San Diego State University

MFA in Design and Technology
in the School of Theatre, Television, and Film
The Master of Fine Arts Program in Design and Technology in the School of Theatre, Television, and Film at San Diego State University accepts students who are serious about achieving the level of artistry and skill necessary to become practicing professionals. Developing skills that support collaboration is one of the cornerstones of our program; students learn how to share their ideas with others in a supportive environment. A balance of theoretical coursework, studio work, and production is achieved through the curriculum as well as close consultation with faculty advisors.

Direct exposure to the diverse and richly active theatre, television/film, and entertainment world in Southern California is a vital part of our program. Students work with theatre and TV/Film professionals both within and outside the academic environment as well as with our faculty who continue to design at the regional, national, and international levels. Fellowship and other opportunities are available with our community partners - The Old Globe, Cygnet Theatre, and MOXIE Theatre. Our program provides the essential education, technical training, and creative experience necessary for professional design and technology-based careers or college-level teaching.

The MFA program at San Diego State University is a three-year degree program with emphases in scenic design, costume design and technology, lighting design, projection/integrated media design, and technical direction. MFA students are allowed to design as much as their individual capabilities permit, as well as participate in an intensive internship – often working as an assistant to a professional designer or in a television or film studio. The three years our students spend with us should be among the most rewarding and fulfilling of their lives.

The School of Theatre, Television, and Film is committed to creating a learning environment which advances racial and social justice, anti-racism, and cultural diversity. San Diego State is located on the land of the Kumeyaay.
The Scenic Design and Technology program includes class offerings in design and technology, theatrical production design opportunities, film production design opportunities, and training in cutting-edge and industry-standard skills and software. Our program focuses on both the art and the implementation of the scene design/production design process in theatre, television and film. Emphasis is placed on developing skills that enable our students to find success in the professional world working as designers for theatre and opera, production designers and art directors for film and television, scenic artists, and design associates/assistants. Throughout the program, students have the opportunity to collaborate with their fellow design colleagues, work with professional directors in design studio classes, and produce fully realized scenic designs for department productions. Students may also design for film projects and have the opportunity to work with other graduate students in the film department.

Current Curriculum: Some of the classes taken by our scenic design and technology students cover these topics: Advanced Scenic Design, Model Building, 3D Printing and 3D Scanning, Digital Painting, Traditional Rendering, Period Dress and Décor, Hand Drafting, Vectorworks, AutoCAD, Unreal Engine, Scene Painting, Photoshop, The Business of Theatre, TV and Film, SketchUp, Advanced Media Design, and more.
PROJECTION & INTEGRATED MEDIA DESIGN

The Projection and Integrated Media Design program offers classes in advanced projection design, theatrical production design opportunities, film design opportunities, and training in cutting edge and industry-standard skills and software. Our program focuses on both the art and the implementation of the media design/production design process in theatre, television and film.


PRODUCTION DESIGN

The Production Design for Television and Film program has been recognized as one of the Top 10 Production Design Schools in the world, according to The Hollywood Reporter. Our students study specializations such as art direction and production design, as well as develop skills in advanced software and technology used within the industry.

Classes include: Art Direction and Production Design, SketchUp and Vectorworks, Post-production work, Digital effects, Virtual scenery design, and hands-on scenery work for advanced student productions (single and multi-camera).
The Costume Design and Technology program includes classes and practical assignments in design and technology. In addition, developing skills that support collaboration is central to our program where students learn how to share their ideas with others in a supportive environment.

Through production assignments, students work with theatre and TV/Film professionals, both within and outside the academic environment.

Current Curriculum: Some of the classes taken by our costume design and tech students are: Advanced Costume Design for Theatre, Related Fields, Costume Design for Television and Film, Traditional and Digital Rendering, Costume Technology, Costume Crafts, Fabric Study and Modification, Puppetry, Mask Making, Period Dress and Décor, History of Menswear and Tailoring, Make-up, Wig Construction and Period Styling, The Business of Theatre, TV and Film, Portfolio Development, and more.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES:
ON SITE HISTORICAL COSTUME COLLECTION OF GARMENTS AND EPHEMERA BACK TO 1830’S, DESIGN RESEARCH LIBRARY, STUDY COLLECTION OF 20TH CENTURY COUTURE AND BRIDGE GROUP FASHIONS
COSTUME TECHNOLOGY

Our Costume Technology area focuses on the professional skills required for the field. Our students study diverse topics such as fabric painting and dyeing, fabric modification, armor, draping, millinery, jewelry, and advanced craft construction techniques.

