

Concept Paper for New Degree Program Proposal

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I Title, Department, College

Design Studies Masters Degree Program

Vignelli Center for Design Studies/CIAS

Design Studies Masters Program Committee:

- Deborah Beardslee, MFA, Associate Professor, CIAS
- Joyce Hertzson, MFA, Professor, CIAS
- Tina Lent, Ph.D., Professor, College of Liberal Arts
- Bruce Ian Meader, MFA, Associate Professor, CIAS
- R. Roger Remington,
Massimo and Lella Vignelli Distinguished Professor of Design, CIAS

II Abstract

RIT is the home of thirty-eight original and comprehensive collections of modernist design, including the complete life work and intellectual property of Massimo and Lella Vignelli. These archival collections, housed in the Cary Library and the Vignelli Center for Design Studies, are unique and unparalleled cultural and artistic resources, for which RIT has earned international recognition. To further enhance the renown and value of these collections, and build on them as scholarly resources, we are proposing a new masters degree program in Design Studies that situates them as the heart of its curriculum. Working from original historical archival materials, the program addresses the need for a new kind of design professional who will lead the discourse on contemporary design in the 21st century. This is a unique and innovative two year program that includes a summer studying abroad, which will ensure students have international experience, a critical component of Design Studies that will prepare them for successful careers in a global society. Not only does this program conform to RIT's Strategic Plan, but it dovetails with other programs at the university, and with the goals and worldview of the Vignelli Center for Design Studies, out of which it has been developed.

III Description of the New Program

a Overview and Justification of New Program

This proposed two-year masters program in Design Studies focuses on research and scholarship, as differentiated from traditional applied graduate design programs. Design Studies, as defined by prominent designers Massimo and Lella Vignelli, and design historian Victor Margolin, prioritizes a research-based design culture as an independent discipline, much like the relationship between the study of art history and the practice of studio arts. In his book, *The Vignelli Canon* (2010), Massimo Vignelli states that design cannot become a legitimate profession without the study of history, theory, and criticism as central components of design education, delivered by design scholars. Victor Margolin goes even further in advocating that design studies comprises research agendas that focus on the study of design practice, design products, and design discourse, as well as the study of design history and theory (Multiple Tasks, 253). Despite numerous conferences, publications, and initiatives centering on Design Studies, the discipline has only just begun to be integrated into the canon of graduate programs, and its curriculum is far from being fully formalized in the terms theorized by Margolin. Although a few Design Studies graduate programs already exist, they are significantly different from what we are proposing. Programs at the School of Visual Arts in New York City, Harvard, and the University of Wisconsin/Madison have a narrow scope that falls far short of realizing the larger scholarly, and more globally relevant, mission of Design Studies as conceptualized here. A new Design Studies program launched in the fall of 2012 at Parsons: The New School for Design Studies, on the other hand, has a broader and more diffuse approach than ours, and lacks an international component. This proposal represents a creative conceptualization of Design Studies as an inter-and trans-disciplinary field of scholarly endeavor that provides both breadth and depth.

It is fitting that this broader revision of Design Studies is being developed at RIT where the Vignelli Center for Design Studies resides. This Center demonstrates an institutional receptivity to Vignelli's belief in the foundational role of design in creativity and to his goals of education, preservation, advocacy, collaboration, public good, and globalism, that are embodied in the Center's mission. This proposed degree program fully integrates all of these goals. Furthermore, the Vignelli Center for Design Studies conforms to Margolin's suggestion that within a university setting, design studies should be housed in a flexible interdisciplinary center rather than in a department (Multiple Tasks, 252). Just as the Vignelli Center for Design Studies grew integrally out of the previous archival acquisitions and curricular programs on campus, it has now become a magnet that is attracting new archives and collections, international scholars, and is a catalyst for the development of this proposed degree program. The Center has already begun to function as a place where researchers who are developing new research methodologies for studying design can engage each other, as well as scholars in other disciplines, another key component of Margolin's ideas for Design Studies (Multiple Tasks, 255).

