

# Environmental Art + Social Practice MFA

Dear Prospective Student,

Here are some frequently asked questions we would like to share with our prospective students. Please visit <https://art.ucsc.edu/mfa> and/or email [artmfa@ucsc.edu](mailto:artmfa@ucsc.edu) with any additional questions.



**1. What size cohort is expected to join the MFA EASP program in Fall 2021?**

- a. The Art Department expects around 8 students to join the first EASP cohort in Fall 2021. Our selections will be yearly and we expect another 8 students in the Fall of 2022, and so on.

**2. What facilities will MFA EASP students have access to?**

- a. MFA students will have access to studios in the Hahn Art Building and to facilities in the Elena Baskin Visual Art Center at the main campus. Studios and facilities in the West Side Research Park at 2300 Delaware will be accessible in the second year. Some of the facilities at the main campus include:
  - i. HIVE makers space with 3D printers, computerized vinyl cutter, computerized paper cutter;
  - ii. Full featured woodshop including two laser cutters/etchers and CNC machine;
  - iii. Metal fabrication studio with several arc welding stations; a bronze and aluminum foundry;
  - iv. Black and white analog darkroom;
  - v. Painting studios, a full featured printmaking studio including lithography, intaglio, screen printing;
  - vi. Animation computer lab;
  - vii. State-of-the-art digital printing output facility with 17"- 44" Epson printers open 24/7;
  - viii. Lighting studio;
  - ix. Two sculpture studios;
  - x. And more!
- b. The Art Department plans to offer workshops to graduate students to help develop proficiency with the variety of materials and techniques made available in these facilities.

**3. Can MFA EASP students work on collaborative projects together?**

- a. Yes! Collaboration is highly encouraged between students in EASP, as well as with MFA students in Digital Arts and New

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Media, Social Documentary, and in other disciplines. The Hahn Art Facility is equipped with modular partitions, so students that choose to work together on a project may combine their spaces to make one larger space. Collaboration is considered a key element in our program. We encourage students to cross borders and to consider collaborating with non-human as well as human communities. The campus is inside a forest and in a very biodiverse region, which includes marine life.

- 4. Can MFA EASP students combine other disciplines with their art? For example, sciences, performance, music & sound, poetry & text, education, film, archaeology, farming, etc.**
- a. Yes! EASP students will be encouraged to take interdisciplinary approaches to their work. Diversity is welcome in the program in general, and the MFA EASP offers a space for students to cultivate diversity in the ways they approach these issues. There is no prescription for what the projects should be that students would pursue here, and the department's goal is to open up the field to things we can't yet imagine.
  - b. Interdisciplinarity is a key feature of the work of all EASP Art Faculty, as we combine ideas and skills across fields. Learn more about our work here: <https://art.ucsc.edu/mfa/faculty>
  - c. The EASP program will work with each student to connect them with appropriate people and resources to provide guidance and knowledge to support their thesis project when those needs extend beyond what EASP faculty can provide. For example, if a student wishes to incorporate poetry, Ronaldo Wilson in the Literature Department may be a good link; or if someone wants to learn about agroecology, they might consult with Stacy Philpott at the UCSC Farm; if they want to pursue a feminist studies, or prison abolition, or human rights dimension to their project, they might connect with Gina Dent, or Savannah Shange, or Silvana Falcon; if someone's research is related to mushrooms and multispecies collaboration, they may be able to connect with Anna Tsing from Anthropology and check out John Cage's amazing mycology collection; and, depending on their interest, they might want to work with someone outside the university, and we can help with that too. Prospective applicants are encouraged to explore the work of individual faculty members in different departments across the university, as well as in the Art Department.
  - d. There are a number of affiliate faculty from other

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departments across campus that have indicated interest in serving as advisors, instructors, and thesis committee members for the MFA EASP. As an example, Isaac Julien and Marc Nash are affiliate faculty with our programs. Taking one of Professor Julien's classes as an elective would be an interesting way to develop video installation work. As another example, affiliate faculty member Micha Cárdenas directs the Critical Realities Studio, a hybrid studio/lab that uses multiple realities, in art, to address critical global issues including climate change, racism and gendered violence, and working with her might be of interest to MFA EASP students. T.J. Demos is another affiliate faculty member who teaches courses in climate justice and activist art in the History of Art and Visual Studies Department and also runs the Center for Creative Ecologies.

