

Glasgow School of Art Course Specification
Course Title: Circular Economy Design

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 2026-27 Academic Year.

Course Code:	HECOS Code:	Academic Session:
PDIN204		2026-27

1. Course Title:
Circular Economy Design

2. Date of Approval:	3. Lead School:	4. Other Schools:
PACAAG April 2025	School of Innovation and Technology	This course is available to students on PGT programmes which include a Stage 2 elective.

5. Credits:	6. SCQF Level:	7. Course Leader:
20	11	Dr Paul Smith

8. Associated Programmes:
This course is available to students on PGT programmes which include a Stage 2 elective.

9. When Taught:
Stage 2, Taught online only

10. Course Aims:
Circular Economy Design is a 20 credit elective course. The circular economy has become synonymous with a more sustainable and equitable society. One that eliminates waste while creating social, economic and ecological value. Achieving circularity requires working collaboratively and recognising the roles governments, industry and citizens can play in a more environmentally conscious future. This course focusses on the exploration of the key schools of thought for a circular economy, how they are applied today, and how they could be applied in a future society. In keeping with all Stage 2 electives, it broadly aims to: • Encourage interdisciplinary, critical reflexivity from within an open set of choices; • Foster deep investigative approaches to new or unfamiliar areas of practice and theory; • Cultivate self-directed leadership and initiative-taking in both applied and abstract modes of practice/ study not necessarily associated with a student's particular creative specialism; • Enable flexible, ethical exploration and connection of diverse knowledge and understanding within a specialist programme of study.

In specific terms it aims to:

- Develop a critical understanding of the theories, the practices, political and social issues surrounding the circular economy;
- Develop a critical understanding of how theory and practices surrounding a circular economy are enacted in an individual creative practice or creative domain;
- Develop competency to conceive, manage, and deliver research related to a domain specific issue in the Circular Economy.

11. Intended Learning Outcomes of Course:

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

- Demonstrate a critical understanding of the main theoretical, practical, and political perspectives surrounding the circular economy in context of design practice;
- Critically analyse circular economic theory and approaches in the context of a design domain;
- Demonstrate critical ethical assessment of application of circular economy theory and approaches in the context of a design domain

12. Indicative Content:

This course focuses on the study of the Circular Economy and applicable theories and practices within the domain of design. It covers the appropriate selection and application of Design and Circular Economy tools and methods. It emphasises the approach of cross disciplinarity within a design context. In general, via lectures, guest talks, seminars, and tutorials the course will cover topics such as:

- The circular economy as a set of theoretical approaches to design
- Sustainable and circular material practices
- Global perspective on circularity
- Circular communities
- The circular economy in practice

Particular focus will be given to the key school schools of thought surrounding the circular economy. This will be supported by an exploration of appropriate philosophical and ethical concerns.

13. Description of Summative Assessment Methods:

On this course, students will be assessed on:

- Their level of critical understanding of the main theoretical, practical, and political perspectives surrounding the circular economy in context of design innovation practice.
- Their ability to critically analyse a pertinent issue related to the application of circular economic theory and approaches in the context of a design domain
- Their ability to clearly communicate the outcomes of a research project using written and visual techniques
- Their ability to demonstrate critical ethical assessment in the context of the circular economy

Assessment Method	Description of Assessment Method	Weight %	Submission week (assignments)
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Essay	A 3500-word written essay (this should include visual material, e.g., diagrams and mappings, as well as a bibliography).	100	Week 11, Stage 2
or			
Presentation	A 10-minute recorded presentation	100	Week 11, Stage 2
13.1 Please describe the Summative Assessment arrangements:			
Attendance at all weekly online sessions is mandatory.			
For this course, assessment of student work will consist of:			
A 3500-word essay, which presents the personal account of the outcome of a research project. The text may include such aspects as the relevance of the research to their design domain, the student's motivations, theoretical perspective, method(s) applied, decision-making, findings along with a reflection on the value of their research and its outcome. The document could contain visual material such as photographs, diagrams and mappings. (100% weighting) - Submitted week 11, Stage 2			
or			
A 10-minute recorded presentation, which presents the personal account of the outcome of a research project. The presentation may include such aspects as the relevance of the research to their design domain, the student's motivations, theoretical perspective, method(s) applied, decision-making, findings along with a reflection on the value of their research and its outcome. The presentation slides could contain visual material such as photographs, diagrams and mappings. (100% weighting) - Submitted week 11, Stage 2			

14. Description of Formative Assessment Methods:
Engagement with formative assessment is a mandatory requirement.
Project work is formatively reviewed with verbal feedback in project online crits throughout the life of the course. Individual written work is formatively reviewed with written feedback by submission of draft text in the form of an extended abstract. Individual presented work is formatively reviewed with written feedback by submission of short, recorded presentation.
14.1 Please describe the Formative Assessment arrangements:
Formative review is provided through tutorials, an interim text submission or interim presentation submission, wherein students receive feedback on work in progress.

