

DESIGN + INNOVATION, MS

The Master of Science in Design + Innovation (MD+I) program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison is a unique, interdisciplinary degree that equips students with the skills and perspectives to address complex challenges through innovative solutions. As a collaboration between five UW–Madison schools and colleges—Engineering, Human Ecology, Business, Art Department, and the iSchool – MD+I integrates diverse disciplines into a one-year intensive curriculum.

The MD+I program aims to cultivate designers equipped with the skills and mindsets necessary to address complex, real-world problems. We prioritize inclusive design, ensuring that diverse perspectives are integral to the design process, and we promote socially engaged innovation that aligns with the Wisconsin Idea—extending the benefits of the university's work to the broader community. Our commitment to transdisciplinary collaboration involves breaking down traditional disciplinary silos to foster holistic and integrative approaches to design challenges.

The program emphasizes hands-on learning and real-world impact, teaching students to navigate complex systems and design life-centered solutions that benefit both human and more-than-human stakeholders. Students engage with community and industry partners while honing skills in engineering, business strategy, user experience, and creative problem-solving.

The MD+I program is dedicated to shaping the future of design through inclusive, collaborative, and socially engaged practice. We strive to empower our students to become innovative leaders who are capable of addressing the world's most pressing issues with empathy, creativity, and a commitment to making a positive impact on society.

The Master of Science in Design + Innovation program is not a STEM-OPT program, CIP code: 30.9999 Multi-/Interdisciplinary Studies, Other.

ADMISSIONS

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Please consult the table below for key information about this degree program's admissions requirements. The program may have more detailed admissions requirements, which can be found below the table or on the program's website.

Graduate admissions is a two-step process between academic programs and the Graduate School. **Applicants must meet the minimum requirements (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/requirements/>) of the Graduate School as well as the program(s).** Once you have researched the graduate program(s) you are interested in, apply online (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/>).

Requirements	Detail
Fall Deadline	February 1
Spring Deadline	This program does not admit in the spring.
Summer Deadline	This program does not admit in the summer.
GRE (Graduate Record Examinations)	Not required.

English Proficiency Test Refer to the Graduate School: Minimum Requirements for Admission policy: <https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241> (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241/>).

This program does not allow exceptions.

Other Test(s) (e.g., GMAT, MCAT) n/a

Letters of Recommendation Required 2

ADMISSIONS PROCESS

All application materials must be submitted online through the Graduate School's application portal (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/>). Applications will open approximately one calendar year prior to the start of the program. Do NOT send any paper copies of documents by mail (email or paper mail) unless specifically requested to do so by the Graduate Admissions Team. Applications must be complete to be reviewed by the Graduate Admissions Team.

1. Online application (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/>)
2. Resume or Curriculum Vitae (CV)
3. Creative Brief: The creative brief is a multi-page document that conveys why you want to attend the Design + Innovation program, what you hope to achieve as a designer and examples of your work, so that we can understand the experience you bring with you and your potential as a student. We recommend that you think of the creative brief as a design project. This document is like a short magazine, portfolio or booklet that gives us a chance to get to know you, why you want to join the program, how you have worked in the past and what you are dreaming of in the future. It consists of three parts, which you should compose as a single, multi-page PDF for upload. The three parts are: a) Statement of Purpose, b) Design Prompt, and c) Work Samples.

- a. **Statement of Purpose** (max 500 words, or about 1 page): Tell us your design origin story. When and how did you first understand that design + innovation was the path for you? What motivates you to choose Design + Innovation? What is your "why"?
- b. **Design Prompt** (max 500 words, or about 1 page): If you could re-design **anything** (a process, place, brand, building, product, program, planet....) what would it be and why? What essential steps would you take to get this design project started?
- c. **Work Samples** (maximum 10 pages): What projects, collaborations, works of art, experiments or ideas are you the most proud of? Using a consistent design approach to all pages and an emphasis on visual representation of your work, show us 2-3 recent projects. We are interested in seeing your best work – whether that be design, research, art, collaborative, professional or team projects, experiments, prototypes, class projects, independent passions, installations, community work and more. There is no standard approach and your work samples will be uniquely yours.