PUPPETRY

Puppetry is a stand-out part of our costume program. Our students study advanced puppet construction techniques, puppet manipulation and historical puppet mechanics, as well as fabricate puppets of all kinds using a wide range of approaches.
The Lighting Design and Technology program at San Diego State University in the School of Theatre, Television, and Film includes class offerings in advanced lighting design techniques, cutting-edge technology, professional documentation, and leading industry-standard software. Our program focuses on both the art and the implementation of the lighting design process. Emphasis is placed on developing skills that enable our students to find success in the professional world working as designers, associates/assistants, programmers, and technicians. Our program is known for producing alumni well-versed in Broadway-level drafting and paperwork, standards, and practices. Additionally, our program explores lighting design and practices in related fields such as television and film lighting, architectural lighting, corporate industrials, concert lighting, themed entertainment lighting, and others. Finally, our students work with cutting-edge technology to stay up-to-date in our ever-changing technological field.

Current Curriculum: Some of the classes taken by our lighting design and technology students are: Advanced Lighting Design, Lighting Technology, Design for Film and Television, Advanced Lighting Topics, Related Fields in Lighting, Digital Communication for Lighting Design (Vectorworks, Lightwright, Augment3d and other previsualization software, programming techniques, advanced assisting/associate techniques), AutoCAD, SketchUp, Photoshop, Period Dress and Décor, The Business of Theatre, Television, and Film, Portfolio Development, and more.

LIGHTING DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY

WE OFFER BROADWAY-STYLE TRAINING, TECHNIQUES, BROADWAY-LEVEL DRAFTING, AND PROFESSIONAL DESIGN AND DOCUMENTATION PRACTICES

OUR PROGRAM EXPLORES LIGHTING DESIGN FOR THEATRE, TELEVISION/FILM, THEMED ENTERTAINMENT, CONCERTS, ARCHITECTURAL LIGHTING, CORPORATE INDUSTRIALS, AND MORE!

The Technical Direction program includes class offerings in technology and management, theatrical production opportunities, event management opportunities, and training in industry-standard skills and software. The first year focuses on building an understanding of the core concepts of technical management. We break down the production process and provide students with the project management skills necessary to be successful in their careers at SDSU and beyond. Year two further explores these concepts while developing a greater understanding of the systems that make theatre happen. The final year is spent developing mastery through professional internships and independent research in a particular area of interest.

Beginning in year one, and throughout their course of study, technical direction students have ample opportunity to fully manage the scenic production for shows ranging in scale from intimate studio productions to full-scale, multi-set musicals. Other technical direction opportunities include coordinating our 250-person concert musicals and School of Music and Dance operas. Students may also work on film projects and have the opportunity to work with other graduate students in the film department.

FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

The School has well-equipped workshops for scene and costume construction, rehearsal rooms, and two mainstage theatres, which feature state-of-the-art lighting, sound, and video equipment. The scene shop includes carpentry equipment, a metal/welding shop, a full-scale automated paint frame, and a props area. The costume shop holds a wig and makeup room, a full costume pull-stock, and dye room as well as houses SDSU’s exclusive Theatrical Research Library containing a plethora of valuable research material and rare, out-of-print books. Other facilities include: a Mac lab complete with up-to-date software such as Vectorworks Designer, Lightwright, Augment3d, ETC Nomad, Adobe Creative Suite, and more; a Mobile Scenic and Projection Design PC Lab (software includes DATATON’s Watchout Media Server Software, Adobe AfterEffects, Adobe Premiere, Adobe Photoshop, and more); a 3D Printing and Fabrication Lab; a Light Lab stocked with conventional, LED, and moving light fixtures as well as a state-of-the-art lighting console; and two television and film studios that support both single and multi-camera production which produce dozens of short films every year.

