

# Harvard Design School



July 8, 2009

To all incoming MDesS students,

Very shortly the fall term will begin. You should have already received all sorts of information about the orientation week schedule and other events. I have no doubt that not everything is clear to you quite yet, and I simply wanted to take a moment to talk about your first few days here at the GSD.

For most of you, there is nothing that you really need to be doing prior to the beginning of orientation week on Monday, August 26, for International Students, or Tuesday, August 27 for everyone. During this week, you will hear more than you want to know about the ins and outs of being a student at the GSD. During this same week, you will also find out who your faculty advisor will be; and some general meeting times will be posted so that you will know when to meet with your advisor. There is no real necessity for meeting with your advisor between now and then.

In terms of class selection, keep in mind that at the GSD you do not need to select classes immediately and certainly not before you register. The general procedure here is first for you to familiarize yourself with the catalog of course offerings on the web, attend the course presentations on Monday September 1, and then to participate in a group meeting with your advisor who will talk about different courses with you and your colleagues in the same area. In general, there are two different types of courses available to you – lecture courses with open enrollments and seminars with limited enrollments. If you are interested in taking one of the “limited enrollment” seminars presented during the Course Presentation event, you must participate in the on-line lottery that will be described at that time. If something is really important to you, go ahead and put your name in the lottery for the course even if you have not yet met with your advisor. You will also receive a form from Barbara Elfman to fill out with your limited lottery choices. You need to fill this out and return by the date posted on the form as well as signing up online with the registrar. If you are admitted into the limited enrollment course, you will see your name published on an on-line list for the course. You need not follow this procedure for Lecture courses, which have no enrollment

Harvard University  
Graduate School of Design  
George Gund Hall  
48 Quincy Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
[www.gsd.harvard.edu](http://www.gsd.harvard.edu)

limits. You can be generally sure of getting into any lecture course if you meet course prerequisites, and you would simply go to the first class meeting.

When classes formally begin, you go to the classes of interest to you (you do not sign up before hand except for limited-enrollment seminars). You may go to first class meetings for more courses than you anticipate being able to take. You do not actually formally sign up for classes until you submit your “study card” on September 9. Be sure, however, to go to the first class meeting for any class of interest to you – especially for any seminars with restricted enrollments that you may have been admitted to, since you must be present at the first meeting time or you forfeit your rights. Even if you were not on the admitted list, showing up for the first class is also often useful since occasionally some admitted students do not show up and additional spaces become available. For lecture courses, you simply show up and work begins immediately.

The process described above may seem a bit mysterious initially, but there is a useful flexibility to it. The first week of class at the GSD is a kind of “shopping period” that allows you to look at different courses before committing to one or another, and to devise a curriculum that is really right for you.

The major exception to the procedures noted above is for any of you wanting to take a course outside of the GSD (e.g., at MIT or another Harvard graduate school). As you know from the GSD catalog, you are welcome to take courses outside of the GSD. The University has many rich offerings. As a matter of normal educational advice to incoming students, however, we do not normally encourage you to take courses outside of the GSD during your first semester at Harvard; and, if you do so, to take no more than one. You are going to have enough on your hands getting acclimated to the culture and the practices of the GSD, much less having to deal with similar issues elsewhere. Nonetheless, if it is important to you to take courses elsewhere, keep in mind the following: MIT and the other professional schools at Harvard have different enrollment procedures than the GSD and you should take time to review their websites in advance. Even though a professional school is at Harvard, such as the Business School or Kennedy School of Government, you must go and cross register in order to take a class. If it is truly important to you to take a course there, you must personally take the initiative to locate and go to the class of interest on its first day (be sure first that you have the necessary prerequisites), but keep in mind that not all classes everywhere are open to students from outside of the school offering the course. If it appears that you would be allowed to take the course, you will have to subsequently complete and have approved by your advisor a “cross-registration” form. Again, normally, this occurs only after you begin classes and doing the work. Do not think that you can simply join a class a week after the class has already been in progress. Experience indicates that this is rarely successful. Clearly this whole process is more involved than simply being at the GSD, and, in your three-term program here, keep in mind that there will be time to take courses elsewhere if you wish.

When you arrive for orientation week you will hear more about these and other matters, including how to get an account on our computer network and so forth. One of the events scheduled during orientation is a period where you briefly present yourself to your colleagues via a very brief (literally two minutes) two-slide PowerPoint presentation. Keep in mind that the intent here is purely to help us each get to know each other better. Since there are a number of you, you must keep your presentations short, but do briefly summarize not only your academic/professional background and interests, but also any personal interests that you might have as well (do you go rock-climbing?). Keep them simple – no fancy animations please. The PowerPoint should be loaded on to a CD with your name and area of concentration labeled on the disc and dropped off to Barbara Elfman in Rm 334B, no later than Friday August 28 at noon. The slide show and breakfast will be on Monday August 31 from 9-11am followed by a time to meet with your area advisors. This is a very important morning, so please block out this time.

In the meantime, once you have arrived in Cambridge do take some time to familiarize yourself with Boston and its surrounds – something that you might not have much time to do once classes begin. We like it here and hope that you do as well. We look forward to seeing you shortly.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin Bechthold". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping tail.

Martin Bechthold  
Professor of Architectural Technology  
Co-Director of the MDesS program

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sanford Kwinter". The signature is highly stylized and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping tail.

Sanford Kwinter  
Professor of Theory and Criticism  
Co-Director of the MDesS program