

# Design Major Curriculum Assessment Report

## Design Program | Fall 2025

### Rationale / Comparison to Past Years

With our direct assessment obligations fulfilled, the Design Program conducted a student feedback session in Fall 2025 to meet the university's assessment requirements. This effort followed a similar indirect assessment activity that we completed in 2023, to allow us to direct student attention to our five Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs). This activity is intended to complement the forthcoming Academic Program Review (APR) during the spring of 2026, which we expect will provide a broader curricular analysis.

It was our goal to build upon the 2023 indirect assessment—which we conducted with graduating seniors—where the primary objectives were to gauge whether the students' perceptions of their learning aligned with the PLOs and to understand their comprehension of them. For Fall 2025, we extended this exercise by offering it to first-year students who were newly entering the program, as part of our Orientation proceedings. **This allowed us to explore what incoming students expected to learn in the Design Program at USF, and to evaluate the extent to which those expectations corresponded with our PLOs.** Additionally, this exercise provided an opportunity to introduce the PLOs in a more engaging and interactive way at the outset of students' studies.

## Methodology:

Following a brief department-wide orientation, the Art + Architecture programs separated into their own sessions. The Design Program welcomed twenty-two incoming majors into one of our designated design labs within the XARTs facility, with all four full-time faculty members (Noopur Agarwal, Liat Berdugo, Rachel Beth Egenhoefer, and Stuart McKee) in attendance. The students were seated around a large communal table, where each seat was supplied with a post-it note pad and a sharpie marker to support participation in the activity.

We began by asking students to respond to the question: *"What do you think you will be learning as a design student at USF?"* Students were instructed to record each response on individual post-it notes, with the reminder that the exercise was informal and that there were no right or wrong answers. Students wrote for approximately four to five minutes.

To continue the activity, students were invited to share their ideas aloud. As a group, we then collaborated on categorizing their responses into thematic clusters and grouped the post-it notes around the room. The resulting categories were as follows:

1. **Process** – the second largest grouping, which included such themes as framing, mood-boarding, finding a style, and iterating.
2. **Media** – the largest grouping, (which overlapped with Tools & Applications below), and included such themes as three-dimensional design, posters, web design, digital media, and software.
3. **Time & Resource Management** – which included references to learning methods for using available resources, with some mention of interior design.

4. **Communication** – which included themes such as constructive criticism, teamwork, marketing, audience awareness, and engagement with the USF community.
5. **Tools & Applications** – which included references to learning the Adobe computer programs, including Photoshop; along with two-dimensional modeling, three-dimensional modeling, and color theory.
6. **How to Apply Ideas** – which included applying design skills to post-graduation activities, designing in real-world contexts, and exploring and expressing imagination/creativity.
7. **Uncategorized / Other** – which included topics such as design history.

Following this brainstorming exercise, our faculty introduced each of the five Design PLOs (shown in bold type below) and invited student reactions. Feedback was recorded as follows:

- **PLO 1 Apply skills to generate design work through methodologies of process, production, and experimentation.**

This reminded students of marketing concepts, creativity, and the notion that everything is a work in progress.

- **PLO 2 Synthesize design research and scholarship in history, theory and criticism.**

The students initially associated this with financial scholarships, then understood it as applying past research conceptions to the present; they also emphasized design as a lifestyle and a way of relating to the world.

- **PLO 3 Demonstrate fluency with diverse media and their accompanying technologies, along with the ability to accommodate new technologies as they emerge.**

The students connected this to adapting to both emerging and older

technologies; they also highlighted the need for flexibility and engagement with non-Western approaches.

- **PLO 4 Articulate the role of design and the function of the designer as a leader in the social, cultural, and political landscape.**

The students understood this as making design with purpose.

- **PLO 5 Engage in the practice of design professionalism and collaboration –**

The students emphasized respect and teamwork as essential for accomplishing goals, while valuing input from others, and learning to collaborate with individuals whose ideas

The full assessment activity lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes.

### Closing the Loop:

We discovered that most of the concepts shared by incoming students align with at least one or more of our PLOs. While this result further confirmed our PLOs, it sometimes left us questioning how we might address concepts of the “city as classroom” and “originality” in our outcomes. See our tabulations below:

- 1. Apply skills to generate design work through methodologies of process, production, and experimentation.** [each number shown indicates the quantity of students who identified that concept within the exercise]

Appeal 1; Branding/logo design 2; Character design 2; Collage 1; Color theory/using color 8; Composition 2; Concept development 2; Creating meaning 1; Creating mood boards 1; Design communication 1; Designing spaces 2; Developing a style 1; Experimentation 1; Finishing 1; Functionality 1; Fundamentals 1; Illustration 1; Poster design 2; Printing 1; Project development 1; Publication design 1; Sewing 1; Typography 8; UI/UX design 2; Videography and editing 1.

**2. Synthesize design research and scholarship in history, theory and criticism.**

Art history 2; Communicating complex ideas 1; Design history 2; Design in popular culture 1; Design and marketing 1; Elements of design 2; Understanding different styles 1; What makes a good designer 1.

**3. Demonstrate fluency with diverse media and their accompanying technologies, along with the ability to accommodate new technologies as they emerge.**

The Adobe applications/Photoshop 5; Designing by hand 2; Mixed media 1; Software 3; Three-dimensional animation 1; Three-dimensional design/modeling 5; Using computers 1; Web design 5.

**4. Articulate the role of design and the function of the designer as a leader in the social, cultural, and political landscape.**

Make people feel emotional 1; Communicating with other cultures 1; Design in the real world 1; the Environment 1; Express feelings and ideas; Finding your voice 1; Living as a student designer 1; Making a difference through design 1.

**5. Engage in the practice of design professionalism and collaboration.**

Collaboration/Teamwork 4; Constructive criticism 1; Design business profitability 1; Learning how the design world works 1; Learning what interest you 1; Professor-Student communication 1; 1 What can you do with a design degree?

**Outlier comments:**

Learning through the city 1; Uniqueness 1;

In addition, during our subsequent design faculty meeting, we reflected on several key observations from the assessment activity. First, we noted that incoming students tend to approach design from a predominantly vocational perspective, focusing heavily on practical skills and career applications. This orientation, while understandable for first-year students, prompted us to consider how we might better communicate the broader intellectual and creative dimensions of design education early in their studies.

Second, we recognized that certain terminology within our PLOs, particularly the word "scholarship" in PLO 2, proved confusing to students. Their initial association of the

term with financial aid rather than academic research suggested a disconnect between our academic language and students' frames of reference. This realization led us to consider revising the wording of our PLOs to make them more accessible and meaningful to prospective and incoming students, while preserving the intended learning outcomes themselves.

Third, the frequency with which students mentioned Photoshop—cited five times in relation to PLO 3—stood out as notable. This emphasized students' perception of Adobe applications as central to design practice and suggested that they view technical proficiency with industry-standard software as a primary component of their anticipated learning.

Finally, the multiple references to collaboration and teamwork throughout the activity reinforced findings from our 2023 assessment exercise. This consistency across both assessment cycles indicates a need to more formally integrate collaborative practices and professionalism training throughout our curriculum, ensuring that PLO 5 is not only articulated but systematically embedded in our courses and assignments.