- d. There are a number of examples of collaborations with research projects and sites at the undergraduate, graduate, and faculty levels.
  - i. The UC Natural Reserve System (<https://ucnrs.org/>) initially began for scientific research, but has since become open to artists as well. There is a desire for art and science collaborations from those working in these reserves. The project Unseen California (<https://www.unseencalifornia.com/>), established by EASP faculty member Karolina Karlic, creates opportunities for artists to engage with these reserves and offers a field study experience for artists in residence.
  - ii. The Institute of the Arts and Sciences (<https://ias.ucsc.edu/>) is an interdisciplinary exhibition and event forum at UCSC.
  - iii. Saul Villegas's Deep-Sea Coral Virtual Exhibition (<https://www.modernobysaulvillegas.com/deep-sea-coral>) is an example of a collaborative project between an undergraduate art student and the Seymour Marine Discovery Center.
  - iv. The OpenLab Collaborative Research Center (<https://openlabresearch.com/>) is dedicated to interdisciplinary innovation in the arts, sciences and technology.

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## 5. What are the curricular requirements for the MFA program?

- a. View a list of curricular requirements and a sample schedule of classes here: <https://art.ucsc.edu/mfa/courses>
- b. The backbone of the program is a sequence of studio classes. Students pursue their studio work throughout the two years of the program. That said, it is a more structured curriculum than a typical MFA, in that the program is focused on environmental art and social practice.
- c. Twenty units (four courses) of electives can be taken in departments across the university, specifically chosen according to the student's individual focus.
- d. The thesis project can be focused in a location outside of Santa Cruz. MFA students can use the summertime in between the first and second years of the program to begin work on their thesis.

## 6. Will there be any funding opportunities for MFA students?

- a. MFA students will receive two years of funding through Teaching Assistantships (TAships). A TAship includes coverage of resident tuition and health insurance (\$6,262.70/quarter), and a salary disbursed monthly (\$7,522.94/quarter). Here are links to funding and costs:
  - <https://arts.ucsc.edu/hr/teaching-assistants>
  - <https://graddiv.ucsc.edu/financial-aid/index.html>
  - <https://registrar.ucsc.edu/fees/registration/>
  - <https://financialaid.ucsc.edu/cost-to-attend/graduate-costs.html>
- b. MFA students will also receive a \$2,500 supplemental housing stipend each year until new graduate housing is built on campus. This stipend is given directly to the student with no restrictions as to how it can be spent.
- c. UCSC offers a number of fellowships that students may apply for, although these opportunities vary in size and availability, and are not guaranteed.
- d. At this stage, there is no funding available for materials.

## 7. How will non-CA residents deal with the nonresident tuition costs (NRST)?

- a. All non-CA residents will have the first year of NRST costs covered by the Art Department via funding from UCSC's Graduate Division. For US citizens who are non-CA residents, these students must establish California residency by the start of their second year in order to qualify for in-state tuition charges in the second year.

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- b. California residency can be obtained in a number of ways: obtaining a CA driver's license, registering a car in CA, registering to vote in CA, and opening a local bank account.
- c. Some non-CA residents may qualify for an exemption from NRST charges. These qualifications are listed on the University of California's Admissions website: <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/tuition-financial-aid/tuition-cost-of-attendance/ab-540-nonresident-tuition-exemption.html>
- d. International students will be offered a funding package for both first and second years upon admission, with offers made based on available funding for that year from the Graduate Division, and Fellowships. International students are encouraged to investigate funding opportunities to supplement what UCSC can provide. All efforts will be made to provide full tuition support for all MFA EASP students.

## 8. Which courses will be assigned TAships?

- a. A TA will work in one of the Art Department's undergraduate large lecture courses (2D Foundations, 3D Foundations, 4D Foundations, Writing for Artists, Photography, Digital Practices, Environmental Art).
- b. A TA will typically be asked to lead two sections with 25 students each, for a total of 50 students per quarter.
- c. A TAship is a 50% FTE appointment (20 hrs/wk).
- d. TAs do not receive course credit for the course they are assigned to.
- e. We understand the training and experience gained from teaching assistantships as an integral part of the graduate program and not just a parallel activity, especially considering how central education may be in art projects in the fields of environmental art and social practice. Furthermore, TAship provides opportunities for graduate students to advance their knowledge and gain valuable teaching experience that may benefit their research, intellectual and professional development, and career prospects. Finally, we see TAship as an interesting way for our graduate students to participate more actively in the diverse and vibrant UCSC community.