b Summary of New Program Curriculum

The core of this two-year Design Studies program comprises a year-long sequence of courses in the three distinct areas that define the program's comprehensiveness and uniqueness. The first area, Design Studies, includes the history, theory, and criticism of design. The second area, Design Methodologies, focuses on the theory, process, and heuristics of design methods and systems design. The third area, Archival Studies, considers the theory, methodology, and practice of collections and archival management. In their second year of the program, students will choose one of the three areas as a concentration, in which they will take three related electives. The purpose of this year is to deepen and focus students' knowledge base, as well as to provide experiential and research opportunities that will inform their thesis planning and implementation. To ensure that their education includes a global component that enhances their understanding of international influences in design and supports the Vignelli Center for Design Studies' goals, students will be required to study abroad at a partnering school in England, Italy, Germany, or other approved institutions, during the summer between the program's two years (see Appendix 1, *Curriculum Table*). Excellence, innovation, and global relevance are all characteristics of this curriculum.

This proposed masters program is object- and research-based; its pedagogical heart resides in RIT's unique, archival collections in the Vignelli and Wallace Centers (see Appendix 2, *Curriculum Diagram*). Working directly with these primary source materials, students will conduct critical research, analysis, and interpretation. The program emphasizes scholarly research and will include the annual publication of students' graduate theses done as part of their graduation requirements. Students in this program will be contributing to a new discourse on design evolving from this broad-based curriculum, enabling them to enter a wide range of careers. Most importantly, they would be adherents to the Vignelli Center credo that design should work for and enhance the public good.

IV Fit with RIT Mission and Strategy

The program focuses on preparing students for successful careers in a global society, which is the core vision of the university's Strategic Plan. The five strategic dimensions enumerated as the goals and objectives of an RIT education—career focus, student success, scholarship, global society and community—are integrally woven into the foundational structure of this program as well. The program is also inter- and trans-disciplinary and experientially-based. Internal and external (particularly global) partnerships ground the academics in the real world and teach the lesson of broader collaboration as a means of achieving individual success, while also building a community of scholars. Finally, the program's emphasis on innovation and creativity in forging a new approach to design careers is a prime example of what defines all of RIT's programs.

V Synergy with Other Programs

Within the existing CIAS/School of Design curricula there are bachelors and masters level courses in graphic design, industrial design, interior design, and 2D/3D computer-based design that can inform and be informed by this program. Further, the College of Liberal Arts currently offers bachelors level courses in museum studies, public history, urban and community studies, and communication. Additional interdisciplinary connections exist in GCCIS, with undergraduate courses in information sciences and technologies, and in the SCOB, where undergraduate courses in management, marketing, leadership, and ethics are offered. The newly approved masters program in Architecture includes opportunities for common coursework that intersect with Design Studies.

VI Administrative Structure for the New Program

The graduate program in Design Studies would be housed in CIAS in the School of Design. It would be administered by the Vignelli Center for Design Studies and would be chaired by Professor R. Roger Remington, the Massimo and Lella Vignelli Distinguished Professor of Design.

VII Enrollment Management Expectations and Sustainment

In the research done to conceptualize this program, detailed information on twenty-eight existing undergraduate and graduate programs at universities in the U.S. using the name Design Studies, was analyzed. This program is unique in the scholarly approach it takes to Design Studies, as differentiated from the more traditional graduate skills-based preparation for professional design practice at other universities. It is also unique in its focus on scholarship based on archival design materials. We agree with the analysis from Enrollment Management, (see Appendix 3) that this program “would allow RIT to leverage existing resources and expertise, including CIAS faculty... as well as resources including the Vignelli Design Center and the Cary Graphic Arts Collection.” We also agree that nationally ranked MFA degrees and the reputation of the Vignelli Center would draw attention and add credibility to the program. We do not agree, however, that programs at Parsons, Harvard, Wisconsin and Arizona represent significant competition. As stated previously, in section 3A, the program at Parsons is broader and more general, offering only a single track, while the programs at the latter are both narrower and more specific, and in the case of Harvard, focusing specifically on architecture. We also anticipate that new student enrollment would be between 5–10 students per year initially, but project an incrementally increasing growth based on the record of growth in existing CIAS programs. The program has the potential to draw from bachelors’ programs on campus, such as programs in Graphic Design, Industrial Design, New Media Design and Imaging, Interior Design, 3D Digital Graphic Design, photo and film in CIAS, as well as from such COLA undergraduate programs as Communication, Museum Studies, Philosophy, and Sociology/Anthropology. The academic nature of this program stresses career flexibility and prepares students to pursue current career paths while defining new cross-disciplinary opportunities.

