HUMAN ECOLOGY, MFA

Human ecology is the study of the complex relationships between human beings and their environments. The school offers advanced degrees with four program specializations: civil society and community research, consumer behavior and family economics, design studies, and human development and family studies. Each program option has its own faculty, curriculum, and requirements. Prospective graduate students apply for the human ecology degree, the umbrella degree under which the degree options are offered. Inquiries should be made to the individual department offering the desired program specialization.

All of the school’s graduate programs provide opportunities for interdisciplinary, advanced course work with an intensive research or creative discovery experience. Faculty and students are also involved with institutes and centers administered in the School of Human Ecology and across the campus such as the Arts Institute, Center for Child and Family Well-Being, the Center for Financial Security, the Institute on Aging, the Kohl’s Center for Retailing Excellence, the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, the Center for Non-Profits, the Institute for Research on Poverty, and the Waisman Center. With access to courses and resources in and beyond the School of Human Ecology, graduate students in human ecology’s program options gain the skills and specialized expertise that will be required to be successful scholars, artists/designers, and workers in academic, service, government, and business settings worldwide.

DESIGN STUDIES (DS)

The Design Studies Graduate Program takes an integrated, interdisciplinary approach toward design and its relationship with human needs and environments, clothing, textiles, and other material objects. This perspective integrates aesthetic, cultural, historical, technical, and behavioral knowledge and methods. Students gain knowledge and insight through descriptive, analytical and creative activities.

The program’s graduate faculty is comprised of interdisciplinary scholars, designers, scientists and artists who are equipped to mentor graduate students as they build individual programs of study based on personal goals and interests. Faculty and students use a variety of investigative methods, including qualitative and quantitative research methods as well as various kinds of creative scholarship. Specific approaches might include design visualization, simulation, humanistic and scientific analysis, interpretive interviewing and ethnographic research, post-occupancy evaluation, survey research, historical investigation, material culture, and cultural analysis, critical analysis, and studio or laboratory experimentation. While the backgrounds and scholarship areas of the faculty are diverse, the program is tied together by an interest in the relationship between people and their relationship to objects, culture and environments.

The program offers three degrees: an M.S., MFA, and Ph.D. On all degree levels, students specialize in a general area of design, as listed below. At the doctoral level, students focus on basic or applied research. At the M.S. level, students focus on research, applications of research, or studio performance. At the MFA level, students focus on studio work. All students work with an advisor and graduate committee to develop a focused course of study.

The Design Studies Graduate Program is especially appropriate for self-starting students who like the challenge of tailoring a graduate program to their needs and welcome the opportunity to draw from the excitement and resources of a large university, while still working closely with faculty mentors. The program may be less appropriate for those who are more comfortable with the structure of a predetermined course of study.

All students are encouraged to collaborate with other campus units, including departments such as art, art history, engineering, folklore, history, landscape architecture, theater and drama, and architecture (at UW-Milwaukee); groups or programs that link departments, such as area studies programs; interdisciplinary programs such as the Arts Institute or the Institute on Aging; or “clusters” such as those in material culture and visual culture. Within the school students have access to computer labs supporting design visualization, the Gallery of Design (http://sohe.wisc.edu/what-we-do/design-gallery), the Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection (http://sohe.wisc.edu/what-we-do/helen-louise-allen-textile-collection), and the Ruth Ketterer Harris Library (https://sohe.wisc.edu/research-development/textile-collection/textile-resources-2/ruth-ketterer-harris-library) of textile and design-related materials.

SPECIALIZATIONS

The graduate program option in Design Studies department addresses diverse aspects of design inquiry, focusing on design as a complex inter-relationship between people and the built environment or people and textiles. There are three primary areas of emphasis:

**Studio-based design inquiry (MFA)** emphasizes discovering new insights, processes and relationships through the creative process. Faculty and graduate students who conduct studio based design inquiry work on either one of the following concentration areas or work across them:

- **Textile/clothing forms, art and design** is a studio-based approach that focuses on the conceptual, technical and aesthetic possibilities of textiles (an art approach is taken, rather than industry focus).
- **Interior environments** focuses on design as a complex interrelationship between people and the built environment. The studio-based option emphasizes discovering new insights, processes and relationships through the creative process.