- i. Here are a few file and format guidelines to help you achieve consistency and legibility in your creative brief. File **requirements**, denoted with an asterisk (*), and **recommendations** follow:

1. Format: PDF*
2. File size: 4MB max*
3. Pages: 15 max (including all parts of the creative brief, cover and table of contents)
4. Page layout: 12" x 18" or A3, two-page spreads should be combined into one page.
5. Color format: RGB
6. Resolution: 150 dpi
7. Project info: Always note the date and context (professional, academic or personal). If you worked on a team, describe your role and contributions. If you include any images that are not your own original work, you must cite your sources.

d. **Note on links:** We do not accept links to portfolio websites in lieu of an uploaded document, designed to the specifications above. If you include links to time-based media (such as video, performance or podcast work) within your creative brief, review is at the discretion of admissions committee members and may not be taken into consideration. It is in your best interest, therefore, to include all of your work in a visual or written format in the creative brief document.

e. **Resources for creative brief design:** The UW-Madison DesignLab has many resources, including these design tips and tricks (<https://designlab.wisc.edu/resources/design-tips-and-tricks/>) that will help you put your best foot forward. Don't know how to start? Questions about how it's going? Our enrollment coach (see contact box) is here to answer your questions and give feedback while you are developing your creative brief.

4. **Unofficial transcripts:** All applicants must upload a copy of their transcript from their undergraduate institution and other previous higher education institutions, including other graduate studies. An official transcript is not part of the online application process unless specifically requested in writing by the Admissions Team.
5. **Two (2) letters of recommendation:** Enter the recommender email contact information into the online application. Recommenders will receive an email with instructions for the survey and recommendation letter upload process. We do not accept recommendation letters via email, paper format, or online portfolios.
6. **English Proficiency Scores:** See English Proficiency Test policy above.
7. **Application Fee**
8. **Personal Interview (if necessary):** A personal interview with program staff (in the form of a telephone call or video chat) may be required.

[aid. Further funding information is available from the Graduate School.](#) Be sure to check with your program for individual policies and restrictions related to funding.

PROGRAM RESOURCES

Students enrolled in this program are not eligible to receive tuition remission from graduate assistantship appointments at this institution.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Office of Student Financial Aid

For information regarding student financial aid, scholarships, and more, visit the Office of Student Financial Aid website (<https://financialaid.wisc.edu/>).

International Student Services Funding and Scholarships

For information regarding international student funding and scholarships, visit the International Student Services website (<https://iss.wisc.edu/students/new-students/funding-scholarships/>).

REQUIREMENTS

MINIMUM GRADUATE SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS

Review the Graduate School minimum degree requirements (<https://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/#requirementstext>) and policies (<https://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/#policiestext>), in addition to the program requirements listed below.

MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

MODE OF INSTRUCTION

Face to Face	Evening/ Weekend	Online	Hybrid	Accelerated
Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Mode of Instruction Definitions

Accelerated: Accelerated programs are offered at a fast pace that condenses the time to completion. Students typically take enough credits aimed at completing the program in a year or two.

Evening/Weekend: Courses meet on the UW-Madison campus only in evenings and/or on weekends to accommodate typical business schedules. Students have the advantages of face-to-face courses with the flexibility to keep work and other life commitments.

Face-to-Face: Courses typically meet during weekdays on the UW-Madison Campus.

Hybrid: These programs combine face-to-face and online learning formats. Contact the program for more specific information.

Online: These programs are offered 100% online. Some programs may require an on-campus orientation or residency experience, but the courses will be facilitated in an online format.

CURRICULAR REQUIREMENTS

Requirement Detail	
Minimum	30 credits
Credit	
Requirement	

FUNDING

FUNDING GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES

[The Bursar's Office provides information about tuition and fees associated with being a graduate student. Resources to help you afford graduate study might include assistantships, fellowships, traineeships, and financial](#)

Minimum Residence Credit Requirement	16 credits
Minimum Graduate Coursework Requirement	15 credits must be graduate-level coursework. Refer to the Graduate School: Minimum Graduate Coursework (50%) Requirement policy: https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244 (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244/).
Overall Graduate GPA Requirement	3.00 GPA required. Refer to the Graduate School: Grade Point Average (GPA) Requirement policy: https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203 (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203/).
Other Grade Requirements	Students must earn a C or above in all coursework.
Assessments and Examinations	None.
Language Requirements	No language requirements.

Students may not have any more than two incompletes on their record at any one time.