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## 9. What type of materials should be included in the application portfolio and statements?

- a. The Art MFA faculty are looking for a sense of the whole person through their application. The portfolio should include what you consider to be your best artistic work, as well as work that indicates the direction you would like to pursue. If you do not come from an art background, it is recommended that you provide some documentation of the kinds of projects you've been involved in that would support your move towards this graduate program. The Statement of Intent is important to support and further articulate what is visible in the portfolio and what you would like to do in the program.

## 10. What sort of employment opportunities are available for students completing this MFA?

- a. We expect that artists going through this program will build careers in the field of environmental art and social practice artmaking as these forms relate to environmental justice, social justice, public policy, and multimedia art practices, criticism, and theory. Graduates may find employment in the art world and in academia as well as qualifying for job opportunities in hybrid and developing fields, including in green technology, environmental policy, public arts policy, community planning, public space design, and other forms of advising and design where creative approaches to problem-solving is called for. Depending on the focus of their thesis project, graduates' access to academic positions is not limited to art practice fields, but may include political theory, humanities and social issue curricula, as well as hybrid and cross-disciplinary art programs linked with science, social science, and the humanities. Graduates may also work as arts administrators in a variety of institutions or seek employment in curatorial positions, journalism, research and editorial positions, as well as in audio-visual production and in the digital economy. Some graduates may also work as self-employed artists or in unique positions that defy existing job categories and are specifically tailored to their skills and interests.
- b. You can find examples of people who have built unusual career paths related to social and environmental art practice:

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- i. among some of the speakers at the ArtPlace Summit 2020:  
[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuRFvudqol\\_sotvOQNDY6p1v5fvqtcgqBx](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuRFvudqol_sotvOQNDY6p1v5fvqtcgqBx)
- ii. among presenters at the Imagining America National Gathering 2020: <https://iagathering.org/>
- iii. at Monument Lab's website:  
<https://monumentlab.com/fellows>
- iv. at Mural Arts Institute's Environmental Justice Program:  
<https://www.muralarts.org/program/public-art-and-civic-engagement/environmental-justice/>
- v. by reading about work by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Fellows:  
<https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/programs/grants/artist-as-activist-fellows>
- vi. the Blade of Grass Fellows:  
<https://www.abladeofgrass.org/fellowship-program/>
- vii. through researching other Social Practice and Environmental Art and Justice projects, organizations, and artists.



**11. Is a car required to get around Santa Cruz?**

- a. No, a car is not needed. Santa Cruz is a bike-friendly city and offers a bus system that is free for UCSC students. A car would be convenient to reach the areas surrounding Santa Cruz, but there are public transportation options to travel to these places as well.

**12. Will there be another informational session for prospective students before the application deadline?**

- a. Yes, the department is planning for a second info session and virtual Open House to be held on December 11, between 12 noon and 2 pm PST. This second session will provide the opportunity for meeting and talking with Art Department faculty.

**13. What are your plans for remote vs in-person instruction in the fall?**

- a. We are practicing optimism by expecting to offer in-person classes in the fall, while developing fall-back plans simultaneously. Because the core EASP classes will be small, and some meeting often off-site, we hope to set up hybrid

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classes for the EASP core classes to meet safely in person even if the virus is still impacting us. However, we cannot guarantee what next fall will bring, and are happy to stay in touch with all applicants and also with students who are accepted as plans unfold in response to changing conditions.



**14. What is a typical day / week for a EASP grad student?**

- a. This will vary somewhat depending on the quarter. For one example, in the fall quarter of the first year, EASP students will take three courses, one studio (@ 5 hrs contact per week), one 5-credit seminar (3 hrs/week), and one 2-unit seminar (1.5 hrs/week), and, if TAing, will be working 20 hours per week as a TA. The core studio course provides a base for the student's studio work, which will also develop inbetween scheduled class times. Continuity should begin to develop across the core courses, providing coherence, and the TA ships extend art practice through pedagogy.

**15. What kinds of projects do you anticipate that graduate students might make in this program?**

- a. We do not have preconceptions about the work that will be created, but look to the students to surprise and inform us. That said, we will encourage work that engages with both people and places, an ecological approach that includes humans in an understanding of ecology, and includes environmental justice in an understanding of social practice. We will also encourage students to move beyond thinking about art as representation only, and into thinking of art projects as direct engagements with places and communities, facilitated with, and manifested through, media and creative processes of all sorts.

Thank you for your interest in our MFA program, and we look forward to your application!