Glasgow School of Art Course Specification
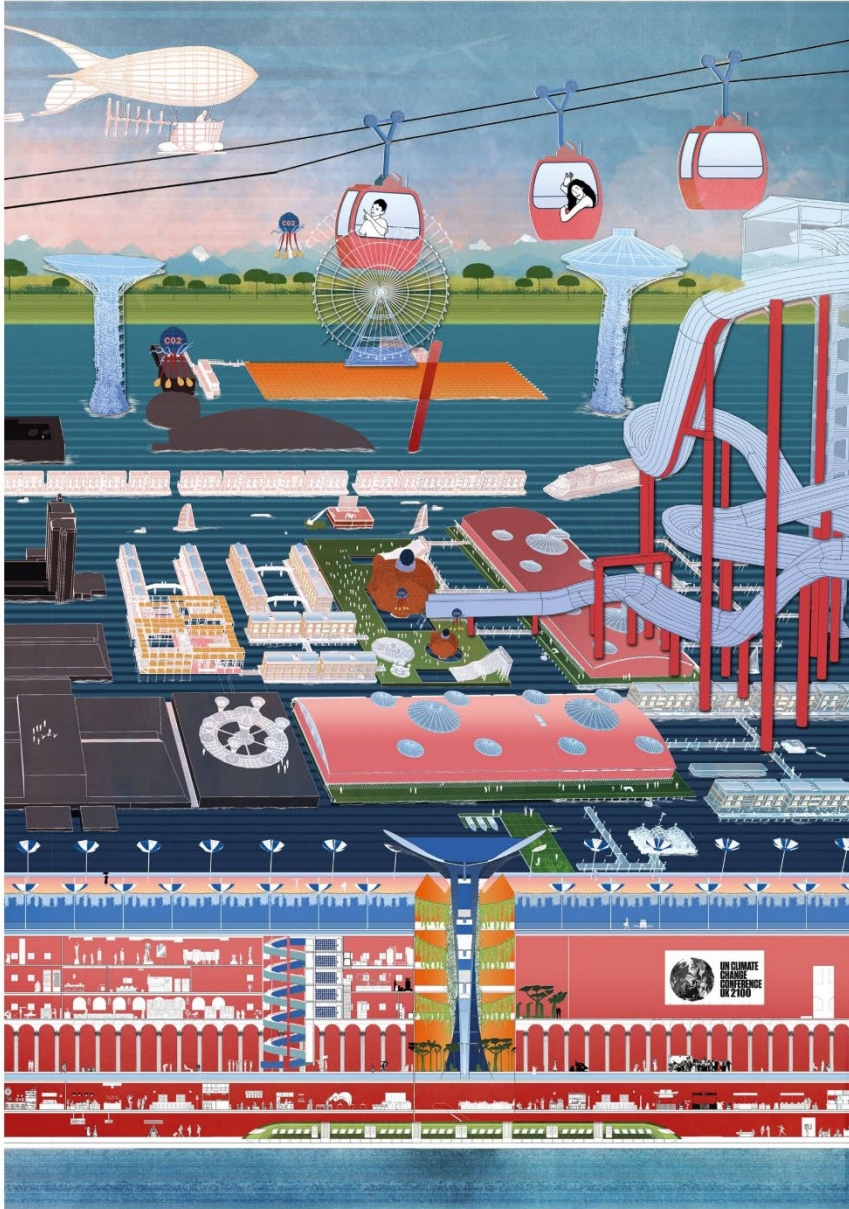# Course Title: Final Design Thesis

Image Credit: June Goh, Mackintosh School of Architecture, Year 5 2022-23

Please note that this course specification is correct on the date of publication but may be subject to amendment prior to the start of the 2025-26 Academic Year.

Course Code	HECOS Code	Academic Session
FDT5105		2025-26

Course Title	Final Design Thesis
Course Contact	Miranda Webster

Credits	60
SCQF Level	Level 11
When Taught	Semester 1 and 2

Associated Programmes	Diploma in Architecture
Lead School	Mackintosh School of Architecture
Other Schools	N/A
Date of Approval	PACAAG April 2025

Course Introduction

This course is designed to give students the opportunity to explore architecture as a response to the contemporary challenges facing the 21st Century European City. The investigative studies, urban design strategies and comprehensive design projects undertaken in the Studio Work 4 course offer the foundation for this exploration and study through the Final Design Thesis.

