

**Glasgow School of Art Course Specification
PD Dissertation**



Image: Future Experiences (Emma Defty, Eric Chen, Lesley McCluskey, Marily Papanastasatou)

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
		2026-27

Course Title	PD Dissertation
Course Contact	Irene Bell

Credits	20
SCQF Level	10
When Taught	Stage 4, Semester 1

Associated Programmes	BDes Product Design
Lead School	School of Innovation and Technology
Other Schools	N/A
Date of Approval	Academic Council 5 November 2025

Course Introduction

This course represents a substantive piece of critical inquiry and research commensurate with SCQF level of study 10. It allows for the pursuit of independent thematic study into topics of personal interest and the research and critical understanding that underpins the writing of a dissertation.

The course offers Stage 4 students a range of modes of submission within the dissertation to support agency and differing research methods, topics and interests. Details of the modes of submission are introduced to students in Stage 3, Semester 2 and are 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:

- **Essay:** a discursive, interpretative and analytical essay on a topic of the student's choice, that sets out a critical argument on a particular subject (indicative word count: 5000 words)
- **Critical Journal:** the student researches and contextualises their own studio practice by comparing it to those of others and situating it in a larger historical and cultural context (indicative word count: 5000 words)
- **Curatorial Rationale:** an exhibition proposal on a topic of the student's choice that selects art or design artefacts and offers critical interpretation as if curating an exhibition in a particular site (indicative word count: 5000 words)
- **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: 3000 words and at least 30 images)

Course Aims

This course provides students with the opportunity to:

- Participate in an active engagement with source materials according to individual research interests and contemporary contexts
- Advance students' confidence in taking critical control of their chosen topics
- Equip students with an advanced vocabulary to engage in discussion on issues of increasing relevance to their own studio practice
- Further develop the core skills required to formally present debate and discussion in a historical, social, political, ethical and technological context

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

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

- Apply appropriate research methods according to individual research interests
- Utilise a range of critical opinion to formulate a cohesive and expansive narrative.
- Employ a wide range of key terms and definitions to reinforce the academic rigour of the written discourse
- Apply the core principles of critical writing and verbal presentation
- Demonstrate the capacity to produce self-directed and original critical work commensurate with SCQF Level 10 expectations

Indicative Content

This course covers the following content:

- Self-directed study and research
- Multi-disciplinary approaches to critical inquiry
- International perspectives on material culture, politics and ethics languages and vocabularies of critical studies
- Research sources and principles of research
- Independent argument and critical analysis

Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

In this course, students will be expected to increasingly take significant responsibility for the management of their learning. Emphasis will be placed on the gradual encouraging of self-reliance and personal academic development.

This course is designed as a text-based experience which supports students in their introduction to critical learning and practice.

The principal teaching strategies employed on this course are:

Supervision - individual sessions with a dedicated member of staff with knowledge of research and/or thematic interests relevant to support students' dissertations.

Tutorial (group and individual) - designed to provide academic support through individual or group meetings with staff to discuss the different directions and aspects of projects or course-based activities as well as progress on the programme/course overall.

Presentation (visual, text, and verbal) - an important learning device used to generate peer debate regarding the generation, development or overall success of student work within the context of their dissertation. Students present work to their peers and tutors through appropriate

visual, textual and verbal means (including: models or mock-ups, portfolios, videos, slideshows, etc.).

Self-Directed Learning - self-directed study emphasises the importance of autonomy, reflection upon personal learning and project work within an individual and/or a collaborative environment.

Guest Speaker sessions (when relevant) – include input from visiting lecturers/guests from industry and academic staff enabling students access to, and understanding of, relevant contemporary practice, research and commercial context. Talks arranged at the School of Innovation and Technology are often open to all students regardless of year group or programme.

Lectures and Seminars - often used to introduce key knowledge to support written work and used to disseminate theoretical, methodological, contextual and historical knowledge and address specific issues related to each course which can be used to underpin critical writing. Lectures also have the broad aim of generating further debate in seminars, tutorials, studio sessions or further enquiry in self- directed learning or research.

Review (group and individual) - enables the development of key presentation skills and encourages students to receive and give constructive feedback regarding each other’s work, and an opportunity to debate project input. These may be tutor-led, tutor-facilitated, or peer-led allowing students to fully develop their research and critical thinking skills within a reflective discursive framework.

This course is supported by a virtual learning environment tool (Canvas) for the dissemination, discussion and access to relevant course information, and signpost to other relevant teaching and learning platforms used by GSA.

Indicative Contact Hours	Notional Learning Hours
5.5	200

Description of Formative Assessment and Feedback Methods

Students are supported in their learning through a range of formative assessment activities that enable students to reflect on their learning as they progress through the course. This includes:

- Regular feedback from tutors through engagement in individual and group tutorials, seminars, discussion groups and presentations
- Class discussion and peer input

Engagement with formative assessment is a mandatory requirement. Students receive formative assessment at staged intervals throughout the research and writing process

Students will receive written and oral formative feedback during one-to-one tutorial sessions with their supervisor.

Description of Summative Assessment arrangements

Summative assessment is designed to support students to reflect upon their learning on completion of a course. It provides an evaluation of progress made and the level of achievement identifiable in the work submitted.

Following an assessment presentation, students will submit a written dissertation for assessment. Grades will be awarded using the GSA marking scheme following/adhering to the assessment regulations in the Code of Assessment.

Description of Summative Assessment Method	Weight %	Submission week
Dissertation: Students will submit a 5000 words dissertation or stated equivalent, as per assessment brief for selected mode of submission)	100	Week 12

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	N/A

Reading and On-line Resources
Reading and on-line resources to be compiled by individual student, augmented by recommendations from supervisors.