VIII Impact on Resources

Due to the integration of Design Studies with existing programs, courses, faculty, and facilities, there is a limited need for the infusion of new capital to implement this program. The program will incorporate many existing courses that have been converted to the semester curriculum. Additional courses designed specifically for Design Studies will be open to students in all programs, thereby adding, rather than subtracting, from College and University resources. As the Vignelli Archives are the key to the uniqueness of this program, the fact that CIAS has already made the commitment to hire a full-time archivist means that no additional lines will be necessary. Design Studies program courses will take place in the current Vignelli Center Helen Hamlyn Trust Study Room and archives, therefore not impacting the number of available classroom spaces on campus. As with any graduate program, there will be a need for funds for graduate assistantships and scholarships.

IX Conclusion

This program will produce professionals grounded in academic disciplines with strong skills in research, writing, communication, and critical thinking. As such they will be prepared to enter existing and new career paths, as well as to define new cross-disciplinary opportunities. Students from this program could become professional educators, critics, authors/editors, design managers, archival managers, archivists, and collections managers, or to continue on to advanced study leading to the Ph.D.

References

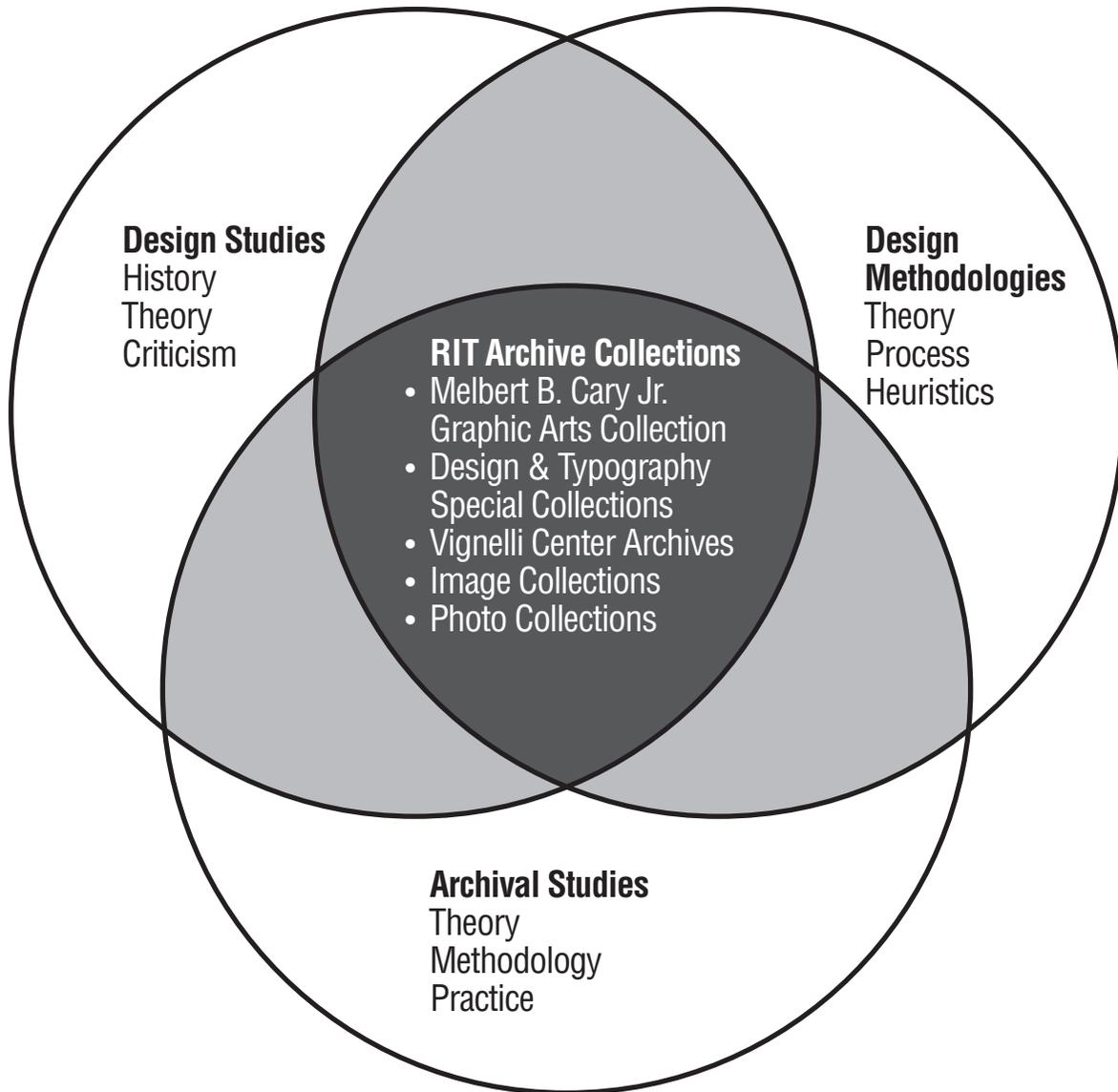
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Proposed Masters Degree Program in Design Studies Curriculum Table