The Mainstage Theatre (formerly the Don Powell Theatre) is a proscenium-type venue which seats 350 patrons. The Mainstage Theatre completed a $44 million renovation and re-opened in Fall 2023. The lighting system is a 365 dimmer-per-circuit system with a cutting-edge lighting console for traditional, LED, and moving light control, including a remote followspot system. The stage is fully trapped and is adjacent to a full-stage wagon house. The rigging system is a combination of five electric winch lighting batons and 32 counter-weighted line sets.

The Prebys Stage is a 150-seat, flexible 60’ x 60’ blackbox space, which opened in Fall 2023 as a part of the newly revitalized Performing Arts District. This theatre has a fully operational tension grid and all LED lighting capabilities with fully flexible seating. Attached to the exterior of the Prebys Stage is a smaller open-air venue for performances under the stars.

The Scenic Studios are located next to the Mainstage Theatre. They consist of separate wood and metal-working shops which utilize state-of-the-art equipment. The paint area houses a full-stage (20’ x 50’) electrically-operated paint frame and an adjacent spray booth.

The Costume and Make-up Facilities share the lower level of the building along with a design and construction research library. There is a large costume studio equipped with industrial machinery and specialty machines such as a patcher and walking foot machine. The studio has ample room for two draper teams and extra work tables. The wig and make-up studio contains wig making and styling stations and a wig dryer. There is a crafts studio and a ventilated dye room with commercial dye equipment. The costume department houses the Alicia Annas Historical Collection - a historical costume collection with over 2,000 garments from 1840’s to 1950’s (with the oldest garment from the 1700’s) and a Contemporary Study Collection featuring garments from the 1960’s to the present, including many examples of work by designers such as Chanel and Givenchy.

The Light Lab contains a variety of equipment – from the classic Fresnel to moving lights and LEDs. The lab is designed for versatility and complete flexibility for student experimentation and self-learning as well as a rep plot for quick mockups and cueing projects. Graduate lighting students have full access to the light lab for class projects, mock-ups, experimentation, color testing, and free-flowing idea development. The lab is controlled by a state-of-the-art lighting console and has its own dedicated ladders, gel and gobo stock, a white cyc, black scrim, or a full traveling black, as well as a small sound system and haze machine.

TELEVISION AND FILM STUDIOS

Studio A has two full-time support engineers. The studio is outfitted with a Master Control area, three studio pedestal-mounted studio cameras, an automated lighting console, Mole-Richardson lighting, an audio control suite with digital audio console, state-of-the-art digital switchers, chroma-key wall, and CGI.

Studio C stands as a “shell” equipped with 300 amps of electrical power and a scene dock with a variety of flats used to create sets. Advanced and graduate student filmmakers use Studio C to build free-standing sets for single-camera style shoots.
CURRICULUM

The program of study for each student in the MFA for Design and Technology program is tailored based on their interests and career goals. Our curriculum teaches through a variety of related experiences, integrated to reinforce concepts and skills in different ways. Our goal is to provide the student with an array of opportunities and to allow each student to create portfolio-quality work. Our classes fall into four categories:

DESIGN CLASSES:

Collaborative Studies: The designers’ main studio class is called “Collaborative Studies” and is taken by all of the design and technology students in the program. Faculty and professional guest directors collaborate with our designers on plays, musicals, operas, newly devised works, and themed entertainment projects. These courses explore specialization within the students’ chosen area of design.

Advanced Design Courses: These courses explore the topics within the students’ chosen design areas. Examples include: Costume Design for TV and Film, Costume Topics, Advanced Topics in Lighting Design, Related Fields in Lighting, Art Direction, and Projection Design. Students will work on individual projects in conjunction with departmental shows.

Practicum in Theatre Arts: Students produce a fully-realized design on the mainstage season or for the student film festivals.

TECHNICAL AND SKILLS CLASSES:

Theatre Rendering: All designers take Theatre Rendering to improve their skills both in rendering and in seeing and revealing form. The goals of this course include developing the habit of creating renderings on demand, developing a working process of research, inspirations, and skills, exploring a variety of rendering media to create dimension and artistic intent, and creating projects for a professional portfolio.

