

MA Photography and Urban Culture

Programme Specification

Awarding Institution: University of London (Interim Exit Awards made by Goldsmiths' College)

Teaching Institution: Goldsmiths, University of London

Final Award: MA

Programme Name: MA Photography and Urban Cultures

Total credit value for programme: 180

Name of Interim Exit Award(s):

Postgraduate Certificate in Photography and Urban Cultures (60 CATS)

Postgraduate Diploma in Photography and Urban Cultures (120 CATS)

Duration of Programme: 1 year full-time or 2 years part-time

UCAS Code(s): Not applicable

HECoS Code(s): (100505) Sociology

QAA Benchmark Group: Not applicable

FHEQ Level of Award: Level 7

Programme accredited by: Not applicable

Date Programme Specification last updated/approved: May 2024

Home Department: Sociology

Department(s) which will also be involved in teaching part of the programme: Not applicable

Programme overview

This programme has been developed in collaboration with the Centre for Urban and Community Research in response to the increasing interest in urban theory and the visual representation of urban cultures and places.

It is designed to encourage creative interplay between practice and theory; you will have the chance to consider cutting-edge debates in cultural and social theory in a research setting that actively encourages the development of photographic practice.

The programme offers working photographers, visual artists and media practitioners space to reflect critically on their practice. It also offers those with a background in sociology, urban and cultural geography, cultural studies or anthropology the opportunity to combine visual forms of representation with standard forms of research techniques in investigating urban life and the physical environments of the city. The programme offers the following modules:

Through the lens focuses on the relationship between urban space, the built environment, and urban cultures, identities and communities, as well as urban photography practice and practitioners.

Talking Practice (A), focuses on students' visual projects relating to urban spaces and the built environment. Talking Practice (B), focuses on students' visual projects relating to urban identities and communities.

Cities and Society, introduces students to key issues and debates within urban studies and research.

The distinctive aspects of the programme are that it provides students with a set of learning experiences that combine cutting-edge debates about conceptual and practical aspects of urban photography and visual research, in conjunction with key sociological and urban theory debates focusing on the nature of contemporary urban societies.

The MA Photography and Urban Cultures aims to offer the unique opportunity for students to develop skills that engage with both the theory and the practice of the representation and evocation of contemporary city life. Students will have the chance to consider cutting edge debates in cultural and social theory in a research setting that actively encourages the development of photographic practice.

Alongside subject specific debates that the students will be introduced to throughout the modules, there is the opportunity to develop the practical skills of photographic work in a community of urban researchers that can be applied to a number of contexts, including local, regional, national and international research and visual practice environments.

The MA is designed so that it can be taken by practising photographers, visual artists, and urban researchers that wish to simultaneously develop a portfolio of work and an interest in the theoretical debates around representation of the city as well as by students wishing to develop a critical engagement with theoretical and cultural debates about representation of the urban within photographic practice. The programme is also intended to link directly to professional research outcomes, and many graduates have secured employment within urban research, ethnography, teaching, curatorial and arts practice, human rights, and architectural research. This programme aims to widen access to a specialised area of higher education, particularly urban ethnography and associated visual practices.

Students are expected to be highly motivated and to pursue independent study within the module areas, typically represented by field and library research, and the development of course project work.

The MA develops the core strengths of Goldsmiths, University of London. The module is located within the Sociology Department with close links to the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR) at Goldsmiths. It forms part of the Department of Sociology's portfolio of Masters programmes. CUCR is an interdisciplinary research centre with interests in investigations of contemporary city life that cross the humanities and social sciences. This module complements the other MA programme linked to the CUCR, the MA Cities and Society. Students from both MA's have the opportunity, though not the obligation, to participate in the research culture of the Centre, which produces a running programme of seminars, conferences and screenings.

The MA PUC programme also offers students the opportunity to attend a series of photographic and urban research workshops, walks, field-trips and seminars (in collaboration with CUCR). These workshops and seminars are designed to support student progression towards a successful realisation of their dissertations and final visual projects (FVPs). They provide formative rather than summative assessment, and provide a key component in supporting students' visual training and understanding of urban research cultures.

The programme also accords with the strategic aspiration of Goldsmiths, University of London to increase the size of the College particularly at postgraduate level. The students will add to the flourishing postgraduate population of the Department of Sociology and CUCR.

