



Web Chat Transcript: November 7th, 2018

Q: What are the fabrication facilities like, and how busy do they get during finals?

A: The fabrication facilities at Penn include your traditional wood and metal fabrication shops and more cutting edge digital facilities. The MArch program specifically has 3d printers dedicated to each studio section. They are located in the studio spaces which make it super convenient to use. Upstairs in the wood shop you'll find 2 CNC tables, 2 full color powder printers, an FDM printer, as well as various other tools to aid the digital fabrication focus here at Penn. We also have a robotics lab which have four robots arms: two smalls and two large ones. Everybody can use the lab, but at the moment only specific courses are using them. We have a sheet where you can reserve the time to use it. It is very organize and we don't have time conflicts.

Q: What might be a typical day for MCP student?

A: A typical day is very different for each concentration. For the first semester, you usually have two classes every day for 3-4 days a week then you have a lot of lecture and speaker events to choose from. Secondly, you have to choose one concentration but can switch during your first or second semester. You also tend to have five elective credits where you can take courses in other concentrations. The concentrations act as a guideline but do not lock you into anything.

Q: For the Calculus pre-req is AP Calculus credit on transcript sufficient?

A: We will accept AP Calculus only if it is listed as credit on your college transcript.

Q: How many students are in each MCP concentration?

A: It varies by year but I know this year and last year, Sustainable Transport Infrastructure and Planning was amongst the largest at around 22 students. Concentrations are rarely larger than 20 students. I know Community Economic Development is the second largest with around 18. Urban Design has about 10. Land Use has 12. Smart Cities also has around 8 for the semester. Public Private Partnership is also around 8.

Q: For concentrations under MCP program, am I able to choose more than one? Or I have to stick with one?

A: Just one.

Q: How many dual masters students are there on average in each class?

A: I would say probably about 30 altogether in our masters programs.

Q: I'm wondering if I don't apply for urban design concentration in my application, is it possible that I can still do urban design later?

A: You generally apply to the certificate program in the fall after you matriculate. Otherwise, you may not be able to complete it while you're completing the master's degree.

Q: Once enrolled in the March program, how would one explore the possibility of getting a dual masters in Landscape Architecture? Are there classes in the first year to explore if landscape architecture would be a good fit as a secondary major? If so what is the process and timeline to commit to the dual masters programs?

A: You can apply from the get-go to both programs. This allows you the most flexibility. During the first year of the MArch program, you really don't have much flexibility to explore options.

Q: What is the time commitment like for a dual degree? What is the benefit of doing a dual degree, rather than two separate degrees?

A: The dual degree timeline varies depending on which degrees you would like to merge. For Landscape and Architecture it would be 4 years total. The benefit would be the two degrees. If you are passionate about two fields or feel that they are connected it is wonderful to be able to study them together and get a better sense of the connections.

Q: For the personal statement, are you expected to propose a specific research topic?

A: You don't need to have a research topic. Rather the personal statement is an opportunity to express your interests and your desire for pursuing the degree(s) that you have applied to. There is plenty of time once you are here to develop research topics and thesis ideas.

Q: What about computer access? Do most students work exclusively from laptops?

A: There are two computer labs with many PCs both. They are available to use at all times except when a class is taking place there. I don't usually have problems to find a computer available in the lab. However, students have their own laptop or PCs and that depends on what each person prefers. In the school web you have recommendations if you are planning to buy a new computer.

Q: What is the average class size and age range of M. Arch I students? What is the admittance rate?

A: We look to have a class size of around 60-70 for M. Arch. Each year the age range changes, but for this year the age range is 22-57 years of age.

Q: So for all the MCP students in urban design concentration, do they have to also get a certificate to graduate, or is it that student from other concentrations can get the urban design certificate as well?

A: No, the certificate programs are separate from the planning concentrations each student enrolls in when they get here. They are designed to offer additional certification if you have a specific interest in one of those topics. You do not have to be in the urban design concentration to pursue the urban design certificate for instance.

Q: If applying to dual degrees from the get go are there two separate applications and fees or are they combined?

A: There ARE two separate applications. You fill out and submit the first, then fill out and submit the second. You don't have to pay a second application fee and you don't have to submit two sets of test scores and transcripts.

Q: Personal statement - as specific research topics are not required, what would you say sets apart candidates? What are key things the admission committee is looking for?

A: They are looking for your knowledge of the field and how well you articulate your interests and goals.

Q: Since MCP is included in PennDesign, I assume the program will focus more on design over public policies. Is this the truth?

A: I wouldn't say that to be exactly true. While the department is in the School of Design, its emphasis is in fact across the board. Outside of studio and workshop courses, much of the curriculum does delve into policy unless your concentration is urban design. The core curriculum especially in each of the concentrations offers approaches to thinking off policy initiatives and programming related to affecting change at the planning level.

Q: What is the ratio of international students? Is there a cap on how many international applicants are accepted?

A: Right now we have about 45% international students. We don't have caps or quotas. We admit people based on their qualifications, the portfolio being the most important element for the MArch program.

Q: Can anyone provide info on applying/being in the MArch program without an architectural background?