Skills Classes by Area: Each area of Design and Technology has an abundance of skills classes that the students take to advance in their chosen field. Examples include:

- Scenic Design: Scene Painting, Photoshop, Model Making, Hand-drafting, 3D Printing, Vectorworks, Sketchup
- Costume Design and Technology: Patternmaking, Draping, Fabric Dyeing and Painting, Crafts, Fabric Modification, Theatrical Makeup, Wig Making
- Lighting Design: Digital Communication for Lighting Design (Vectorworks, Lightwright, Augment3d, Programming Techniques, Assisting), Lighting and Sound Technology, Cinematography
- Technical Direction: Technical Direction, Advanced Stage Technologies, AutoCAD, Rigging, Welding and Metalwork
- Projection Design: Advanced Media Design - Digital Media Creation, Advanced Media Design - Digital Rendering

Portfolio Development and the Business of Theatre, TV, and Film: Preparation for theatrical designers and technicians entering the workforce. Interview techniques, professional-style resumes, portfolios, websites, and other self-marketing materials.

THEATRE PRACTICUM SKILLS: Students work on individual projects in conjunction with departmental shows. These projects are designed to improve skills and portfolios.

HISTORICAL/RESEARCH CLASSES:

Period Dress and Decor: This is a visual survey of the relationships and cultural significance of the dress, architecture, and decorative arts from selected periods considered significant in the history of dramatic literature. It is a two-semester course.

Seminar in Contemporary Designers: Research-based. Topics: major scenic, costume, and lighting designers working in contemporary theatre, film, and television.

ACADEMIC CLASSES:

These classes study theory, writing, and literature. Examples include: Design Aesthetics of Theatre, TV, and Film, Theories of Theatre Seminar, and Writing for Theatre.

Special Study: Students can develop their own classes with faculty guidance. These courses often are concepts, skills, or research that the student wants to explore further.

Click or scan for more information
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

San Diego is a vibrant theatre town with two world-renowned LORT regional theatres, many additional high-level professional theatres, and lots of intimate theatres – many of which like to employ our students! The San Diego theatre scene is known for the creation of exciting new work, Broadway try-outs, and companies and festivals that specialize in lifting previously un-sung voices, such as the Diversionary Theatre - "the country’s third-oldest LGBTQIA+ theatre", the MOXIE Theatre whose mission is to create more diverse and honest images of women in our culture", the Lipinski Family San Diego Jewish Theatre, the Black Voices Play Reading Series, the Latinx New Play Festival, and many others.

San Diego State University is located only 2 hours away from Los Angeles. Attending SDSU is a great way to create southern California contacts if you plan on moving to Los Angeles. Many of our students design in L.A. or intern there, and our classes schedule field trips to backstage experiences throughout southern California such as Disneyland/Disney’s California Adventure, SeaWorld San Diego, the Old Globe, the San Diego Civic Theatre, and Knott’s Berry Farm. In addition, guest speakers from Los Angeles and San Diego are often invited to speak in our classes. Past guest speakers have included important Los Angeles tv/film and theatrical designers, and designers from SeaWorld and Disney Imagineering, among many others.

If New York is your dream, our students have exposure to many Broadway designers. Southern California is proud to be the home of some of the most important regional theatres in the country, including The Old Globe, La Jolla Playhouse, South Coast Repertory, and The Center Theatre Group. The majority of the productions at these theatres are designed by Broadway Greats who welcome our students to sit behind them in tech or offer assisting opportunities, which can begin excellent New York connections. In addition, some of our students choose to pursue internships in New York. Many of our faculty and staff have worked on Broadway and provide wonderful resources if your heart craves the Great White Way.