The course is designed to facilitate students' command of the professional skills, design processes, research methods, communication skills, architectural knowledge and representation skills required to create safe, sustainable and efficient design proposals, while expressing architectural character and meaning. Students are supported to master their critical thinking and design methodology, which is underpinned by specific knowledge delivered through subject specialist courses in Professional Studio and Architectural Technology.

The Final Design Thesis is a self-directed piece of work and provides an opportunity to define an individual ethical standpoint and to pursue and find expression for personal architectural interests and preoccupations. The Final Design Thesis aims to equip students with a critical, reflective and speculative research methodology and should clearly evidence the collection, analysis and synthesis of data, out of which an intellectual position has been theorized and supported through an architectural proposal that is comprehensively investigated and resolved. Students are expected to operate with professionalism, and self-direction in anticipation of their future career path.

Students are taught through a combination of group and individual tutorials, visits, talks and skills workshops. Through formative feedback, peer reviews, and formative assessment, students apply their learning on the course across the 2 semesters. This is evidenced as a holistic representation of the Final Design Thesis, demonstrating the collection, organisation, analysis, synthesis of research and resultant architectural proposal. The Final Design Thesis brief is accompanied by a selection of carefully selected texts which situate the design project within a wider architectural discourse.

The course offers students the opportunity to integrate the specialist knowledge delivered in the Subject Area courses; the Architectural Technology and Professional Studio.

Throughout the course students are supported to develop and demonstrate the professional competencies and graduate attributes required to meet the standards for Exemption from the ARB and RIBA Part 2 Examination in Architecture.

Course Aims

The aims of the course are to:

professionalism: facilitate a student's command of the knowledge of professional ethics in terms of collaborative, inclusive, sustainable, and safe design principles to produce an individually defined architectural position evidenced through a self-directed design proposal

design/create: facilitate a student's command of a creative design process in the production of a self-directed design proposal

research: facilitate a student's command of advanced design led research skills in the production of a self-directed design proposal

communication: facilitate a student's command of the integration of analogue and digital media to visually and verbally communicate structured thinking and a self-directed design proposal

skills: facilitate a student's command of critical reflection, communication, and a structured methodology, with digital and analogue tools, to produce a self-directed design proposal

knowledge: facilitate a student's command of the creative use of advanced architectural theories, concepts, and techniques to address social, ethical and climate change challenges to produce a self-directed design proposal

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the Course, students will be able to **synthesise, speculate and articulate:**

professionalism: professional ethics in terms of collaborative, inclusive, sustainable, and safe design principles to produce a self-directed Final Design Thesis evidenced through a design proposal in the context of the European City

design/create: a creative design process in the production of self-directed Final Design Thesis evidenced through a design proposal in the context of the European City

research: advanced design led research skills in the production of a self-directed Final Design Thesis evidenced through a design proposal in the context of the European City

communication: the integration of analogue and digital media to visually and verbally communicate structured thinking and a self-directed Final Design Thesis evidenced through a design proposal in the context of the European City

skills: critical reflection, communication, and a structured methodology, with digital and analogue tools, in the production of a Final Design Thesis evidenced through a design proposal in the context of the European City

knowledge: the creative use of advanced knowledge of architectural theories, concepts, and techniques to address social, ethical, and environmental challenges in the production of a Final Design Thesis evidenced through a design proposal in the context of the European City

Indicative Content

Students will formulate and synthesise intellectual positions with arguments that can be supported and evidenced in an architectural proposal. This demands that students iterate strong visual, verbal, and written arguments in support of their architectural intentions and the construction of the thesis over the course of the academic year.

The gathering and organisation of information is tested through architectural speculations to engage with an initial individual line of enquiry and generate a pace through the first phase of the thesis investigations. Through discussion, collaboration, speculation, drawing and making, these tests are used in the development of the thesis in relation to context, programme, and technology. The thesis work uses the theme of 'The Ethical City' to engage the student in debates, and research through design that demonstrates an architectural proposal to addresses contemporary concerns facing the 21st century European city.

