



Welcome to our chat!

Q: I have a question about how the different disciplines are integrated within the PennDesign program, ie. interior design, construction, urban design, and non-architecture students collaborating with MArch students?

A: The different disciplines are really integrated more through student organizations and events. When your schedule allows for more electives you are free to take electives in other disciplines as well. Construction is built into the curriculum for the architecture program, there are also architecture electives that focus more on construction techniques and materials as well as product design and furniture design. Also, the third year studios in architecture offer cross-disciplinary studios if you're interested in focusing on landscape or urban design.

Q: I didn't get a chance to visit the campus, are faculty and students generally okay with email inquiries with specific questions?

A: The Landscape Architecture faculty are totally ok with email inquiries as are the students under the "Get to Know Us" section on our admissions site <https://www.design.upenn.edu/graduate-admissions/get-know-us>.

Q: I'm hoping to apply to the 3 year MLA program. What was your background before beginning the program? I have a degree environmental science and engineering, currently working as a data analyst.

A: I actually also have an undergraduate degree in Environmental Engineering, from Cornell. I came straight from undergrad to the MLA program. I will admit I wish I had taken some time off to work a bit and get some more real world experience besides internships I have had, but overall I think I have learned so much here in the short time I have been thrown into this field. I have had some prior experience in drawing and painting, but I wish I would have taken some crash courses in the Adobe suite since that definitely was a learning curve.

Q: I feel like I am in a different position than most people I talk to because I have lots of experience with AutoCAD and Illustrator but have only taken one drawing class. My application portfolio is really lacking in the creative works and I've been trying to produce as much as I can.

A: I can say that the portfolio is really an attempt to show your strengths and breadth of previous work. The admissions office wants to see how they can put together a diverse cohort and how each individual can bring something to the table. For me, I took a drawing and painting class the semester before I applied which helped to diversify my portfolio, but I definitely included some CAD sections and plans just to show I have had office and technical experience

Q: This is encouraging to know. Have you had any difficulty developing your creativity, coming from a largely technical background?

A: To be honest yes, I think in high school I was equally creative and technical, but 4 years of engineering made me feel like I was lacking some creative outlet. Then once I got here, I feel like having no design background put me at a disadvantage because I was unfamiliar with certain language or famous designers, current projects, etc.

But honestly just being here at PennDesign around all other designers and students with non-design backgrounds has helped me feel ok to feel vulnerable, yet learn so many new things. Your first semester theory class helps you get up to speed with design concepts, and I think as long as you stay open to learning from professors, but keep your gut instinct from your background you will be successful!

Q: I'm currently in a 4-year architectural pre-professional program. I'm wondering if PennDesign has Advanced Placement programs like some other architectural graduate programs? Do I need to apply for the 3-year professional grad program, or is there any shorter choice, like 2-2.5 years?

A: You should apply to the MArch Professional degree program. The admissions committee has not given advanced standing for the past few years so your program would be 3 years long. However, you would be able to waive out of some of the required courses such as technology, and fill them with electives.

Q: What do you consider the greatest strength of the MArch program?

A: I really enjoy the range of studios offered in the second and third year. Each is very unique so the work created throughout the class shows a lot of differences / each person has the chance to try very different types of design. Also, being able to take electives in other disciplines is something I've taken advantage of.

Q: What kinds of educational/professional background(s) do you see the most of within the 3-year MLA students? I have a biology/fine arts background myself, so no technical skills to speak of!

A: I would say it's diverse. A lot of our international students seem to come in with architecture or "landscape gardening" backgrounds, which are design based. But in my cohort there are students who have backgrounds in city planning and urban design, literature, fine arts, sociology, psychology, environmental science and political science. And I would say that a bio/fine arts is a great combo! Having a technical background with the ability to also represent ideas and concepts is what landscape is about! You will have classes in grading and field ecology, as well as storm water management, and digital media (modeling/parametric design) so you will have the chance to pick up some new technical skills.