Film and Television Production Studios
- CBS Television City (Los Angeles)
- CBS Radford Studio Center (Studio City)
- Fox Studios Culver City
- NBC Studios Burbank
- Paramount Pictures
- Sony Pictures Studios
- Walt Disney Studios
- Warner Bros.
- Universal Studios
- Manhattan Beach Studios
- Raleigh Studios
- Santa Cinta Studios
- Los Angeles Center Studios
- Cartoon Network
- Nickalon

Themed Entertainment
- Disneyland
- Disney California Adventure
- SeaWorld San Diego
- LEGOLAND California
- Sesame Place San Diego
- Universal Studios Hollywood
- Six Flags Magic Mountain
- San Diego Zoo and Safari Park

Visual & Practical Effects Companies
- The Jim Henson Company
- Legacy Effects
- Malashock Dance Company
- Malashock Dance Company
- Garner Holt Productions

San Diego Theatres
- Lamb’s Players
- Coronado Playhouse
- Moonlight Stage Productions
- North Coast Repertory Theatre
- Cygnet Theatre
- MOXIE Theatre
- Diversionary Theatre
- New Village Arts
- San Diego Musical Theatre
- South Coast Repertory
- Balboa Theatre
- San Diego Civic Theatre
- The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park
- San Diego Symphony
- San Diego Ballet
- San Diego Opera
- Speckles Theatre
- Vjeas Arena (SDSU’s campus)
- Cal Coast Credit Union Amphitheater
- SDSU Campus (SDSU’s campus)
- On Stage Playhouse
- Malashock Dance Company

How Close from SDSU?
- 10 miles = Beaches
- 10 miles = Downtown
- 50 miles = Mountains
- 75 miles = Deserts
- 95 miles = Disneyland
- 120 miles = Los Angeles

Map Not to Scale
EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

SDSU Design and Technology Showcase - This annual event allows our students to showcase their work for industry professionals. It is a time for our students to polish and display their portfolios, often resulting in professional design opportunities.

Design Showcase West - SDSU is one of the participating schools in the national design showcase, held at UCLA in Los Angeles every spring.

Fellowships - A fellowship program with the Cygnet Theatre and the MOXIE Theatre in San Diego provides opportunities for our students to work as designers and/or assistants to local and national designers during the theatre's mainstage season.

Internships - Students are required to participate in an intensive internship, often working as an assistant to a professional designer or in a television or film studio. Companies that have offered internships to our students in the past include: The Old Globe, Barbizon Lighting in NYC, Walt Disney Imagineering, Santa Fe Opera, the Los Angeles Opera, and PCPA among many others.

Formal Relationship with The Old Globe - SDSU's formal relationship with The Old Globe (a LORT regional theatre in San Diego) makes it possible for students to interview for various staff and over-hire positions during their graduate studies. It also allows access to the Broadway designers hired by the Globe and may provide assisting opportunities!

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

Graduate Assistantships and/or Teaching Assistantships are available every semester for students in all disciplines. Competitive out-of-state tuition waivers are also available, as well as numerous awards of merit and university scholarships.

Graduate Assistantships (GAs) - Many MFA students are awarded Graduate Assistantships requiring typically 100 to 200 hours per semester in the technical shops, for special projects, or as classroom assistants.

Teaching Opportunities (TAs) - Our students have the opportunity to teach introductory design and technology classes and T.A. on more advanced classes in which they may be interested. T.A.s are listed as instructors-on-record, which is a strong building block for the students' teaching CVs.

San Diego State is consistently ranked in the top 15 on the list of 50 Best Value Colleges and Universities in California and in the top 50 of Forbes’ ranking of the 300 Best Value Colleges and Universities in the United States.

ALUMNI AND RESUME BUILDING

Our program provides a well-rounded education that touches upon the many aspects of entertainment design. We encourage our students to work professionally while in school to build experience and professional contacts. Our long list of impressive and influential alumni working in widely diverse areas of the entertainment industry include: film, television, education, themed entertainment, consulting, corporate industrials, and theatre. Some of the companies that have employed our graduates are: Walt Disney Imagineering and Disney Theme Parks, LAIKA Digital, SeaWorld, The Old Globe, Visual Terrain, Nautlius, La Jolla Playhouse, Cygnet Theatre, San Diego Opera, North Coast Repertory Theatre, Diversionary Theatre, San Diego Rep, the Hemsley Lighting Programs, Norwegian Cruise Line, and various Independent Films and Video. Some of the television productions our designers have gone onto include Mad Men, Glee, Orange is the New Black, Let’s Make a Deal, MTV Video Music Awards, Girls Meets World, Hollywood Game Night, The Academy Awards, and the Golden Globes Awards, among many others.

CONTACT US

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact:

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Additional information is available at

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