

USC ROSKI DROP-OUT FACT SHEET: DEAN’S STATEMENT

—Fr: Erica Muhl, Dean of the Roski School of Art and Design, Los Angeles, CA, May 15, 2015 (IN ITALICS)
—MFAnoMFA (USC Roski School MFA Class of 2016) clarifications, May 22, 2015 (IN BOLD)

EM *"I regret that several¹ of our MFA students have stated they will leave the program over issues that were presented to us and that we considered to have been resolved,² specifically having to do with financial aid and curriculum."*

- 1) In fact it is not "several" MFA students, but rather the entire group of first-year students dropping out in a collective action of protest.
- 2) Resolution was never reached, despite our repeated and consistent good-faith efforts to assure our promised funding and curriculum with the Dean and Vice Provost. We made it clear that we were only requesting the fulfillment of the University's stated terms upon which we entered the MFA Program. Once Dean Muhl chose to rescind these promises, the original terms were never reinstated (see the accompanying "Funding", "Curriculum", and "Faculty" documents for original terms and promises and the Roski School's departure from them).

EM *"The USC Roski MFA program remains one of the most generously funded programs in the country. These students would have received a financial package worth at least 90 percent of tuition costs in scholarships and teaching assistantships."*³

- 3) A forced renegotiation of our recruitment terms took place during the Spring 2015 semester, in which our promised TAship funding transitioned from allocation based on "satisfactory progress" to "competitive". If the newly-implemented (April 21st, 2015) "application" process did not yield the student a TAship, 65% of the tuition costs would be covered by scholarships. Had the Dean honored our original recruitment promises, cash scholarships + TAship would have totalled 82% of tuition costs; once the Dean chose to rescind the recruitment funding promises as of Spring 2015, our cohort was no longer offered funding assurances with any degree of specificity (see "Funding" document).

EM *"The school honored all the terms in the students' offer letters."⁴ We offered the students scholarship support with an option to apply for a TAship in their second year. This was in keeping with practice at Roski except for a recent three-year period when two-year TAships were the norm. Subject to the students meeting the standard requirements of basic preparedness and satisfactory progress, they would have been first in line for TAships on their return for a second year (except for one student who already had full financial support)."*⁵

- 4) See the accompanying "Funding" document. The email from the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs Penelope Jones, an agent of the Roski Administration, expressly clarified and described the funding offered in each award letter. In an effort to recruit our cohort, the Roski Administration represented to us that if we enrolled, we would receive second-year TAships, without application or qualification. Each of us reasonably relied upon that representation to make a major life and career choice, to our detriment. This is

more than an "unfortunate mistake," as described by the Vice Provost. The Roski Administration's representations in the award letter, in conjunction with this further email communication by the Assistant Dean, effectively created a legally enforceable contract—a contractual obligation based upon the legal principle of *promissory estoppel*. This contractual obligation was materially breached by the University's administrators in the Spring 2015 semester.
5) "Priority", "first in line", "merit-based" and "competitive" awarding of our promised TAships were terms never clarified by the Roski administration, nor presented as binding in any way when the renegotiation coercion took effect in Spring 2015. Our cohort asked the University's administration several times for written, explicit clarification of our cohort's funding and curricular terms; as of this date, the University has refused this request.

EM *"Changes are made to the curriculum on an ongoing basis. Minor changes were made to the MFA curriculum prior to the students' arrival in fall 2014,⁶ mainly involving one elective in the summer of 2015. Studio visits and study tours remain part of the curriculum as the students requested."⁷ (Clarified 5/18/15: Studio visits have always been and continue to be a core component of the curriculum over fall and spring semesters. For-credit studio visit courses for the 6-week summer session were discontinued in 2014, but were reinstated for the summer of 2015 at the students' request.)"*