**Research-based design inquiry** emphasizes discovering new insights and relationships through the application of theories and methods drawn from the social sciences, engineering, and humanities. Graduate students who are involved with research based design inquiry work within one of the following three concentration areas.

- **Design history and material culture** examines design in its historical context, as both a process and a product. The program defines design broadly to include architecture, interior design, industrial design, decorative arts, and other areas of material culture.
- **Environmental design research** addresses the interaction between people and their built, natural, and/or virtual environments with a clear goal to create environments that are sustainable and responsive to human needs. The faculty and graduates of the program have pioneered studies in environment behavior, evidence-based design, building evaluation, sustainability, aging and environment, children’s environment, environments for special populations, and emerging technologies and applications of virtual reality.
- **Textile science** provides in-depth understanding of the physical and chemical properties of natural and synthetic fibers and their interaction with dyes, finishes and plasma.

**Integrated design inquiry (M.S., MFA, Ph.D.)** emphasizes a melding of both studio based and research based design inquiry; this incorporates a framework of evidence (or research) based design, combining studio
based inquiry with research strategies such as action research or post occupancy evaluation.

**FUNDING**

Prospective students should see the program website for funding information.

**REQUIREMENTS**

**MINIMUM DEGREE REQUIREMENTS AND SATISFACTORY PROGRESS**

To make progress toward a graduate degree, students must meet the Graduate School Minimum Degree Requirements and Satisfactory Progress (http://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/#policiesandrequirementstext) in addition to the requirements of the program.

**MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

MFA, with available named option in Design Studies

**MINIMUM GRADUATE DEGREE CREDIT REQUIREMENT**

60 credits

**MINIMUM GRADUATE RESIDENCE CREDIT REQUIREMENT**

24 credits

**MINIMUM GRADUATE COURSEWORK (50%) REQUIREMENT**

Half of degree coursework (30 credits out of 60 total credits) must be completed in graduate-level coursework; courses with the Graduate Level Coursework attribute are identified and searchable in the university’s Course Guide (http://my.wisc.edu/CourseGuideRedirect/BrowseByTitle).

**PRIOR COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS: GRADUATE WORK FROM OTHER INSTITUTIONS**

With program approval, students are allowed to count up to 20 credits of graduate coursework taken at other institutions or as a UW–Madison Special student (with a maximum of 9 special student credits as part of the 20). Special student coursework must be numbered 300 or above for residence and degree credit and 700 or above for minimum graduate coursework (50%) credit.

Credits earned five or more years prior to admission to an MFA degree are not allowed to satisfy requirements. Use of Special student credit may require payment of tuition difference.

**CREDITS PER TERM ALLOWED**

12 credits

**PROGRAM-SPECIFIC COURSES REQUIRED**

Contact the program for information on any additional required courses.

**OVERALL GRADUATE GPA REQUIREMENT**

3.00

**OTHER GRADE REQUIREMENTS**

The Graduate School requires an average grade of B or better in all coursework (300 or above, not including research credits) taken as a graduate student unless conditions for probationary status require higher grades. Grades of Incomplete are considered to be unsatisfactory if they are not removed during the next enrolled semester.

**PROBATION POLICY**

The Graduate School regularly reviews the record of any student who earned grades of BC, C, D, F, or Incomplete in a graduate course (300 or above), or grade of U in research credits. This review could result in academic probation with a hold on future enrollment or in being suspended from the Graduate School.

**ADVISOR**

Every graduate student is required to have an advisor. An advisor is a faculty member, or sometimes a committee, from the major department responsible for providing advice regarding graduate studies. An advisor generally serves as the thesis advisor. In many cases, an advisor is assigned to incoming students. Students can be suspended from the Graduate School if they do not have an advisor.

To ensure that students are making satisfactory progress toward a degree, the Graduate School expects them to meet with their advisor on a regular basis.