15. Learning and Teaching Methods:	
Formal Contact Hours	Notional Learning Hours
20	200
15.1 Description of Teaching and Learning Methods:	
The course will be based on teaching sessions focusing on:	
• Theory (lectures); • Project definition (seminars, brief writing and tutorials); • Project enactment (Interim submission and tutorials); • Production (tutorials).	

16. Pre-requisites:

Successful completion of PGT Stage 1.

17. Can this course be taken by Exchange/Study Abroad students?	Yes
18. Are all the students on the course taught wholly by distance learning?	Yes
19. Does this course represent a work placement or a year of study abroad?	No
20. Is this course collaborative with any other institutions?	No
20.1 If yes, then please enter the names of the other teaching institutions:	
N/A	

21. Additional Relevant Information:

This course focusses on the technical, social and political landscape of the circular economy, and the synthesis of circular economic theories and practices into contemporary design practice, as a method of developing environmental and socially sustainable design. The course emphasises place-based innovation and natural assets through socially engaged practice. It enhances the established competencies of GSA students and introduces the practical and theoretical landscape of the Circular Economy.

Students will be encouraged to identify areas of exploration within the theme and identify external experts relevant to their projects.

22. Indicative Bibliography:

The course indicative reading and online resource list is accessible via [Resource Lists](#). This list will be reviewed and updated annually to reflect course content and subject developments.

Design strategies for the circular economy

- Benson, E. (2017), *Design to Re-Nourish*, CRC Press
- Braungart, M., & McDonough, W., (2009), *Cradle to Cradle. Remaking the Way We Make Things*, London, Vintage
- Braungart, M., & McDonough, W., (2013), *The Upcycle: Beyond sustainability – designing for abundance*, Tantor Media Inc
- Brocken, N. M. P., (2016) *Product design and business model strategies for a circular economy*, Journal of Industrial and Production Engineering. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681015.2016.1172124>
- Chapman, J. (2021), *Meaningful Stuff*, MIT Press
- Thakara, J. (2017), *How to Thrive in the Next Economy: Designing Tomorrow's World Today*, London, Thames and Hudson

Circular economy theory

- Ghiselline, P., et al., (2015) A review on circular economy: the expected transition to a balanced interplay of environmental and economic systems *Journal of Cleaner Production* [online]. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652615012287?via%3DiHub> [Accessed: 21st February 2018]
- Kalmykovaa, Y., Sadagopanb, M., and Rosado, L. (2017), Circular economy – From review of theories and practices to development of implementation tools, *Resources, Conservation & Recycling* [online]. Available

at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2017.10.034> [Accessed: 21st February 2018]

- Kirchherr, J., Reike, D., and Hekkert, M. (2017) Conceptualizing the circular economy: An analysis of 114 definitions, *Resources, Conservation & Recycling* 127 (2017) 221–232
- Stahel, W, J. (2019) *The Circular Economy: A User's Guide*, Routledge
- Webster, K. (2016), *The Circular Economy: A Wealth of Flows*, Ellen MacArthur Foundation Publishing

Social context

- Boylston, S. (2019), *Designing with Society*, Oxford, Routledge
- Rowarth, K. (2018), *Doughnut Economics*, Random House
- Russel, M. (2019), *Capitalism & Disability*, Haymarket Books
- Karl-Henrik, R. (2000), *Tools and concepts for sustainable development, how do they relate to a general framework for sustainable development, and to each other?*, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Elsevier
- Gold, S., & Mies, A. (2021), *Mapping the social dimension of the circular economy*, *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Elsevier
- Walker, A., M. (2021), *Assessing the social sustainability of circular economy practices: Industry perspectives from Italy and the Netherlands*, *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, Elsevier

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