A: Unfortunately the students logged on right now all have backgrounds in Arch, however, I can let you know that we have MANY students each year who join us that do not have a background in Architecture. In fact, the faculty admissions committee purposefully seek out a number of students to different backgrounds to diversify the cohort. About a third of our students do not have an architecture background and their program is usually 3 1/2 years long (they start in the summer).

Q: For personal reasons my undergrad GPA was under 3.0 and is unreflective of my academic abilities, but since I've been out of schools many years would a great GRE score (330+) make up for that deficiency in my application and possibly help secure scholarship/grant opportunities?

A: We look at your GPA and your GRE scores together, so if you have strong GREs, that can lift your application. But the portfolio is really the most important part of your application and weighs the heaviest.

Q: What exactly are you looking for in the application & portfolio for students with no arch background?

A: We're looking for your design ability mainly, and your eye to hand coordination. So you would put in any art work, photography, things that you've designed and/or created.

Q: I'm thinking of pursuing transportation or urban design concentrations, so shall I just put "undecided" for concentrations for now?

A: I would choose one. There are actually many students that come in not knowing which concentrations they want to pursue. A couple of students actually were between those two concentrations and professors tend to be very understanding during your first semester. Urban design is probably one of the hardest concentrations to switch into after the first semester since there is a studio immediately. I would look at the research of different professors and choose one initially based on what interests you most.

Q: What are some career paths after MCP?

A: There is actually a page where you can see where Penn students got jobs after they graduated. Follow this link for the 2017 data:

[https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/files/2017\\_PennDesign\\_CP\\_Report.pdf](https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/files/2017_PennDesign_CP_Report.pdf)

Q: What are the factors that goes into scholarship/grants considerations? And are they provided reliably each year if rewarded?

A: Every applicant is automatically considered for merit-based scholarship. Whatever scholarship you are awarded will stay with you your entire academic career at PennDesign as long as you remain in good academic standing.

Q: What is an ideal MCP candidate look like, especially one interested in smart cities? What type of hard or soft set skills?

A: An ideal candidate should be passionate in their field and understand what they want to do. In terms hard or soft skills, both are developed greatly throughout the program. Smart Cities, especially, requires a bit more hard skills because you are taking more advanced Geographic Information System courses and coding to build a sensor during your first semester. You also have to write multiple large essays while taking core courses with your peers throughout the program.

Q: Would there be an advantage to receiving merit based aid if I submit an application a month earlier vs than at the deadline, or are they all evaluated the same after the deadline has passed?

A: There would be no advantage. All applications are reviewed together after the application deadline.

Q: Are there any study abroad or externship opportunities?

A: Yes there are a few different opportunities to study abroad in the MArch program. In the first semester of third year there is usually a studio that studies at the Architectural Association in London. This is a more traditional study abroad program in which all your coursework for that semester happens at the AA and you get credit for it here at Penn. In addition to this there are summer elective courses that take place in various cities internationally. For example, this past summer I had an elective course in Athens where we worked on a project with EYDAP, the municipal water company, over the course of a month. In addition to these opportunities, students usually travel during their third year as most studios have a travel week to visit their specific site (these range from regional locations to international ones). In addition, there are many travel fellowships which cater to more personal study or research goals which students are encouraged to apply to.

Q: Are there any resources you could point me to for either samples of portfolios from non-arch majors or general guidance on designing the portfolio itself?

A: Unfortunately, we don't have any samples of portfolios. The faculty would like to see your individual "stamp" on the portfolio. Think of it as a design project in and of itself!

Q: What is the balance between computer modeling and actual making, whether that is design-build projects, physical models, or hand drawing?

A: Your professor is there to guide you but ultimately your work is your own so if you don't want to do parametric design don't. As to the process each professor emphasizes different things. I have had professors who appreciated going back and forth between computer modeling, drawing, sketching, and building process and final models. I also have seen professors who are entirely immersed in a digital environment. That depends a little more on professor. As to the curriculum you will have to build full scale models outside the computer your first semester, no 3d printing on that one.

Q: If I don't have a design background, how shall I prepare my portfolio? I didn't have systematic training in design and I've only taken "Intro to Environmental Design" and "Urban Design" in my school.

A: If you aren't applying for the urban design concentration then a portfolio isn't necessary. I just answered a similar question for Chen above and yes, GIS work is something that could be included, but most students don't include a portfolio if they aren't applying to UD

A: If you are applying directly to the urban design concentration it isn't required to submit a portfolio, but it is recommended. Your portfolio should be a collection of your creative work and/or even analytical samples such as GIS, infographics, report + writing samples. Don't be dissuaded because you may not have typical urban design work to show. A combination of your portfolio and personal statement should show the admissions committee why you want to go here and how your previous experience and skills then apply to work you would undergo here at Penn.

Q: I am interested in the one year MS in Design with a Concentration in Historic Preservation. Who is the best contact for questions about skills/experiences that qualify for this program?

A: This is a new program that just started this fall! For more information, you can contact the Chair, Frank Matero, at [fgmatero@design.upenn.edu](mailto:fgmatero@design.upenn.edu).