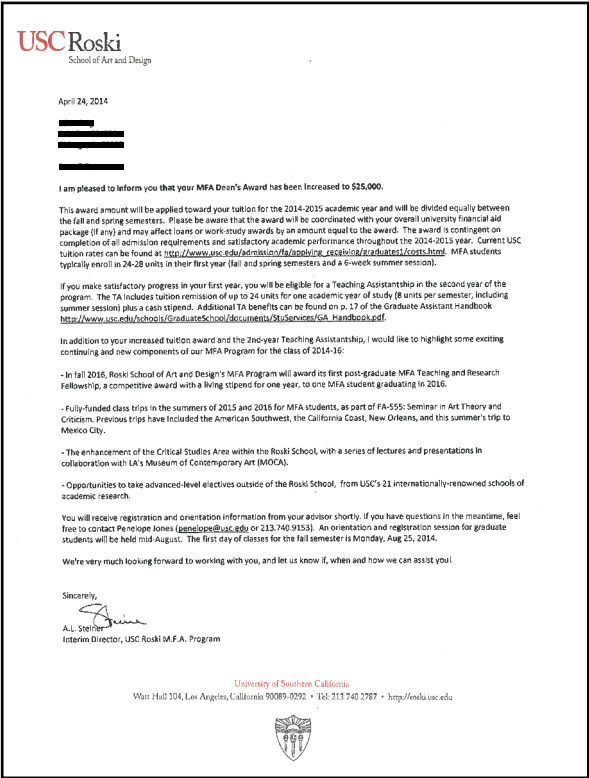
- 6) These changes had not been made at the time we were recruited, accepted and enrolled in the MFA Program, nor were we informed that they were forthcoming. The curricular and faculty changes are significant (see the accompanying "Curriculum" and "Faculty" documents).
- 7) We had all chosen to attend the Program based on the quality of the designated MFA faculty, noted studio artists as listed on the USC Roski School website during our recruitment, acceptance and enrollment (see the accompanying "Faculty" document). As of May 10, 2015, we had no idea if there was designated MFA faculty or who/how we would work with faculty in the 2015-2016 academic year, despite requesting clarification regarding this central matter several times. This lack of certainty as to our Graduate advisory faculty all but eliminated the central tenant and culture of the MFA Program we chose to enter.

EM *"I have met with the students at length and hope for an opportunity to continue engaging them in a full and open conversation."*⁸

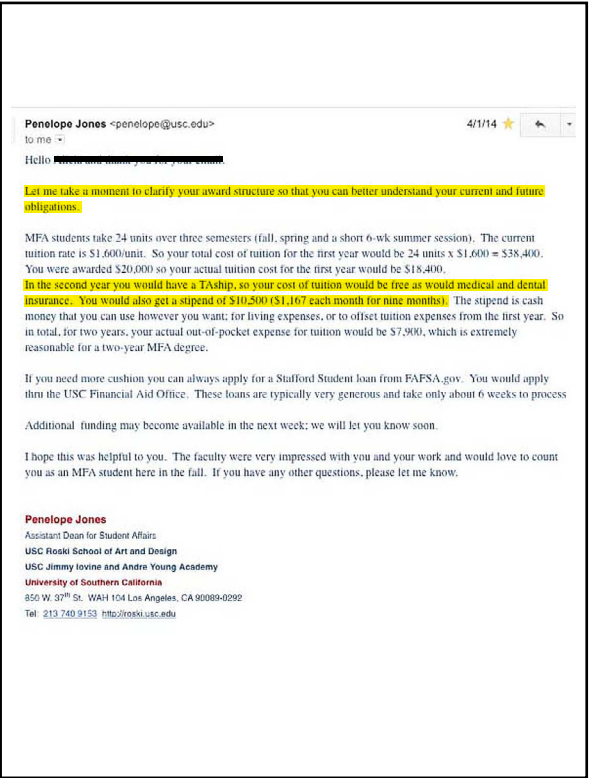
- 8) Our cohort's dire concerns were met with hostility, obsfucation and dismissal during each of our seven meetings with University administrators, which were uniformly unproductive. Even in Muhl's most recent public statement, she continues to avoid or manipulate the truth, as we have clearly outlined. Additionally, we have received no communications or messages since May 15, 2015 from the University reinstating the terms of our program of study or funding offers. Therefore, it is clear that there is no interest on the University's part in "open" dialog or resolution of these matters.

USC ROSKI DROP-OUT FACT SHEET: FUNDING

PROMISES MADE DURING RECRUITMENT



Award Letter—April 24, 2014



Email from Asst. Dean of Student Affairs—April 1, 2014

Under the promises made during the recruitment, with the exception of one IAF scholarship student, the funding is as follows:

