The Bachelor of Arts in Media Arts + Practice (MA+P) is for students interested in harnessing the power of digital storytelling and media design for uses in diverse fields, from business to education, from architecture to medicine, from urban planning to law. The program combines the history and theory of 20th- and 21st-century media forms with hands-on production experience and research.

Students study the evolution of media in concert with new cinematic technologies, from the work of early innovators such as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, through the pioneering experiments in information theory embodied by thinkers such as Claude Shannon, Norbert Wiener and Vannevar Bush, and on to the experiments of artists and designers working with interactivity, immersion, stereoscopy and performance for over a century. Students also examine the relationship among media forms, emerging technologies and culture, and they learn how to author in diverse media platforms for both critical and creative practice. They learn how to use video, still images and interactivity; they become critical makers and thinkers; and they join the research labs in small, mentor-led experiences that contribute to the creation of a robust capstone project.

This major is ideal for students who are interested in the expanded array of cinematic technologies that can be used for the creative and critical expression of ideas, as well as those who want to develop skills in visual communication for use in a variety of diverse fields. Imagine becoming a visual strategist at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory and creating interactive experiences about space, like frequent MA+P visitor Dan Goods. Or imagine inventing new ways to present abstract data to The New York Times, like Mark Hansen, who is part of the New York Times Research and Development Lab. Media Arts + Practice students invent new ways of communicating complex ideas in a world inundated by data and information.

ABOUT THE BA IN MEDIA ARTS + PRACTICE

A total of 128 units of coursework (16 units per semester) is required to complete the BA in Media Arts + Practice. This includes 48 units of core USC requirements, 56 units of MA+P major requirements, and 24+ units of elective courses.

YEAR ONE
The first year of the BA focuses on the fundamentals of digital authoring and critical thinking. Courses explore a diverse range of media forms and question the impact these forms have on experiences of identity, citizenship, politics, communication and storytelling.

YEAR TWO
The second year concentrates on empowering students with the extensive potentials of critical making and emergent media. Courses in the second year focus on web-based projects, data visualization, ubiquitous computing and advanced procedural literacy.

YEAR THREE
Students in the third year of the BA learn how to plan, organize, budget and lead a large-scale collaborative media project, as well as how to conduct research for their own thesis effort and how to prepare for the job market with a professional online presence and portfolio.

YEAR FOUR
In the fourth year, students focus on the production of their thesis project and explore job opportunities and entrepreneurship.

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YEAR FOUR
In the fourth year, students focus on the production of their thesis project and explore job opportunities and entrepreneurship.
Students majoring in Media Arts + Practice develop a broad range of digital authoring skills. They begin by learning how to use software to create media, but this is not the only focus of their education. Media Arts + Practice students are taught to be strategic and flexible, capable of working outside the screen entirely, building interactive installations in real space. They learn to be auteurs, able to engage as both design researchers and critical makers, not simply as auteurs.

MA+P students are taught to be strategic and flexible, leveraging emerging technologies while maintaining a strong emphasis on concept, design, rhetoric and style. The focus is on "techniques" rather than "tools" - due to the changeable nature of the digital media industry, tools can become obsolete in the blink of an eye. To that end, due to the changeable nature of the digital media industry, platforms. The focus is on "techniques" rather than "tools" - particularly programming languages and buildable (DIY) electronics instruction in both open-source and proprietary software, as well as interactive approaches to the built environment and/or urban planning.

The MA+P curriculum seeks to cultivate an atmosphere of interdisciplinary. Students leave USC not only as experts in media authorship, but also as strategic thinkers who can apply their expertise in collaborations across the creative and professional spectrum.

HOW TO APPLY

Detailed application procedures can be found at cinema.usc.edu (under "Application Procedures"). The deadlines are as follows:

Freshman: December 1
Internal Transfer: February 1
External Transfer: February 1

Media Arts + Practice does not accept students for the spring term. All applications will be considered for fall admission.

To apply, students must submit the following materials. Previous experience in digital media authoring is not a requirement for admission.

Personal Statement: The personal statement invites you to tell us who you are, what you’re passionate about and why you think the Media Arts + Practice program will help you reach your goals.

Still Image Assignment and Process Description: Representation refers to the use of language and images to create meaning about the world around us. With this definition in mind, create an image that effectively communicates your thoughts or feelings about an issue relevant to you or your community. Then write a 200-word reflection on the image that addresses your design process and choices. What did you create? How did you create it?