Q: If I am to build a portfolio, do you think photography would count as well?

A: Yes that would be fine to include photography.

Q: What is the studio life like? Do most people work in studio, or do they work at home? Are projects partnered / collaborative?

A: Yes, definitely. Inside PennDesign, I took many classes with students from other programs. Also we have different student groups where you can meet people who have different things in common or interest apart from their disciplines. PennDesign student council organizes happy hours every Friday and that's a good opportunity to chat and talk to all the students in the school. Outside Design, Penn has associations and groups where you can meet people from other schools and the graduate center, which organizes different kinds of academic and social activities. There are sports centers or sports teams that

you can join as well. Last but not least, there are many opportunities to volunteer or work outside the University so you can get involve with Philadelphia community.

A: Studio is quite busy and typically a place people gather before, between, and after classes. Many people work in studio, a few will work at home. There are several group and partner projects throughout the curriculum but I believe the majority of the projects are individual. I have found that studio tends to be a second home base that everyone works and hangs out in. Most often we meet outside studio for any weekend excursions that we've planned.

Q: Which summer prep programs are mandatory for March 1? If I met the requirements for studios and physics would I still have to take the respective summer prep programs at Penn?

A: The faculty decide if you should take the summer preparatory studio. If you have physics, calculus, etc. prerequisites, you don't necessarily have to take them at Penn.

Q: My background is a B.S. in Architecture and I've been working in a firm for 2 years now, what kinds of work should I include from my professional experience?

A: You should mainly include the work you did in school since that is your own. You can include a little professional work but must be very clear about the part you played in the project(s). The faculty are more concerned with your design process and less impressed by polished work.

Q: But for MCP student(s), is there anything that you expected before coming to PennDesign, but it turns out a little bit different? Or anything you are surprised about?

A: I would say the most surprising thing was the cross over with other concentrations. Most students think the concentrations are locked in and you don't get a lot of time or availability to cross over with coursework, but in fact you do. Additionally, there are many opportunities to work with classmates from other concentrations in both workshop, seminar courses, and studios so you really get a great interdisciplinary vibe.

Q: Does working for 1-2 years in an architecture firm provide an advantage when applying?

A: Not necessarily. Although the skills you gain in an office are of course valuable for your professional development as an architect, they don't always translate one to one in a design school setting. I would focus your portfolio to showcase your skillset as a designer and critical thinker.

Q: If I apply to Urban Design concentration, but I don't have a strong portfolio, is it still possible that I can get admitted to the program and do Transportation concentration? Or shall I just make it clear that I'm interested in both in my personal statement? Would you recommend instead that I put "undecided" for concentration and still upload a portfolio?

A: I would definitely say to incorporate it in to your personal statement, especially if your interests lie in both areas. It wouldn't hurt you to come in as undecided if you are unsure what concentration you want to do. Many applicants declare undecided and then choose their concentrations in the fall or spring of their first years. It's not a hard drawn line that it is difficult to change once you are here. In fact quite a lot of students change around once they get here and talk to current students or other first year students and see what they are learning. I will say though, that if you came and then wanted to go into

the urban design concentration, they would want to look at your portfolio before moving you into that concentration.

Q: Are there additional funding opportunities besides the initial scholarship and loans that are available throughout the year? What work-study opportunities are there on campus?

A: There are many work-study positions around the School of Design. You can work in the Fabrication Lab, the Computer Labs, the Architectural Archives, as well as some of the departmental offices. There aren't really other scholarship opportunities. Oh, and Carolina reminded me that there are also positions available in the fine Arts library. I would suggest checking out our outside scholarship page- <https://www.design.upenn.edu/graduate-admissions/outside-scholarships>

Q: Which summer prep programs are mandatory? If I met the requirements for studios and physics would I still have to take the respective summer prep programs at Penn?

A: The faculty decide if you are required to take the Summer Preparatory studio. This is based on your portfolio as well as your coursework.

Q: What is the difference between the research directed studio vs independent research, in the final year?

A: The 704 studios (last semester before graduation) are the research studios. Those studios are similar to the others but are more research based. The independent studies are usually individual and you have to present your own research and talk to instructors to be your tutors. Studios are 2 credits usually and IS vary depending on your proposal.

Q: Is the summer prep covered by tuition or is there an additional cost?

A: There is an additional cost. It is a 3 1/2 year program as opposed to the 3 year program for people with an architecture background. Your PennDesign scholarship would cover a portion of it.

Q: When do most decide their thesis / research topic? How do professors influence this decision?

A: Thesis is not required for the MArch program although it is an option for students who are interested in pursuing their own topic of study. If thesis is something you are thinking about, the formal process involves submitting an initial research topic in the summer before your final year. Afterward, you will submit a formal proposal at the start of the fall semester. If approved, students generally complete a fall semester independent research study which they will present at the end of the semester. Once again, if approved they move on to complete their thesis in the spring semester. That said the majority of students choose to participate in faculty lead research studios in their final year.

Q: Are there chances to interact with other disciplines at the school? Are there opportunities to collaborate with the community?

A: Yes, definitely!