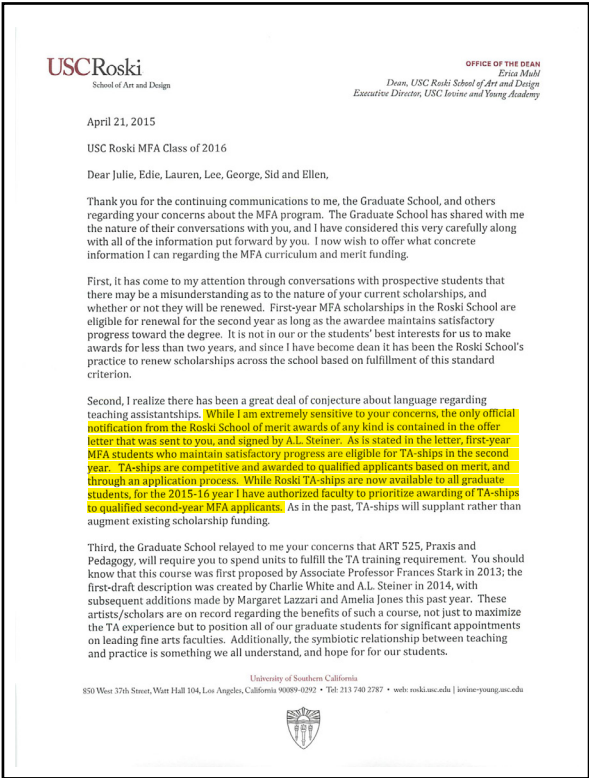
First Year of Tuition _____	\$38,400
First-year Scholarship _____	\$25,000.
Second year TAships _____	Free Tuition (\$38,400), teaching stipend (\$10,500), medical and dental benefits
Total cost of Tuition per Student _____	\$13,400

Scholarships and TAships would cover 83% of the total tuition cost. Among the group, based on USC's loan dispersal for cost-of-living, the average student would take out \$37,626.20 in loans to cover tuition and cost-of-living.

With the second-year funding promised, each student would graduate with **\$37,626.20 in debt.**

—The email from the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs Penelope Jones, an agent of the Roski Administration, expressly clarified and described the funding offered in each award letter. In an effort to recruit our cohort, the Roski Administration represented to us that if we enrolled, we would receive second-year TAships, without application or qualification. Each of us reasonably relied upon that representation to make a major life and career choice, to our detriment. The Roski Administration's representations in the award letter, in conjunction with this further email communication by the Assistant Dean, effectively created a legally enforceable contract—a contractual obligation based upon the legal principle of *promissory estoppel*. This contractual obligation was materially breached by the University's administrators in the Spring 2015 semester.

FORCED RENEGOTIATION OF TERMS AS ENROLLED STUDENTS



From Dean—April, 21, 2015, pg. 1

Without the promised TAships, with the exception of one IAF scholarship student, if the student did not receive the “competitive” TAships, the funding is as follows:

First Year of Tuition _____	\$38,400
First year Scholarship _____	\$25,000
Second Year of Tuition _____	\$38,400
Second Year Scholarship _____	\$25,000
Total cost of Tuition per Student _____	\$26,800

Scholarships would cover 65% of the total tuition cost. Among the group, based on USC's loan dispersal for cost-of-living, the average student would take out \$75,252.40 in loans to cover tuition and cost-of-living.

Without the promised TAship, each student would graduate with **\$75,252.40 in debt.**

—The dean's letter on April 21st, 2015 claiming that "the only official notification from the Roski School of merit awards of any kind is contained in the offer letter sent to you " is not true. The students were recruited with both the award letter and further communication from Roski administration clearly stating TAships for the second-year without further application. Therefore, USC created a legally enforceable obligation that has the force of a contract derived from their initial representation to students, based upon the legal principle of promissory estoppel.

USC ROSKI DROP-OUT FACT SHEET: CURRICULUM

USC WEBSITE WHEN STUDENTS WERE RECRUITED

48 captures

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2013 2014 2015

USC Roski School of Art and Design

Master of Fine Arts

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Program Course and Thesis Requirements

The MFA is a two-year degree in the production and theory of art, preparing students to pursue careers as professional artists. This represents two full semesters and a summer mini-semester of residency each year.

At least 48 units are required for the MFA, to be distributed as follows:

- FA 515 Visiting Artist Forum, 6 units
- FA 520 Individual Studies, max 16 units
- FA 555 Seminar in Art Theory and Criticism, 8 units
- FA 550 Seminar: Contemporary Issues, 4 units
- FA 551 Fine Art and Interdisciplinary Studies, 8 units
- 400- or 500-level electives outside of Fine Arts, 4 units
- FA 594a/b Thesis, 4 units

First-year MFA students are evaluated by the faculty during reviews held at midterm and at the end of each semester.