Year 1			Year 2	
Fall Semester 1 10 credits	Spring Semester 2 10 credits	Summer 3 credits	Fall Semester 3 10 credits	Spring Semester 4 3 credits
1 Design Studies Design Studies Colloquium	1 Thesis Planning and Research	3 Global Design Experience	1 Thesis Development	3 Thesis Implementation
3 Design History I Design History Colloquium	3 Design History II Modernist Design History		3 Elective 1	
3 Archival Studies I Archival Studies Colloquium	3 Archival Studies II Collections Care and Management		3 Elective 2	
3 Design Methodologies I Design Methodologies Colloquium	3 Design Methodologies II Modules and Case Studies		3 Elective 3	

Elective Courses
will be composed of
new and existing
graduate courses,
drawn from CIAS and
other RIT Colleges
as appropriate.

Design Studies



The Vignelli Center for Design Studies
is dedicated to design excellence through

- Education**
- Preservation**
- Advocacy**
- Collaboration**
- Public Good**
- Globalism**

Design Studies

The proposed Masters degree in Design Studies presents both challenges and opportunities.

A non-studio based masters degree in design emphasizing scholarly achievement would allow RIT to leverage existing resources and expertise including CIAS faculty and expertise as well as resources including the Vignelli Design Center and the Cary Graphic Arts Collection. In addition, nationally ranked MFA degrees, and the reputation of The Vignelli Design Center would draw attention and add credibility to the program.

The student market for a non-studio masters degree program in this area however is somewhat limited, and there is significant competition. Other similar programs include the MA Design Studies at Parsons School of Design (started Fall 2012), Master in Design Studies at Harvard University, MS Design Studies at University of Wisconsin, and Master of Science in Design at Arizona State University. The programs, typically 1½–2 years, are relatively small with enrollments ranging from fewer than 20 to as many as 100 students (Harvard). Most programs are located in large urban areas, and offer access to significant university and regional resources.

The program emphasizes the history and philosophy of design, the development of research skills for academic and professional careers, and prepares students for careers in fields related to design research, writing, curating, and criticism. Opportunities in the field, while broad, are somewhat limited and many will require that students continue in a Ph.D. program. We would anticipate that new student enrollment in the program would be relatively small, 5–10 students, and would be affected by the length of time to complete the program, program cost and scholarship/assistantship opportunities available, and opportunities for paid internships and cooperative education.