The programme will also contribute to the College's aspiration facilitate outstanding research outlined in the strategic plan. Through the MA students will be encouraged to produce a portfolio of photography that will also form the basis of an annual exhibition. Staff will both work with and through students to produce a visual research document focusing on urban and city life. We have already piloted this approach through the development CUCR's 'Visible Cities, Invisible Lives' stream of work. In the initial development period of the MA PUC, a number of highly successful visual projects were piloted in collaboration with the CUCR, including photographic exhibitions at the Spitz, Viewfinder, APT and Photofusion galleries in London. Since these programme initiatives, the programme has developed an international festival and conference for urban photographers and visual ethnographers, in collaboration with the CUCR and Tate Britain (www.urbanphotofest.org), and has extensive international links with a variety of media education, visual ethnography/sociology and urban research networks which continue to contribute to its highly successful overseas and home recruitment figures.

Programme entry requirements

Students will normally hold a first or second class degree in a related subject in the humanities, social sciences, or visual arts. Students will also be expected to have a basic competence in photographic practice. In exceptional circumstances, where students can demonstrate that they would be able to produce work of Masters standard, then practical experience in the field of photography and urban research may be considered as equivalent qualifying experience for the programme. Where equivalent experience is considered candidates may be asked to demonstrate their competence through written essay submission, portfolio review and interview.

IELTS 6.5 (with a minimum of 6.5 in the written element).

Programme learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding

| Code | Learning outcome | Taught by the following module(s) |
|------|--|--|
| A1 | Demonstrate conceptual and methodological knowledge of the key concepts and debates in urban studies | All modules |
| A2 | An advanced understanding of the theoretical debates around photographic practice in the city | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B |

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|-----|--|--|
| A3 | Demonstrate a critical understanding of the interface between theory and practice in the representation of the city | All modules |
| A4 | An advanced fluency with current debates in critical cultural theory around the city | All modules |
| A5 | Synthesise and critically analyse the literature on, photography and urban life in the context of the history of sociology and related academic areas | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Cities and Society |
| A6 | An advanced competence in assembling a portfolio of photographic images and reflect on their relevance to debates around processes of representation | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B |
| A7 | A sophisticated understanding of contemporary debates around visual ethnography and the role of photography in the production of knowledges about the city | All modules |
| A8 | Identify ways of using the study of urban life as a means of engaging disparate fields | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Cities and Society |
| A9 | Distinguish and appraise a range of sociological research methodologies and their potential applicability as well as their possible limitations | Cities and Society |
| A10 | Recognise and account for sensitive ethical issues relating to research and representation | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Cities and Society |
| A11 | Understand the positionality of cities from the viewpoints of other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences | Cities and Society |
| A12 | A sophisticated understanding of different methodologies in carrying out research in complex urban settings | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B |
| A13 | Demonstrate the ability to conduct secondary and primary research in written and visual forms | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Cities and Society Dissertation |

Cognitive and thinking skills

| Code | Learning outcome | Taught by the following module(s) |
|------|---|--|
| B1 | Critically analyse the complex interaction of photographic approaches to urban life | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Cities and Society |
| B2 | Systematically and creatively engage debates on photographic representation, urban development, change, governance, culture and economy | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Cities and Society |
| B3 | Rethink urbanising processes as applicable to various scales and entities of consideration that go beyond the “city” | Cities and Society |
| B4 | Establish creative connections between previous academic and work experiences with themes emerging from the programme | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Dissertation |
| B5 | Adapt concepts and methods flexibly and imaginatively to pursue future specific aims relating to career development or further research | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Cities and Society |

Subject specific skills and professional behaviours and attitudes

| Code | Learning outcome | Taught by the following module(s) |
|------|--|---|
| C1 | Synthesise and analyse how sociological methods and concepts can relate to the representation of and intervention in urban life | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Cities and Society |
| C2 | Analyse and evaluate different kinds of knowledge in the context of core themes in urban cultures, development, cultural, politics, and change through individual research | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Cities and Society Dissertation |