REQUIRED COURSES

Code	Title	Credits
Core Courses		
All students complete the following courses:		
DS 641	Advanced Design Thinking for Transformation	3
INTEREGR 477	Tools for Prototyping and Manufacturing	3
INTER-HE 940	Collaborative Capstone I	3
INTEREGR 941	Collaborative Capstone II	3
One of the following:		3
L I S 707	Data Visualization and Communication for Decision Making	
DS 620	Visual Thinking for Problem Solving	
One of the following:		3
OTM 701	Product Management	
OTM 760	Managing by Design	
MARKETNG 737	New Product Innovation	
M H R 715	Strategic Management of Innovation	
M H R 734	Venture Creation ¹	
Specializations ¹		
Complete one specialization from the areas listed:		12
<i>Product Design</i>		
DS 527	Global Artisans	
DS/COMP SCI 579	Virtual Reality	
CNSR SCI 657	Consumer Behavior	
L I S/COMP SCI 611	User Experience Design 1	
I SY E/PSYCH 349	Introduction to Human Factors	
I SY E/PSYCH 549	Human Factors Engineering	

I SY E 552	Human Factors Engineering Design and Evaluation
M E/E C E 439	Introduction to Robotics
M E 449	Redesign and Prototype Fabrication
M E 549	Product Design
MARKETNG 737	New Product Innovation ²
M H R 734	Venture Creation ²
M H R 741	Technology Entrepreneurship
OTM 701	Product Management ²
ART 346	Basic Graphic Design
ART 409	Digital Fabrication Studio
ART 428	Digital Imaging Studio
ART 429	3D Digital Studio I
ART 564	Graphic Design for Accessibility
<i>UI/UX Design</i>	
DS/COMP SCI 579	Virtual Reality
L I S/COMP SCI 611	User Experience Design 1
L I S/COMP SCI 612	User Experience Design 2
L I S/COMP SCI 613	User Experience Design 3
L I S 646	Introduction to Info Architecture and Interaction Design for the Web
L I S 661	Information Ethics and Policy
I SY E/PSYCH 349	Introduction to Human Factors
I SY E/PSYCH 549	Human Factors Engineering
M H R 734	Venture Creation ²
M H R 741	Technology Entrepreneurship
ART 346	Basic Graphic Design
ART 428	Digital Imaging Studio
ART 438	History of Graphic Design and Typography
ART 529	3D Digital Studio II
ART 564	Graphic Design for Accessibility
<i>Communication Design</i>	
ART 318	Introduction to Video, Performance & Installation Art
ART 346	Basic Graphic Design
ART 409	Digital Fabrication Studio
ART 428	Digital Imaging Studio
ART 429	3D Digital Studio I
ART 438	History of Graphic Design and Typography
ART 529	3D Digital Studio II
DS/COMP SCI 579	Virtual Reality
DS/LAND ARC 639	Culture and Built Environment
DS 620	Visual Thinking for Problem Solving ²

L I S 707 Data Visualization and
Communication for Decision Making
2

Design Strategy

CSCS 335	Communicating with Key Audiences
CSCS 455	Entrepreneurialism and Society
CNSR SCI 555	Consumer Design Strategies & Evaluation
CNSR SCI 561	Consumer Engagement Strategies
CNSR SCI 562	The Global Consumer
CNSR SCI 567	Product Development Strategies in Retailing
CNSR SCI 657	Consumer Behavior
HDFS 872	Bridging the Gap Between Research and Action
DS 527	Global Artisans
DS/ LAND ARC 639	Culture and Built Environment
INTER-HE 815	Professional Skills for Community Leaders and Practitioners
I SY E/ PSYCH 349	Introduction to Human Factors
M E 549	Product Design
M H R 715	Strategic Management of Innovation 2
M H R 723	Business Strategy
M H R 734	Venture Creation ²
M H R 741	Technology Entrepreneurship
MARKETNG 737	New Product Innovation ²

Total Credits **30**

¹ These specializations are internal to the program and represent different curricular paths a student can follow to earn this degree. Specialization names do not appear in the Graduate School admissions application, and they will not appear on the transcript.

² Course may be counted towards a specialization area only if it was not taken as a Core Requirement. Students may NOT double count this course for the Core Requirement and the Specialization.

Other Policy

Students in this program may not take courses outside the prescribed curriculum without faculty advisor and program director approval. Students in this program cannot enroll concurrently in other undergraduate or graduate degree programs.

POLICIES

GRADUATE SCHOOL POLICIES

The Graduate School's Academic Policies and Procedures (<https://grad.wisc.edu/acadpolicy/>) serve as the official document of record for Graduate School academic and administrative policies and procedures and are updated continuously. Note some policies redirect to entries in the official UW-Madison Policy Library (<https://policy.wisc.edu/>). Programs may set more stringent policies than the Graduate School. Policies set by the academic degree program can be found below.

MAJOR-SPECIFIC POLICIES

PRIOR COURSEWORK

Graduate Credits Earned at Other Institutions

Students will not be permitted to transfer credits from previously earned graduate coursework.

