Burak**

**Lee-Sean Huang**

**Mollie Ring**

**Jaimie Cloud**

**Julie Kennedy**

**Daniel Rosenberg**

## Guest Lecturers

For up-to-date information, go to [dsi.sva.edu/lecturer](http://dsi.sva.edu/lecturer).

**Ted Alcorn**  
Everytown for Gun Safety

**Sara Aye**  
Greater Good Studio

**Micaela Blei**  
The Moth

**Bill Browning**  
Terrapin Bright Green

**Antionette Carroll**  
Creative Reaction Lab

**Lisa David**  
Public Health Solutions

**Robert Fabricant**  
Dalberg Design

**David Fenton**  
Fenton Communications

**Leetha Filderman**  
Poptech

**Ruth Gates**  
Gates Coral Lab

**Jennifer Gootman**  
West Elm

**Amy Hall**  
Eileen Fisher

**Nicholas Higgins**  
Brooklyn Public Library

**Tracy Johnson**  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

**Cheryl Kiser**  
The Lewis Institute on Social Entrepreneurship

**Amy Larkin**  
Environmental Debt

**Nancy Mahon**  
MAC AIDS Fund

**Chelsea Mauldin**  
Public Policy Lab

**Erin Mazursky**  
Rhize

**Paul Polak**  
*Out of Poverty*

**Jake Porway**  
DataKind

**Doug Powell**  
IBM

**Nathaniel Raymond**  
Harvard Humanitarian Initiative

**Dave Stangis**  
Campbell Soup Company

**Matt Stinchcomb**  
Etsy

**Lizz Winstead**  
Lady Parts Justice League

# Application Process

## APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

For detailed instructions, visit: [sva.edu/grad/howtoapply](http://sva.edu/grad/howtoapply)

- Online Application and \$80 Application Fee: [sva.edu/apply](http://sva.edu/apply)
- Statement of Intent/Personal Statement
- Résumé
- Official College Transcript
- Letters of Recommendation

International applicants may be required to submit the following:

- Proof of English Proficiency
- Copy of Permanent Residency Card
- Declaration of Finances
- Verification of Finances
- Foreign Transcript Evaluation

## DEPARTMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

For specific guidelines about these requirements, visit: [dsi.sva.edu/apply](http://dsi.sva.edu/apply)

- Portfolio (accepted at [svagrad.slideroom.com](http://svagrad.slideroom.com)) or Case Study
- Interview

## DEADLINES

For information on application deadlines, visit: [sva.edu/grad/timeline](http://sva.edu/grad/timeline)

## IMPORTANT LINKS

- FAQ: [sva.edu/grad/faq](http://sva.edu/grad/faq)
- International students: [sva.edu/grad/intl](http://sva.edu/grad/intl)
- Tuition and fees: [sva.edu/tuition](http://sva.edu/tuition)
- Visit SVA: [sva.edu/grad/visit](http://sva.edu/grad/visit)



## PROCESS



Zongliang Shang and Qianshang Chen are using damaged and ugly fruit from local retailers to create water kefir—a delicious drink that's healthy and sustainable. Through their participation in the Fast Track program, they will soon bring this product to market.

# Contact Us

We encourage applicants to visit our department. Contact us directly to schedule a department tour at: [dsi.sva.edu/contact](http://dsi.sva.edu/contact).

If you have any questions about the application process, contact Graduate Admissions at 212.592.2107 or email: [gradadmissions@sva.edu](mailto:gradadmissions@sva.edu).

**Miya Osaki**, chair

**Chessa Cahill**, director of operations

**Abigail MacMillan**, administrative assistant

**Indiana Kuffer**, systems administrator

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**Site:** [sva.edu/dsi](http://sva.edu/dsi)

**Department sites:** [dsi.sva.edu](http://dsi.sva.edu)

 [facebook.com/SVADSI](https://facebook.com/SVADSI)

 [instagram.com/SVADSI](https://instagram.com/SVADSI)

 [twitter.com/SVADSI](https://twitter.com/SVADSI)



As a service designer, I use the design skills

I learned at DSI to organize complex processes to better serve the people using them: constantly switching between the micro and the macro; zooming in to understand the pain points of a single user; stepping back to see how each part of a service flows into larger systems.”

—Emily Herrick, MFA 2016, Designer, New York City Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity

## ACCREDITATION

The School of Visual Arts has been authorized by the New York State Board of Regents ([www.highered.nysed.gov](http://www.highered.nysed.gov)) to confer the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Advertising; Animation; Cartooning; Computer Art, Computer Animation and Visual Effects; Design; Film; Fine Arts; Illustration; Interior Design; Photography and Video; Visual and Critical Studies; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts on graduates of the programs in Critical Theory and the Arts; Curatorial Practice; Design Research, Writing and Criticism; and to confer the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching on graduates of the program in Art Education; and to confer the degree of Master of Fine Arts on graduates of programs in Art Practice; Art Writing; Computer Arts; Design; Design for Social Innovation; Fine Arts; Illustration as Visual Essay; Interaction Design; Photography, Video and Related Media; Products of Design; Social Documentary Film; Visual Narrative; and to confer the degree of Master of Professional Studies on graduates of the programs in Art Therapy; Branding; Digital Photography; Directing; Fashion Photography. Data required by the U.S. Department of Education on “Gainful Employment” for each of the above programs may be found on each individual program page at [sva.edu/ge](http://sva.edu/ge).

The School of Visual Arts is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education ([msche.org](http://msche.org)), 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, 267.284.5000. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation.

The School of Visual Arts is an accredited institutional member of the National Association of Schools of Art and Design ([nasad.arts-accredit.org](http://nasad.arts-accredit.org)).

The Interior Design program leading to the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interior Design is accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation ([accredit-id.org](http://accredit-id.org)), 206 Grandville Avenue, Suite 305, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503-4014.

The Master of Arts in Teaching in Art Education program is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

The Master of Professional Studies in Art Therapy degree program is approved by the American Art Therapy Association, Inc., and as such meets the Education Standards of the art therapy profession.

## CREDITS

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COVER: Karla Despradel, Trueque, an initiative promoting social equality by helping underserved youth in Dominican Republic communities stay in school.

# School of Visual Arts

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