

**Glasgow School of Art Course Specification  
Course Title: Design History & Theory Stage 4 - 40 Credit  
Dissertation**



Image: Jordan Gallacher

*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 Academic Year.*

Course Code	HECOS Code	Academic Session
UDHT4D		2026-27

<b>Course Title</b>	Design History & Theory 40 Credit Dissertation
<b>Course Contact</b>	Nicholas Oddy, Head of DHT

<b>Credits</b>	40
<b>SCQF Level</b>	10
<b>When Taught</b>	Stage 4, Semesters 1 and 2

<b>Associated Programmes</b>	BA (Hons) Communication Design BA (Hons) Fashion Design BA (Hons) Fashion Narrative BA (Hons) Interaction Design BA (Hons) Interior Design BA (Hons) / MDes Silversmithing & Jewellery Design (Integrated Masters) BA (Hons) Textile Design
<b>Lead School</b>	School of Design
<b>Other Schools</b>	
<b>Date of Approval</b>	PACAAG April 2026

Course Introduction
<p>This course comprises the 40-credit option for the Stage 4 submission to Design History and Theory. The 40-credit dissertation represents a substantive and expanded piece of self-directed critical inquiry and research. The dissertation is structured around a <b>self-directed, individual and expanded research project</b>, on a topic of the student's choice, and it constitutes an opportunity for students who wish to expand the development of their writing and research skills. Students are allocated a supervisor who supports and guides them through the research, writing and submission process.</p> <p>The 40-credit dissertation course offers Stage 4 students a flexible range of 40-credit modes of submission to support agency and differing and extended research methods, topics and interests. Details of the modes of submission are introduced to students in Stage 3, Semester 2 and published in advance of the course commencing in Stage 4. All modes of submission are supervised on an individual basis and indicative modes of submission for this course include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Extended Essay:</b> a discursive, interpretative and in-depth analytical study on a topic of the student's choice, that sets out an expansive critical argument on a particular subject (indicative word count: 10,000 words)</li> <li>• <b>Extended Critical Journal:</b> the student researches and contextualises their own studio practice by comparing it to those of others and situating it in an expanded historical and cultural context (indicative word count: 10,000 words)</li> <li>• <b>Extended Curatorial Rationale:</b> an exhibition proposal on a topic of the student's choice that selects art or design artefacts and offers extended and expansive critical interpretation as if curating an exhibition in a particular site (indicative word count: 10,000 words)</li> </ul>

- **Extended Visual Essay:** an illustration-led submission focusing on in-depth, close, and comparative visual analysis, with a substantial part of its content told through images and captions supported by a critical and analytical text (indicative word count: 6000 words and at least 60 images)

### Course Aims

The aims of this course are to:

1. encourage an active and expanded critical engagement with source materials according to individual research interests and historical and/or contemporary contexts
2. advance students' confidence in taking critical and expanded control of their chosen topic
3. equip students with an advanced vocabulary to engage in expanded discussion on issues of increasing relevance to their own studio practice
4. advance and resolve skills in formally presenting an expanded debate and discussion in critical, historical, and cultural studies
5. support understanding of the importance of expanded self-directed and critically reflective work in critical, historical, and cultural studies

### Course Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to:

1. understand and critically apply selected research methods according to individual research interests and chosen and expanded visual and textual strategies
2. recognise and demonstrate through expanded critical discussion that different critical opinion can be reached on written, visual and material culture
3. employ an expanded range of key terms and definitions within relevant discourses on history, cultural studies, design, and material and visual culture
4. apply resolved and critical visual and textual skills in presenting expanded discussion in history, cultural studies, design, and material and visual culture
5. show understanding of the importance of self-directed and critically reflective expanded work in history, cultural studies, design, and material and visual culture

### Indicative Content

The course will introduce students to:

- extended self-directed study and research
- multi-disciplinary and expansive approaches to critical inquiry
- global perspectives on material and visual culture, politics and ethics
- languages and vocabularies of critical and contextual studies
- research sources and principles of research
- independent argument and critical analysis

### Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

This course encourages an independent, tutor-supported approach that emphasises individual and in-depth self-directed study in critical and contextual studies.

Learning and teaching methods support students to engage in an explorative and individual approach to learning and include:

- briefings
- tutorials with allocated supervisor
- group presentation
- reflection and self-evaluation

Independent learning skills will be developed and supported through guided activities and digital online learning resources available on Canvas.

A variety of teaching and learning approaches, including in person, blended and online learning and delivery, are employed to support student engagement with the curriculum and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Indicative Contact Hours	Notional Learning Hours
7	400

### Description of Formative Assessment and Feedback Methods

Students are supported in their learning through a range of activities with staff and peers, such as individual tutorials offering ongoing formative feedback as they progress through the course at plan, interim draft, and final draft phase.

Formative feedback supports students in developing and refining their work towards submission for summative assessment.

Formative feedback offers students the opportunity to make a work-in-progress presentation to peers and tutors, receiving feedback to support the development and refinement of their project work towards submission for summative assessment.

As a course over two semesters, the course includes a formative assessment point in which a student submits formative work. This is assessed and feedback, feedforward, and indicative interim performance are recorded and made available to the student.

### Description of Summative Assessment arrangements

The assessment brief describes and provides guidelines for the summative assessment, with students selecting from a flexible choice of modes of submission within the 40-credit dissertation course.

Summative assessment is designed to support students to reflect on and communicate work produced in response to the assessment brief and learning and teaching activities associated with the course.

Submissions will be assessed and moderated in line with the Code of Assessment.

Description of Summative Assessment Method	Weight %	Submission week
Self-directed dissertation (indicative word count 10,000 words or stated equivalent, as per assessment brief for selected mode of submission)	100	Semester 2 Week 9

#### 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

Given the self-directed and individual nature of learning in this course, each student compiles their own reading and resource lists as the research progresses. The student's supervising tutor and peers provide further recommendations appropriate to the student's chosen area of research and focus.