During the course students will:
- Synthesise research carried out through a wide range of resources to support the generation of knowledge of a European city and the thesis investigation
- Demonstrate a critical reflective working methodology, encapsulating a critical architectural position with maturity of judgement in relation to an individual line of enquiry
- Articulate a clear set of architectural criteria, framed though research, that supports the architectural proposal in line with the thesis and associated ethical considerations in relation to context, programme + technology
- Integrate environmental strategies and sustainable technologies within the thesis investigations and demonstrate these through the architectural proposal
- Collaborate with peers in a range of group sizes to support the co-construction of knowledge and understanding, and to engage in critical debates around contemporary architecture
- Present their design proposals at various stages of development to various audiences in a range of settings using a range of media

Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

Pedagogy:

Studio is both a learning space and a form of reflective practice where knowledge, skills and attributes are transformed into design competencies. Integration of the six learning domains enables design work to be grounded in specialist subject areas, Architectural Technology/ HAUS/ Professional Studio, and enacted through design projects. The course is intended to develop students' mastery of iterative and reflective design practices while deploying their critical, ethical, and professional position as an architect and designer. Student learning is developed through the course, supported by staff and student field trips, which enable students to address real-world issues in the context of specific communities and places. Groupwork and collaboration are core to the student learning experience, enabling students to both work productively with others while contextualising the role of the architect in relation to other disciplines and practices. Studio tutors along with visiting guests offer students insights into the constantly changing world of architectural practice. Independent learning is fostered throughout the year.

Delivery:

The course is delivered through regular studio sessions, using a range of learning and teaching activities, including individual and group tutorials, design reviews, seminars, workshops and lectures by staff and invited guests. Design forums offer the opportunity for critical discourse

around issues raised by the studio project, enabling staff and students to enter into a dialogue around contemporary architectural issues. A hybrid approach to learning through in-person and on-line support offers students access to flexible and inclusive learning. Private study consists of both staff-directed study and independent student-directed study.

Timetable:

Studio tutorials are delivered on a weekly basis either in groups or individually with pin-up tutorials and design reviews at set points throughout the session concluding with design forums at the end of the project.

Canvas:

The virtual learning environment tool Canvas is used for the dissemination, discussion, and access to relevant course information, and to signpost students to other relevant teaching and learning platforms used by GSA.

Indicative Contact Hours	Notional Learning Hours
60	600

Description of Formative Assessment and Feedback Methods
Formative activities are provided during the course, offering students the opportunity to obtain ongoing staff and peer feedback through presentation, discussion, and review of the Final Design Thesis.

This course is taught over two semesters. Formative written feedback will be provided for each component at an appropriate mid-way point in Semester 1 and Semester 2.

Written feedback will be provided via Canvas.

Formative assessment and feedback provided throughout the course fosters reflective learning while supporting the Summative graded assessment and feedback process, which generally happens at the end of the course.

Description of Summative Assessment arrangements
Summative assessment is undertaken at the end of the course and is designed and delivered to support student learning through evaluation of the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for each course, aligned with the professional competencies required for architectural practice. Summative assessment in studio courses is undertaken through coursework assignments in the form of studio design projects. Coursework assignment submissions involve visual and text-based submissions utilising both digital and physical tools and formats. Written feedback is provided on all summative assessments.

Reassessment opportunities where a student has not passed the course are outlined in the GSA Code of Assessment.

Description of Summative Assessment Method	Weight %	Submission week
FDT: Preliminary Design Report Students are required to submit an Illustrated Design Report (1500 words) including preliminary design led research investigations and contextual research and analysis.	33%	Semester 1 Week 12

FDT: Design Proposal	67%	Semester 2 Week 12
Students are required to submit a Portfolio of work which will be holistically assessed. The Portfolio will incorporate the presentation of their Final Design Thesis, comprising of a curated physical exhibition and a Final Design Report (1000 words) including a developed design led research output and contextual research and analysis.		

Exchange/Study Abroad	
Can this course be taken by Exchange/Study Abroad students?	No
Are all the students on the course taught wholly by distance learning?	No
Does this course represent a work placement or a year of study abroad?	No
Is this course collaborative with any other institutions?	No
If yes, then please provide the names of the other teaching institutions	

Reading and On-line Resources
Supporting the course, an indicative reading and on-line resource list is accessible via Resource Lists. This list will be reviewed and updated annually. Supervisors, tutors and peers will provide further recommendations appropriate to student's chosen research subject.