A committee often accomplishes advising for the students in the early stages of their studies.

**ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATIONS**

Contact the program for information on required assessments and examinations.

**TIME CONSTRAINTS**

Master’s degree students who have been absent for five or more consecutive years lose all credits that they have earned before their absence. Individual programs may count the coursework students completed prior to their absence for meeting program requirements; that coursework may not count toward Graduate School credit requirements.

**LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS**

Contact the program for information on any language requirements.
ADMISSIONS

Applicants must apply online and pay the required application fee to the Graduate School. Applicants must meet all Graduate School requirements including a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution and an undergraduate GPA of 3.0 or higher (on a 4.0 scale). Each of the three program areas sets additional minimum requirements and requires additional application material. See each program option for admission requirements.

Applicants to any one of the School of Human Ecology degree program options should list "Human Ecology (code 549)” as the graduate major on their application. Their individual statement of purpose should clearly indicate the degree option to which they are applying.

ADMISSION (DS)

In addition to meeting the Graduate School minimum requirements, the applicant to design studies must submit an essay to the design studies department stating the applicant’s reason for pursuing a graduate degree, their specific topic of interest, and future professional goals. Students applying for specializations in research-based areas, including environment and behavior, material culture (history of interiors, history of textiles and clothing), and textile science must also submit a scholarly paper, written in English and authored solely by the applicant. This may be an undergraduate research paper, senior thesis or published article. Students applying for specialization in studio-based areas, including design visualization and application or textile art and design, must submit a portfolio of design work with descriptive information about the projects shown. All applications must also include three letters of recommendation from former professors or others familiar with the applicant’s ability to pursue graduate study and original transcripts from all post-high school institutions attended.

Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores are required for the Ph.D. but is not required for the MS or MFA plan. Personal biographical statement and CV are also required for Ph.D. applications. International applicants whose native language is not English are required to submit scores from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). International students who hold degrees from U.S. institutions do not need to submit language test scores. See our webpage and the UW Graduate School website for minimum test scores and other details about applying to UW–Madison and the Design Studies department.

Additional information is available on the program website (https://sohe.wisc.edu/graduate-students/research-and-creative-scholarship/design-studies/mfa), and from the chair of graduate admissions at caps@sohe.wisc.edu.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

• Articulate challenges, frontiers and limits with respect to theory, knowledge or practice within the area of study.
• Formulate ideas, concepts, designs, and/or techniques beyond the current boundaries of knowledge within one’s area of study.
• Consider the role of social, political, ethical, and economic contexts of research and creative scholarship in one’s area of study.
• Consider the role of multiple paradigms for describing reality in one’s area of study.
• Create research, scholarship or performance that makes a substantive contribution to one’s field.
• Communicate complex or ambiguous ideas in a compelling manner to a variety of audiences.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

• Foster ethical conduct and professional guidelines.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING GOALS

• Contribute to advancing the human ecology perspective by reflecting the relations among humans and their natural, social, and built environments and applying an interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary lens in one’s area of professional practice.
• Reflect the nature and significance of diversity in one’s area of professional practice.

PEOPLE

Faculty, Civil Society and Community Studies: Professors Jasper (chair), Flanagan, Morales, Zeldin; Associate Professors Bakken, Christens; Assistant Professors Gaddis, Horowitz; Sarmiento, Sparks
Consumer Behavior and Family Economics: Professors Wong (chair), Bartfeld, Zepeda; Associate Professor Collins; Assistant Professors Addo, Warmath
Design Studies: Professors Rengel (chair), Angus, Dong, Sarmadi, Nelson; Associate Professors Hark, Kallenborn, Shin; Assistant Professors Fairbanks, Penick, Ponto
Human Development and Family Studies: Professors Dilworth-Bart (chair), Bogenschneider, Raison, Poehlmann-Tynan, Roberts, Small; Associate Professors Duncan, Hartley, Nix, Papp; Assistant Professors Halpern-Meekin, Kirkorian, Litzelman