



Ahmet Palazoglu
Chair, Assembly of the
Academic Senate
Faculty Representative,
UC Board of Regents

Academic Senate

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1111 Franklin Street
Oakland, CA 94607

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May 29, 2026

Katherine S. Newman
Provost and Executive Vice President
University of California

Re: Approval of UCSD Master of Design (M.Des)

Dear Provost Newman:

In accordance with the Universitywide Review Processes for Academic Programs, Units, and Research Units (the “Compendium”), and on the recommendation of the Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs ([CCGA](#)), the Academic Council has approved the UC San Diego division’s proposal to establish a self-supporting Master of Design (M.Des).

Because this is a new degree title, and the Assembly of the Academic Senate is not meeting within 30 days of CCGA’s approval, Council must approve the program per [Senate Bylaw 125.B.7](#).

I am enclosing CCGA’s report on its review of the new program, and respectfully request that your office complete the process of obtaining the President’s approval.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

Ahmet Palazoglu
Chair, Academic Council

cc: Academic Council
UCSD Division Chair Plant
UCSD Senate Division Executive Director Hullings
Director of Academic Planning and Policy Corona
Senate Executive Director Lin



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COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE AFFAIRS

Partho Ghosh, Chair
pghosh@ucsd.edu

May 13, 2026

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Ahmet Palazoglu
Chair, Academic Senate

Dear Chair Palazoglu,

On May 6, CCGA met and reviewed the proposal from the San Diego division for a Master of Design (MDes). After discussion, the proposal was approved 10-0-2.

UCSD’s Design Lab is proposing a self-supporting Master of Design (M.Des) program. Over the past ten years, UC San Diego’s Design Lab has become a world center for design research and education focused on complex societal issues in domains as diverse as healthcare, urban development, the future of work, online education, climate change, and AI/automation. The goal of the UC San Diego M.Des program is to educate, train, and provide real-world design experiences that will prepare a new generation of design practitioners and leaders. The program proposal reflects a growing need within many industry sectors for designers who can work across disciplines to understand and conceptualize complex socio-technical systems, foster alliances to solve challenges, and help organizations apply design-driven approaches to create positive change.

The Center for Research and Evaluation (CR+E) at UC San Diego Extended Studies conducted an analysis of existing related educational programs and employment trends in labor markets. The results suggest there is a strong need for a Master of Design (M.Des) program, especially focused on the role of design in change management and the design of complex systems.

Four reviewers were secured for this proposal. Overall, they characterized the program as an intellectually ambitious and rigorous, and grounded in a humanity-centered, evidence-based framework that effectively integrates theory, research, and practice. They praised the coherent two-year

structure and the flexibility of the dual-track conclusion (professional capstone or research thesis), which accommodates diverse student trajectories while maintaining high graduate standards.

The reviewers recommended that the program integrate more training in AI literacy and ethics, which is essential given AI's disruption of the design profession. In addition, the reviewers suggested that the program ensure consistency of academic rigor for "mixed-experience cohorts," that is, incoming students composed of professional versus recent graduates. It will be important to maintain standards when managing extensive course waivers for experienced professionals or UC San Diego Design Minor graduates. Furthermore, reviewers noted a need for greater specificity on assessment practices for team-based capstones, including clear criteria for distinguishing individual performance versus that of a team, clarifying the role of external partners, and ensuring consistent engagement of senate faculty in oversight of projects. The Lead Reviewer's report is attached.

UCPB reviewed the proposal and found the proposal to be fiscally low-risk. Their report also is attached.

As you know, CCGA's approval is the last stop of the Academic Senate side of the systemwide review and approval process except when a new degree title must be approved by the Academic Council. I submit this for your review; please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions regarding the proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Partho Ghosh', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Partho Ghosh
Chair, CCGA

cc: Academic Senate Vice Chair Scott
Academic Senate Executive Director Lin
Academic Senate Assistant Director LaBriola
CCGA Members
Director of Academic Planning and Policy Corona
UCSD Interim Dean of the Graduate Division Kim
UCSD Senate Executive Director Hullings
UCSD Senate Associate Director Hill

UC San Diego – Master of Design – Review/Report

Dr. Erkin Şeker, UC Davis (Lead Reviewer)

Program Overview

The proposed Master of Design (M. Des) at UC San Diego is a self-supporting graduate professional degree designed to train a new generation of design practitioners and leaders. The creation of the program is motivated by a market analysis that suggested that "... there is a strong need for a Master of Design program, especially focused on the role of design in change management and the design of complex systems." The program is designed as a two-year program with a mixture of classroom and studio, where the first year focuses on prototyping (physical, digital, and service) and human-centered design (covered by foundational/core courses), while the second year offers advanced topics in design research and systems thinking (covered by electives and capstone/thesis units). The two-year structure is conducive for students to pursue internships and professional opportunities during the summer. The program offers two-tracks: a professional team capstone sponsored by an outside organization or an academic research thesis. Structured as an interdepartmental degree program (IDP), administered by the Design Lab, the M. Des will have a defined faculty body (15 core senate faculty) drawn from multiple academic units across UC San Diego and will be housed in the new Design and Innovation Building (DIB). The program aims to have a steady enrollment of ~90 students.