Undergraduate Credits Earned at Other Institutions or UW-Madison

- Undergraduate credits from UW-Madison: With advisor approval, students may transfer up to 7 credits numbered 300 or above toward the degree specialization areas (not the core degree requirements). These credits may be counted toward the minimum graduate coursework (50%) requirement if numbered 700 or above. No credits may be counted toward the minimum graduate residence credit requirement. Coursework earned ten or more years prior to admission is not allowed to satisfy requirements.
- Undergraduate credits from other institutions: Undergraduate credits from other institutions are not permitted to transfer in this program.

Credits Earned as a Professional Student at UW-Madison (Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, and Veterinary careers)

Refer to the Graduate School: Transfer Credits for Prior Coursework (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1216/>) policy.

Credits Earned as a University Special Student at UW-Madison

Refer to the Graduate School: Transfer Credits for Prior Coursework (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1216/>) policy.

PROBATION

Refer to the Graduate School: Probation (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1217/>) policy.

ADVISOR / COMMITTEE

All students will be assigned an advisor who assists them in planning a course sequence that meets degrees requirements and who will discuss career objectives with the students.

CREDITS PER TERM ALLOWED

15 credit maximum. Refer to the Graduate School: Maximum Credit Loads and Overload Requests (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1228/>) policy.

TIME LIMITS

Refer to the Graduate School: Time Limits (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1221/>) policy.

GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS

These resources may be helpful in addressing your concerns:

- Bias or Hate Reporting (<https://doso.students.wisc.edu/bias-or-hate-reporting/>)
- Graduate Assistantship Policies and Procedures (<https://hr.wisc.edu/policies/gapp/#grievance-procedure>)
- Hostile and Intimidating Behavior Policies and Procedures (<https://hr.wisc.edu/hib/>)
 - Office of the Provost for Faculty and Staff Affairs (<https://facstaff.provost.wisc.edu/>)
- Employee Assistance (<http://www.eao.wisc.edu/>) (for personal counseling and workplace consultation around communication and

conflict involving graduate assistants and other employees, post-doctoral students, faculty and staff)

- Employee Disability Resource Office (<https://employeedisabilities.wisc.edu/>) (for qualified employees or applicants with disabilities to have equal employment opportunities)
- Graduate School (<https://grad.wisc.edu/>) (for informal advice at any level of review and for official appeals of program/departmental or school/college grievance decisions)
- Office of Compliance (<https://compliance.wisc.edu/>) (for class harassment and discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence)
- Office Student Assistance and Support (OSAS) (<https://osas.wisc.edu/>) (for all students to seek grievance assistance and support)
- Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards (<https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/>) (for conflicts involving students)
- Ombuds Office for Faculty and Staff (<http://www.ombuds.wisc.edu/>) (for employed graduate students and post-docs, as well as faculty and staff)
- Title IX (<https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/>) (for concerns about discrimination)

Students should contact the department chair or program director with questions about grievances.

OTHER

1. Additional Prior Coursework Policy (this policy is in addition to the prior coursework policies listed above):
 - a. Graduate Program Credits earned in other UW-Madison Graduate Programs: With advisor approval: a) Students with an earned UW-Madison master's degree may transfer up to 7 credits toward the MS in Design + Innovation program. b) Students without an earned master's degree, but who have completed master's credits, may transfer up to 12 credits in the MS in Design + Innovation program. c) Students with PhD credits or an earned PhD degree may transfer up to 12 credits in the MS in Design + Innovation program. (Refer to the Graduate School Time Limits (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1221/>) policy)
2. Students are strongly discouraged to pursue positions as Project Assistants, Teaching Assistants or Research Assistants during their time in this program, as the rigor and accelerated nature of this program may not accommodate those work time commitments. Students in this program will not receive the tuition remission that is typically part of the compensation package for a graduate assistantship.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES

Take advantage of the Graduate School's professional development resources (<https://grad.wisc.edu/pd/>) to build skills, thrive academically, and launch your career.

PROGRAM RESOURCES

Please visit our program website (<https://mdi.wisc.edu/>) for more information.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

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1. Demonstrate creative, independent problem solving skills and entrepreneurial thinking.
2. Apply design tools and strategies on interdisciplinary teams and projects.
3. Communicate effectively both visually and orally.
4. Implement an iterative design thinking process.
5. Demonstrate a hands-on, iterative process that includes making, creating and designing.
6. Gain depth in a field of study that can be applied in a social, global and design context.
7. Apply principles of ethical and professional conduct in a field experience.

ACCREDITATION

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National Association of Schools of Art and Design (<https://nasad.arts-accredit.org/>)

Accreditation status: Not accredited. Planned 2025-2026