Critical Writing Sample: The critical writing sample is an opportunity to showcase your originality, as well as your analytical skills. Respond to one of the provided prompts by developing a well-written and well-constructed argument. The admissions committee is looking for students willing to push beyond the expected, students who are both critical and creative, and students interested in using media in powerful ways.

Creative Resume: The creative resume is a written record of the applicant's creative materials. It should include a concise description of each project, the month and year the project was completed, the applicant's role and the purpose of the project. The material, which does not need to be in any specific format, should give an idea of the range and depth of the applicant's creative ability. If there is online documentation of the project, please include the relevant URL. It is important to note that these two approaches, theoretical and practical, are not opposing but complementary. Two halves of a whole, neither one is privileged over the other. Instead, the MA+P curriculum is arranged to be cyclical: theory informs practice and practice informs theory. Students must engage as both design researchers and critical makers, not simply as auteurs.

Note: Completion of the MA+P major requires at least three years of study at USC. This means that all accepted transfer students will automatically enter the sophomore or junior cohort, regardless of their previous class standing. Students may submit a petition to complete the program in less than three years, but approval of this petition by the MA+P faculty committee should not be assumed and is not guaranteed.

Leveraging the power of STORYTELLING

The location of the Division of Media Arts + Practice within the renowned USC School of Cinematic Arts reflects the program’s continued interest in storytelling across genres and disciplines. MA+P courses explore the future of narrative, beginning with traditional film and animation styles and moving towards transmedia, interactive, mobile and immersive experiences. The division is also host to many research initiatives devoted to the study of digital storytelling.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do Media Arts + Practice students have previous authoring experience?

Admission to MA+P does not require previous experience creating media-rich projects. Instead, our faculty members are interested in students who are willing to explore new areas, invent new ways to communicate ideas and work together to shape the future of human experience through media forms.

What kind of student is attracted to this program?

MA+P applicants are innately creative people, but they also share strong critical thinking and reasoning skills. They often have interdisciplinary interests and are looking to combine multiple academic areas, such as digital media and anthropology or digital media and journalism.

The typical MA+P applicant is interested in all aspects of design and all types of digital media authoring (not just filmmaking). They are media-savvy; many have experimented in their free time with video editing, web design or graphic design software. Those who do not have digital media experience are gifted visual artists and/or creative writers. What all of these students share is an excitement for the innovative potential of emerging technologies, especially with regard to storytelling and narrative design.

If I join this major, can I still take courses in the other Cinematic Arts divisions?

Yes. Students are encouraged to take elective courses from the other divisions in the School of Cinematic Arts or from other departments and schools at USC.

Can I pursue a minor in another area?

Yes. MA+P students have a small number of elective units available, which allows them to pursue a minor in another academic discipline. In some rare cases, a student may even choose to pursue a double minor or a second major.

What opportunities are there for undergraduate research in MA+P?

The School of Cinematic Arts has several faculty-led research labs, and each Cinematic Arts faculty member and PhD candidate also conducts his/her own original research. MA+P undergraduates are encouraged to join these efforts by taking a position as a research assistant or by working in parallel with an existing initiative. Students will also conduct individual research as part of their culminating senior thesis project.

What are some examples of thesis projects that students have completed in past years?

The first cohort of students pursuing the MA+P BA will graduate in 2017 and have not yet completed thesis projects. Prospective students can refer to the thesis projects created by students in the Honors in Multimedia Scholarship program; the Honors program is a precursor to the BA, and the Honors projects are very similar to the innovative projects expected of students pursuing the BA.

Honors Thesis Showcase: http://map.usc.edu/showcase/

What kinds of jobs do MA+P students pursue after graduation?

MA+P students might go on to become digital media designers and producers, artists, visual strategists, creative technologists or researchers in emergent technologies. They will not be relegated to working solely within the entertainment industry—instead, they can take jobs in the sectors of education, communication, journalism, business and other areas which may require media expertise.

What differentiates this major from a communications major or a film production major?

A large part of the Media Arts + Practice major involves digital media authorship, whereas a communications degree typically does not include an authoring component (it is theory only). MA+P is much broader than a traditional film production program. Rather than focusing on film alone, the MA+P curriculum includes graphic design, web interactivity, mobile media and physical computing. The MA+P curriculum also contains a significant theoretical component (see “Critical Making” under Program Objectives).

Additional questions? Please contact:
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