Q: In terms of portfolio for M.Arch, I've heard that some grad programs are looking for intensity, while others focus on complete documentation (section, plan, elevation). So, is there a specific aspect that PennDesign is looking for in the portfolio? In addition, what is the average number of projects to include in a portfolio? Will 3-5 projects be a good number? Thanks!

A: When making my portfolio I was advised to try my best to showcase all of my talents, so I would include all drawing types/model making/hand drawing. In general I think the 5-6 project range is normal, it depends on what the student's background is/what work they have done previously.

Q: It really seems like you can create your own experience within the school, and create your own experience while you're there.

A: That's exactly correct. A lot of students also take advantage of the certificates offered while choosing electives. There's a list of certificates here: <https://www.design.upenn.edu/all-degrees-certificates/at-a-glance>.

Q: I'm definitely excited to learn. Would you recommend messing around with some tutorials in CAD or similar before the start of the MLA program? (Hypothetically speaking)

A: Sure thing, that would not hurt. We don't really use CAD here too often, if anything I would say Rhino would be the program to become familiar with, although AutoCAD is more frequently used in offices.

Q: Is anyone in your department migrating to Sketch from Illustrator? It's much more user friendly than Illustrator

A: Hmm, no I've actually never heard of that. Illustrator is pretty common here and in the design world.

Q: It's a fairly new app but I've found it to be much more versatile and have design friends using it now over Illustrator. Thank you for your help! Your answers were all very helpful.

A: Awesome, great to learn of new apps and technology. Sadly here in the Design school most students have PC's because it's more advantageous for programs like Rhino and rendering software.

Q: I'm just wondering if there is an upper limit for recommendation letters? Can I hand in more than 3?

A: The limit is four. We require three but you can submit up to four.

Q: How would you describe the culture of the town and campus?

A: The school is located right in the city so you become really integrated with the culture of Philadelphia. If you don't know anything about Philly, it is an awesome, walkable, bikeable city with great food/art/sports scenes.

A: Philadelphia is a super diverse and vibrant city. One of the best things about it is its walkability. It has a lot of cultural, entertainment, and educational richness that you can take advantage of.

Q: Thank you. As a graduate student do you feel as involved with campus events, clubs, and volunteering as you were as an undergraduate student?

A: There are definitely a lot of clubs and activities you can join/do if you make it work with your schedule. The first year might be a little hectic but after you get a hang of it you can be more active!

Q: What made you decide on Penn for your MLA?

A: At the end I was deciding between Penn, UVA and Berkeley, and for me the program at Penn is the only one in the nation right now that is pushing the envelope in terms of the application of landscape architecture. Our digital and parametric modeling for analysis and design is the most current and forward thinking. Also the three year program has such a wide breadth, throughout the entire program you will have worked in every scale and concept that LA's would work. You get to start off at the scale of the garden and move to large scale parks, urban design, regional design and then your last two semesters are elective studios that you choose based on the location of the site (which you can travel to) and based off the professor's interests.

Q: What do you mean by digital and parametric modeling - is that GIS? Or something else?

A: Rhino is a modeling software to model 3D designs. There are parametric plug ins, or supplementary software, particularly one called Grasshopper, which allows you to associate separate features in the software and these

parameters are then flexible and can alter based off different constraints you set. A lot of the applications are for hydraulic modeling, urban design, and even GIS-Rhino workflow.

Q: May I ask what your final choices were and why you chose UPenn's Master of Architecture program?

A: I was primarily interested in Penn. The big draws for me here were the location, being in a city, and very close to other major cities (New York and DC). The network you build with professors while in school expands along the east coast which is awesome. Also, the range of design options and the flexibility in the curriculum to take courses in other disciplines were awesome. Lastly, there is a really great studio culture here. The students are really there to help each other.

Thanks for joining us! If you have more questions, please contact us at admissions@design.upenn.edu