Thesis Requirements

Successful completion of the MFA thesis is required before a student is recommended for the Master of Fine Arts degree. The primary requirements for the MFA thesis are a solo exhibition by the student in the first spring semester, a written thesis, and the completion of a written thesis class. Required in conjunction with the solo exhibition is a formal review and oral defense of the thesis exhibition with the student's appointed thesis committee.

MFA Courses

A full listing of Roski School of Art and Design courses, including descriptions, can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/rosci/>

1st Year - Fall

Course Number	Title	Units
FA 515	Visiting Artist Forum	1 unit
FA 520	Individual Studies	2 units
FA 550	Seminar: Contemporary Issues	1 unit
FA 551	Fine Art & Interdisciplinary Studies	4 units
		8 units

1st Year - Spring

Course Number	Title	Units
FA 515	Visiting Artist Forum	1 unit
FA 520	Individual Studies	2 units
FA 550	Seminar: Contemporary Issues	1 unit
FA 400/500 level	Elective	4 units
		8 units

1st Year - Summer

Course Number	Title	Units
FA 515	Visiting Artist Forum	1 unit
FA 520	Individual Studies	3 units
FA 555	Seminar in Art Theory & Criticism	4 units

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May 2014

The MFA curriculum as it existed when we were accepted and recruited to attend the program was built around an Individual Studies (FA 520) component that offered three to four studio visits per semester with each of the four designated MFA faculty members, an intensive Crit Class (FA 550) that met 15 times per semester and afforded each MFA student the opportunity to present twice per semester, and a robust Visiting Lecture Series (FA 515) that brought between 10-14 visitors to campus each semester and provided MFA with three studio visits each with pre-selected visitors. Other components included the annual Special Topics Theory/Criticism course (FA 551) aimed specifically at graduate student artists and curators. This curriculum had been crafted and refined by designated MFA faculty members including Jud Fine, Sharon Lockhart, Tala Madani, Frances Stark, A.L. Steiner, and Charlie White.

NEW USC WEBSITE

2 captures

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Master of Fine Arts

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Program Elements

Overview

The USC Roski MFA is designed to maximize each student's individual studio experience, and its instructional model is focused on critical dialogue as provided by regular studio visits with faculty and guest artists and scholars, and group critiques with student peers. Students also take courses with USC Roski's renowned Critical Studies faculty that emphasize leading intellectual and artistic histories, understanding the complexities of theories applied to the visual arts, and addressing global art practices. Program electives provide a broader platform for experimentation, and encourage students to explore the expansive possibilities for complementary fields of research at one of the world's leading research universities. This curricular depth coupled with USC Roski's intellectual and artistic reach, its position on the Pacific Rim and in one of the world's major arts capitals, and its ability to provide a vast array of cross- and interdisciplinary opportunities for its students offers an unparalleled environment for advanced study and practice.

Individual Studies

Students work with distinguished faculty and visiting artists and scholars through a series of private studio visits. Visits typically occur weekly, but may occur more or less frequently, as determined by individual student needs and faculty advisors.

Group Critique

Students gain insight and perspective through a weekly seminar that investigates issues relative to current directions in the visual arts. Analysis and implications of forces contributing to conceptual development is provided by student peers, as moderated by faculty.

Global Art

Capitalizing on USC's initiatives that promote thinking globally across disciplines, USC Roski graduate programs focus on global art and cultural histories, theories, and practices. As a way of acknowledging the limits of Western perspectives, courses such as Global Art 1 and Global Art 2 address visual culture in a universal framework via a changing focus on specific regions and case studies. A sensitivity to cultural difference and contrasting ways of making and understanding the visual arts addressed in class through an attention to primary examples around the world is key to these courses. For the Global Art sequence, specialists in particular regions of visual culture outside of Europe and North America address the role of the concept of the "global" with and after colonialism. In Global Art 1, students also have the opportunity to participate in an international study tour that invites an in-depth look at a specific region. Recent specialists for this course have included USC faculty in American Studies & Ethnicity and visiting faculty with expertise in art and visual culture of Latin America and the U.S., Mexico border region.

Visiting Artist and Scholar Seminar (VASS)

The Visiting Artist and Scholar Seminar is linked to USC Roski School's annual Roski Talks lecture series, which features public presentations by prominent artists, designers, writers and curators throughout the academic year. Presentations typically include a group discussion that allows students, faculty and the public to raise questions or problems and explore ideas. First year students in the MFA and MA programs also attend a closed-session seminar with the visitor and USC Roski faculty, engaging in intensive dialogue on issues posed by the lecture/discussion and previously assigned readings.