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|----|--|---|
| C3 | Compare, contrast and analyse sociological perspectives on photography and urban cultures with the perspectives of other disciplines | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B |
| C4 | Conduct research in situations where individuals, households, communities, cities, nations, regions, sectors, disciplines, and groups are no longer necessarily the predominant or most salient subjects | Cities and Society |
| C5 | Critically assess the approaches and philosophies, structures and organisation of various urban formations and their concomitant cultural processes, as well as political systems and actors | Cities and Society |

Transferable skills (Elements)

| Code | Learning outcome | Taught by the following module(s) |
|------|--|--|
| D1 | Design, formulate and conduct research on a topic relevant to contemporary debates in photography and urban studies | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Cities and Society |
| D2 | Effectively communicate, explain and debate in a wide range of contexts and with a broad range of interlocutors | All modules |
| D3 | Communication skills in the presentation of high-quality work in written, oral and visual formats | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B |
| D4 | Evaluate and assess a range of research methods and the use of computer applications for data collection and processing, bibliographic searches, and the editing and production of visual work | Through the Lens Talking Practice A & B Cities and Society Dissertation |
| D5 | Provide concrete demonstrations on how different economic, cultural, political and historical differences are simultaneously brought to bear on cities | Cities and Society |

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| D6 | Exercise initiative and personal responsibility in effective independent work with the attendant skills of experimentation, work organisation, time planning, independent decision-making and keeping to deadlines under often complex and unpredictable circumstances | All modules |
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Grading Criteria (postgraduate)

| Mark | Descriptor | Specific Marking Criteria |
|---------|--|--|
| 80-100% | Distinction (Outstanding/ Exceptional) | Represents the overall achievement of the appropriate learning outcomes to an exceptionally accomplished level. A mark in the 80s or even the 90s will be awarded in the case of really accomplished work, demonstrating high levels of scholarship and originality, although grades in the 90s should be reserved for work deemed to be outstanding and of publishable quality. |
| 70-79% | Distinction | Represents the overall achievement of the appropriate learning outcomes to an excellent level. Candidates show evidence of an excellent application of appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills as specified the module learning outcomes. Typically, this involves extensive reading and grasp of questions and their context and an exceptional degree of clarity in argument and use of evidence. Knowledge and understanding will have been presented critically, with insight and independence of thought. Argument and analysis of reading will demonstrate the candidates own reasoning and be exceptionally clear, critical, well-focused and cogent. |
| 60-69% | Merit | Represents the overall achievement of the appropriate learning outcomes to a good level. Candidates show a good application of appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills as specified in the module learning outcomes. This involves consistency and fluency in discussing and evaluating reading from a range of sources and an ability to relate this reading to the assessment tasks. |

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| 50-59% | Pass | Represents the overall achievement of the appropriate learning outcomes to a threshold level. There is clear evidence of a satisfactory application appropriate, knowledge, understanding and skills as specified in the module learning outcomes. Typically this involves evidence of knowledge and understanding where there is a limited development of ideas and critical comment. |
| 30-49% | Fail | Represents an overall failure to achieve the appropriate learning outcomes. There is not a satisfactory application of appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills as specified in the module learning outcomes. There may be confusion and incoherence and unfocused comment on the literature. |
| 10-29% | Bad fail | Represents a significant overall failure to achieve the appropriate learning outcomes. Only some but not all of the learning outcomes specified for the module have been achieved. Typically, a candidate in this position will not have satisfied the examiners that they have read and understood the essential texts of the module. Research involved in the writing of module work or the dissertation will be poorly organised and inadequately discussed. |
| 1-9% | Very bad fail | A submission that does not even attempt to address the specified learning outcomes. |
| 0% | Non submission or plagiarised | A categorical mark representing either the failure to submit an assessment or a mark assigned for a plagiarised assessment. |

Mode of study

The Department of Sociology and the Centre for Urban and Community Research recognise the importance of developing support for students working in small groups on MA modules. Compulsory modules and options are taught on the basis of small group seminars, reinforced where relevant with tutorial support.

The specific specialist skills listed above constitute central components of the teaching components of the compulsory modules of the degree. Students are encouraged to develop presentational and communication skills as part of the seminar structure of the teaching programme.

Students will be encouraged to work independently, and to work as part of a team. Students are encouraged to attend seminars, workshops and conferences in the Department and elsewhere in the College, where research students, staff and invited

speakers present their work. They will be given the opportunity to benefit from the wealth of academic libraries available to students from the University of London.