Resident Artist and Scholar Program (RASAP)

The Resident Artist and Scholar Program provides second year MFA and MA students an opportunity to engage in close conversation with a visiting artist, scholar, curator, historian, or critic over a more extended and intensive residency period. Opportunities for students include series of studio visits, group lectures or critiques, seminars and individual mentoring sessions.

Critical Studies

The critical studies curriculum features courses on the history of art, exhibitions, pedagogy and aesthetics, with a focus on contemporary art and theory. Through specialized coursework, students will also gain a broad and deep understanding of the construction of "art" as a concept, including in relation to teaching and exhibition practices.

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May 2015, <http://roski.usc.edu/mfa/program-elements.html>

The revised curriculum was formed and finalized by the Dean and faculty administrators outside of this MFA faculty group after we enrolled. It weakened and/or removed each of the above elements, diluting components such as the Visiting Lecture Series down to where few visitors would come each semester and no studio visits with them were assured. These revisions were written by individuals without experience teaching in or administering an MFA program. The MFA program we agreed to attend featured a curriculum written by and for practicing studio artists. The revised curriculum has a different focus and does not reflect a program that any one of us would have elected to apply to or attend.

2 captures

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Electives

Students are able to take electives outside of the Roski School, allowing them to explore disciplines and fields that relate to and augment their studio practice. USC is renowned for its arts schools, including Creative Arts, Dramatic Arts, Music, Architecture, and Dance, all of which provide a rich array of topics and perspectives as presented by leading film makers, playwrights, composers, choreographers, artists, performers, and theorists. Departments such as Art History, American Studies and Ethnicity, Gender Studies, Creative Writing, Philosophy, Comparative Literature, and others contribute to the vibrancy of cross-disciplinary intellectual discourse across USC, and offer innumerable additional opportunities for Roski MFA students.

Opportunities for Exhibition

MFA students are provided with a number of exhibition opportunities, including Open Studio events, first year exhibitions, and individual thesis exhibitions. The MFA gallery is a well-appointed, 2100 square foot space with two professionally constructed movable walls, a lighting grid, and roll up door for insulation of large scale works.

Thesis

As a capstone to their degree, all Roski MFA students are required to mount a thesis exhibition under the auspices of their thesis committee. Additionally, each student is required to submit, according to Roski and Graduate School guidelines, an accompanying written thesis.

Facilities

The MFA Program is housed in the Graduate Fine Arts Building (BTL), located three blocks north of USC's main University Park Campus, at the intersection of South Power and 30th streets. Along with spacious studios for every MFA student, the building features the Gayle and Ed Roski Master of Fine Arts Gallery, a stunning, 2000-square-foot gallery dedicated nearly exclusively to student exhibitions.

MFA students have 24-hour access to the following graduate facilities and equipment:

- individual studios
- computer lab
- residency lab
- digital still cameras
- projection
- 4K format equipment
- video and sound recording and editing equipment

Complete program details are contained in the [USC Catalogue](#).

Current course offerings are contained in the [USC Schedule of Classes](#).