Programme structure

The programme will consist of five compulsory modules and a research based dissertation completed with a complementary major visual project.

Cities and Society (30 CATS over 1 term): This module addresses significant issues in the contemporary organisation of urban landscapes, urban life and connections between cities as well as the interface between human and architectural fabric. Drawing on specific empirical examples in based in China, Hong Kong, the US, London and parts of mainland Europe this module examines key debates in urban sociology and research. There is a strong focus on visual apprehension of cities and ways of accessing and researching cities through photography. It offers a short tour of 'urban theory' from the Chicago School to the present day. This sets up the conceptual basis for the session following which, although empirically focused on specific cities, illuminate different conceptual frameworks for understanding urbanism. Assessment: One 5-6,000 word essay.

Through the Lens (30 CATS, Spring term): These modules aim to introduce students to contemporary examples of photographic practice and city life. They offer students a range of critical perspectives on photographic practice from within sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and visual arts theory. They also include discussions of the work of contemporary media practitioners and photographic artists and examine issues in relation to visual ethnography, the place of photography in news media and visual arts practice. The module also includes talks by internationally based urban photographers whose practice focuses on the relationship between visual practice and urban studies, cultural theory, and research. The module is also complemented by the MA PUC practice-based workshops that explore aspects of urban and spatial culture. Assessment takes one of three forms: One essay of 5000 - 6000 words incorporating either primary or secondary visual materials and is a theoretical exposition on some aspect of photographic theory or cultural theories of representation relating to contemporary urban life. The title of this piece of work has to be agreed with the course convenor; OR one essay of 2500-3000 words with a visual response of 10 - 15 images that addresses one of the module core themes, visual urbanism or urban photography practice; OR one 5000 - 6000 word essay based on a specific photographer whose work addresses issues relating to contemporary urbanism. The essay should reflect current debates around how such visual practices are informed by such theoretical concerns, and how such visual work, in turn, contributes towards a widening of knowledge and associated discourse.

Talking Practice A (30 CATS, Autumn Term) & Talking Practice B (30 CATS, Spring Term): These modules will provide the main visual practice critique for the spring and autumn terms of the MA PUC. Building on a successful background, the modules will facilitate a critical engagement between students' visual projects and the wider theoretical components of the programme. These modules will introduce students to core themes within visual urbanism and urban photography. They will focus on the production of a visual project linked to the TTL A & TTL B modules as well as the Cities and Society compulsory modules. Students will be asked to produce a short visual project in response to a core theme within urban sociology. Assessment: Two theoretically-informed practice reports (1000-1500 words) and two photographic portfolios of 10-15 images (one of each per term). This develops and assesses the capacity of students to work independently, to define a research problem, design and implement the research and communicate the findings.

Dissertation (60 CATS): Students will produce a portfolio of photographic images of the city that would become the subject matter for a 5-6,000 word critical discussion in their research-based dissertation, or a 12,000 word written dissertation. Assessment: Students would be expected to provide for assessment a 5-6,000 word dissertation + a final visual project portfolio that provides evidence of a sustained and coherent body of photographic work focusing on an aspect of urban culture (approximately 20-30 images) or a 12,000 word written dissertation. The evaluation will be informed by a series of compulsory critical presentations in the third term with peer and academic formative feedback. Although the results of the review will not contribute directly to the final mark, it is intended to further cultivate skills in research, dissemination and group presentation. The final project promotes and tests the ability to construct a clear argument on a complex and extensively treated topic combining visual and written material.

Full-time mode

Academic year of study 1

| Module Title | Module Code | Credits | Level | Module Status | Term |
|----------------------|-------------|---------|-------|---------------|------|
| Talking Practice A | SO71123A | 30 | 7 | Compulsory | 1 |
| Cities and Society | SO71042C | 30 | 7 | Compulsory | 1 |
| Through the Lens | SO71XXXX | 30 | 7 | Compulsory | 2 |
| Talking Practice B | SO71124A | | 7 | Compulsory | 2 |
| Project/Dissertation | SO71071A | 60 | 7 | Compulsory | 2&3 |

Part-time mode

Part-time students will normally be expected to pass compulsory modules Talking Practice A & B and Through the Lens A & B in their first year before proceeding to the second year.

Academic year of study 1

| Module Title | Module Code | Credits | Level | Module Status | Term |
|--------------------|-------------|---------|-------|---------------|------|
| Talking Practice A | SO71123A | 30 | 7 | Compulsory | 1 |
| Through the Lens | SO71XXXX | 30 | 7 | Compulsory | 2 |
| Talking Practice B | SO71124A | 30 | 7 | Compulsory | 2 |

Academic year of study 2

| Module Title | Module Code | Credits | Level | Module Status | Term |
|----------------------|-------------|---------|-------|---------------|------|
| Cities and Society | SO71042C | 30 | 7 | Compulsory | 1 |
| Project/Dissertation | SO71071A | 60 | 7 | Compulsory | 2&3 |

Academic support

Support for learning and wellbeing is provided in a number of ways by departments and College support services who work collaboratively to ensure students get the right help to reach their best potential both academically and personally.

All students are allocated a Personal Tutor (one in each department for joint programmes) who has overall responsibility for their individual progress and welfare. Personal Tutors meet with their student at least three a year either face-to-face, as part of a group and/or electronically. The first meeting normally takes place within the first few weeks of the autumn term. Personal Tutors are also available to students throughout the year of study. These meetings aim to discuss progress on modules, discussion of the academic discipline and reports from previous years if available (for continuing students). This provides an opportunity for progress, attendance and assessment marks to be reviewed and an informed discussion to take place about how to strengthen individual learning and success.

All students are also allocated a Senior Tutor to enable them to speak to an experienced academic member of staff about any issues which are negatively impacting their academic study and which are beyond the normal scope of issues handled by Programme Convenors and Personal Tutors.

Students are provided with information about learning resources, the [Library](#) and information available on [Learn.gold \(VLE\)](#) so that they have access to department/programme handbooks, programme information and support related information and guidance.

Taught sessions and lectures provide overviews of themes, which students are encouraged to complement with intensive reading for presentation and discussion with peers at seminars. Assessments build on lectures and seminars so students are expected to attend all taught sessions to build knowledge and their own understanding of their chosen discipline.

All assessed work is accompanied by some form of feedback to ensure that students' work is on the right track. It may come in a variety of forms ranging from written comments on a marked essay to oral and written feedback on developing projects and practice as they attend workshops.

Students may be referred to specialist student services by department staff or they may access support services independently. Information about support services is provided on the [Goldsmiths website](#) and for new students through new starter information and induction/Welcome Week. Any support recommendations that are made are agreed with the student and communicated to the department so that adjustments to learning and teaching are able to be implemented at a department level and students can be reassured that arrangements are in place. Opportunities are provided for students to review their support arrangements should their circumstances change. The [Disability](#) and [Wellbeing](#) Services maintain caseloads of students and provide on-going support.

The [Careers Service](#) provides central support for skills enhancement, running [The Gold Award](#) scheme and other co-curricular activities that are accredited via the Higher Education Achievement Report ([HEAR](#)).

The [Centre for Academic Language and Literacies](#) works with academic departments offering bespoke academic literacy sessions. It also provides a programme of academic skills workshops and one-to-one provision for students throughout the year.

Placement opportunities

The programme actively supports work placements and internships where relevant and appropriate as a means of supporting student learning and this has included placements at

Photofusion, Tate Britain, The Photographers' Gallery, Urban Photo Fest, The Horniman Museum, and various community organisations and NGOs.

Employability and potential career opportunities

Graduates of the programme have progressed to the following areas and careers: doctoral studies professional photographic practices (including architectural, fine art, photojournalism) visual arts practice, curating, publishing, graphic design, digital media, film-making, advertising, public relations, journalism, community arts development, urban planning, human rights, education (primary, secondary, further and higher education, professional training), and social research skills.

This MA develops skills in urban photography, visual ethnography and urban research, communications for urban planning, community arts and visual arts practice. Graduates have found employment in a wide range of areas and a number have become members of the growing international association of urban photographers (www.urbanphotographers.org).

Programme-specific requirements

Not applicable.

Tuition fee costs

Information on tuition fee costs is available at: <https://www.gold.ac.uk/students/fee-support/>

Specific programme costs

Not applicable.