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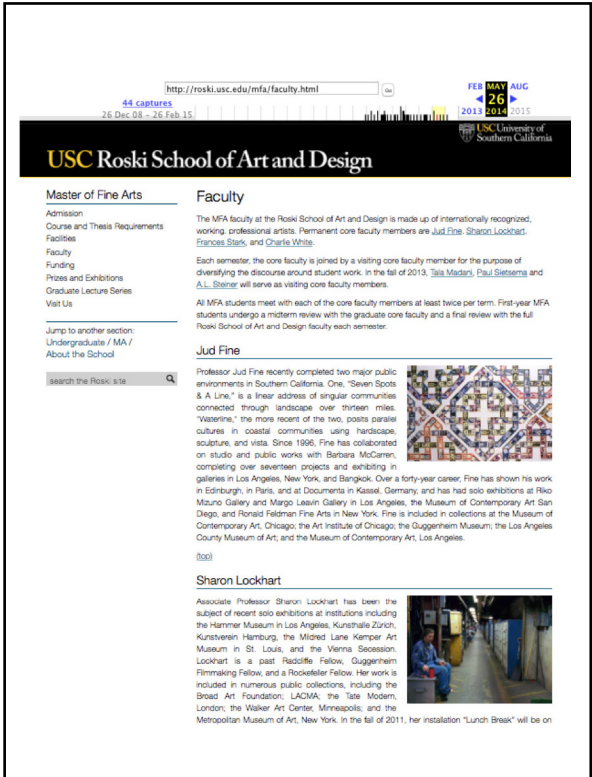
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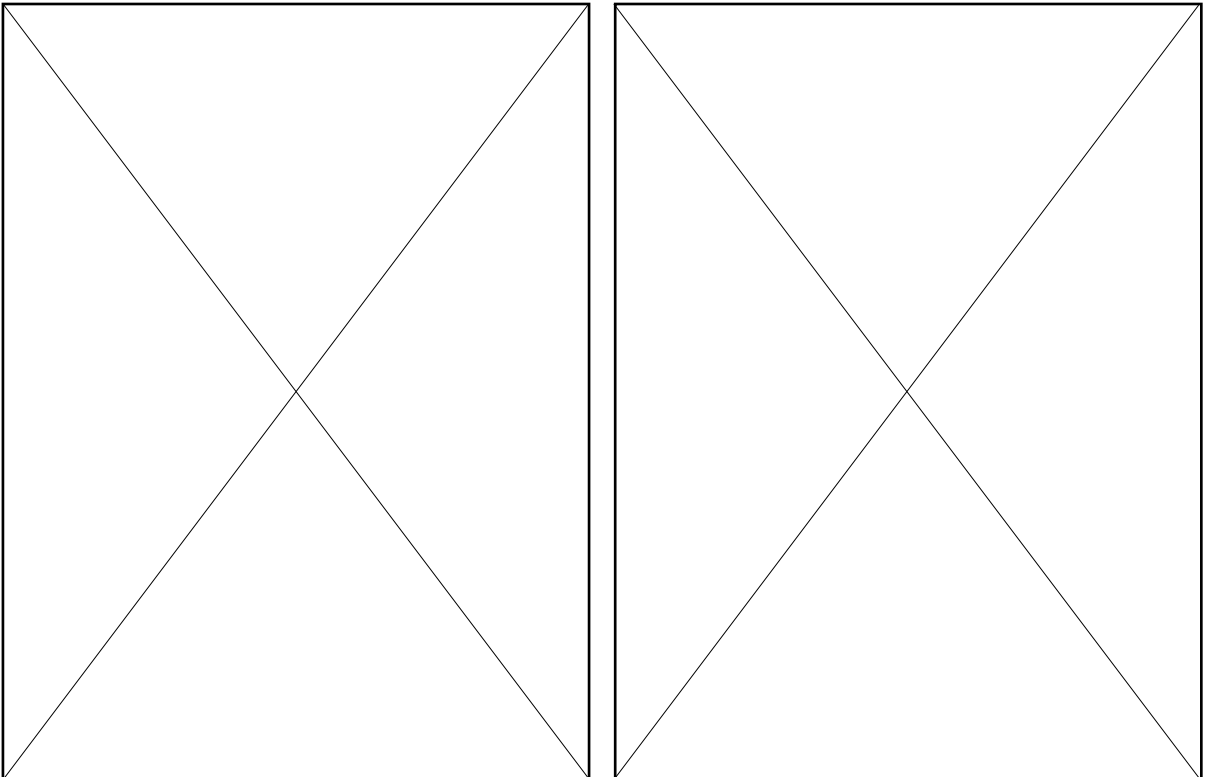
May 2014, partial listing of faculty

The MFA curriculum as it existed when we were accepted and recruited to attend the program was built around an Individual Studies (FA 520) component that offered an average of three to four studio visits per semester with each of the four designated MFA faculty members.

"The MFA faculty at the Roski School of Art and Design is made up of internationally recognized, professional artists. Permanent core faculty members are Jud Fine, Sharon Lockhart, Frances Stark, and Charlie White."

"Each semester, the core faculty is joined by a visiting core faculty member for the purpose of diversifying the discourse around student work. In the fall of 2013, Tala Madani, Paul Sietsema, and A.L. Steiner will serve as visiting core faculty members. All MFA students meet with each of the core faculty members at least twice per term."

NEW USC WEBSITE



The group repeatedly requested clarification as to which faculty would be designated to the MFA Program for the 2015-2016 academic year, and under what terms of commitment they would serve due to the Dean's removal of the MFA Core faculty structure. The Roski School's website continues to reflect this refusal to provide concrete details on this central pedagogical component, with no dedicated faculty listed on the MFA program website.