Academic Quality and Rigor

Overall, the reviewers characterize the program as an intellectually ambitious and rigorous and grounded in a humanity-centered, evidence-based framework that effectively integrates theory, research, and practice. They praise the coherent two-year structure and the flexibility of the dual-track conclusion (professional capstone or research thesis), which accommodates diverse student trajectories while maintaining high graduate standards. Reviewers recommend that the program integrate more training in AI literacy and ethics, which is essential given AI's disruption of the design profession. In addition, the reviewers suggested that the program ensures consistency of academic rigor for "mixed-experience cohorts", that is, incoming students composed of professional versus recent graduates. It will be important to maintain standards when managing extensive course waivers for experienced professionals or UC San Diego Design Minor graduates. Furthermore, reviewers noted a need for greater specificity on assessment practices for team-based capstones, including clear criteria for distinguishing individual performance versus that of a team, clarifying the role of external partners, and ensuring consistent engagement of senate faculty in oversight of projects.

Faculty Size, Expertise, and Governance

Reviewers find the faculty size and expertise as a significant strength, where interdepartmental senate faculty display an "impressive" breadth of expertise spanning cognitive science, engineering, and the humanities. Use of formal MOUs across ten academic units should promote long-term commitment of faculty in the program. While the reviewers praise the interdisciplinary nature of the program, they suggest that a stronger disciplinary balance can be attained by including more faculty whose primary scholarly identity is design. In order to

maintain quality of individualized instruction and critique, reviewers express that the 1:15 faculty-to-student ratio should not be exceeded.

Adequacy of Facilities and Fiscal Resources

Reviewers characterize the program's facilities and fiscal resources as a significant strength, citing the Design and Innovation Building (DIB) for its role in providing a "strong physical foundation" through dedicated studios, classrooms, and a makerspace specifically tailored for design education. The immediate proximity of prototyping facilities is identified as a unique benefit for rapid, hands-on iteration. From a financial perspective, the self-supporting model is described as "robust and conservative," with profitability projected by year three and limited institutional risk due to the lack of required new capital equipment. However, a high student demand could exceed the operational capacity of prototyping labs, necessitating additional staff and maintenance funding. The relatively large cohort size might strain the facility availability to students in other existing programs, which should be carefully considered during course scheduling.

Student Demand and Placement Prospects

Reviewers find student demand and placement prospects strong and supported by independent market analysis included in the proposal. Specifically, the program is strategically positioned to fill a national supply gap for master's-level designers while avoiding direct competition with standard Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) degrees. A significant strength is the robust internal pipeline created by UC San Diego's undergraduate Design Minor and Cognitive Science specialization, which provides a stable pool of alumni and early-to-mid-career professionals. Graduates will benefit from geographic proximity to California's commerce and industry, with industry-supported capstone partnerships facilitating job placement prospects. However, the reviewers caution that the rapidly evolving AI technologies might adversely affect job prospects, again emphasizing the need for including training in the latest AI technologies in the design space. To maximize placement and growth, one reviewer specifically suggests reframing the program to attract a broader target population, such as product managers and engineers. Reviewers encourage the program leadership to ensure the curriculum remains aligned with the evolving needs of the industry and academia to navigate enrollment pressures recently observed in other design programs.

Conclusion

Overall, the reviewers characterize the proposed program as intellectually rigorous, fiscally low risk, supported by excellent faculty, facilities, and resources, and likely to experience large student demand and provide excellent job placement opportunities. Majority of the weaknesses noted by the reviewers are suggestions to improve the program further. Some of these recommendations include integrating AI literacy into the curriculum, establishing rigorous assessment standards for team-based capstone projects and cohorts with different levels of prior training, and reframing the program to non-designers to sustain a healthy applicant pool size.



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UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND BUDGET (UCPB)
Robert Brosnan
rjbrosnan@ucdavis.edu

April 8, 2026

Partho Gosh
Chair, CCGA

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RE: UC San Diego Master of Design (M. Des)

Dear Partho,

UCPB discussed the UC San Diego Master of Design (M. Des) self-supporting graduate professional degree program. The committee noted that the academic plan for the degree was excellent and well-considered. The need was demonstrated, and graduates would quite likely be able to support the debt incurred for the program.

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Several concerns arose from both the review provided by a UCPB committee member as well as through discussion of the proposal. The first concern, and central to UCPB’s work, is the timeline for self-supporting status for the program. The 2024 Compendium requires that all such programs “shall be fully self-supporting within three years of inception.” Appendix G of the proposal shows as a “Annual Contribution to Unit Operations” negative \$398,344 for year one, negative \$188,836 for year two, negative \$89,870 in year three, and a positive contribution in year four, but the cumulative contribution remains negative until year five. Program proposers noted outcomes from least positive to most; it behooves reviewers to act as though the worst outcome is likely.

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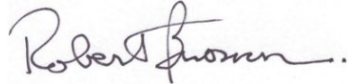
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Members shared concerns that allowing establishment of a program that states at inception it will not follow the requirements for self-supporting professional graduate degree proposals creates an opening for others to follow. If five years to self-supporting status is allowed, will another equally well-conceived program be approved if it is not self-supporting for six years? These programs are to be reviewed after three years; a requirement that is not always met and often difficult to track. The Master of Design would need reviewing at five years as well, to check if it was meeting its own projections.

The second concern noted plans to hire faculty in the Design Lab to serve the program. While faculty FTEs remain with the Design Lab should those hires leave, UCPB members noted that should the program end, the Design Lab would then have faculty without dedicated funding. Inevitably, those faculty salaries would need to come from first department and then core funding. The proposal has no provision for such an eventuality.

These two concerns would require close supervision of the proposed program, should CCGA recommend approval despite the noncompliance with the Office of the President's policy on self-supporting timeline. UCPB urges CCGA and the campus to investigate these concerns, and thanks CCGA for the opportunity to review the program proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Brosnan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Robert Brosnan
Chair

cc: UCPB

SSGDP Master of Design (M.Des) Degree, Design Lab, UC San Diego

Lead reviewer(s): Pheng Cheah

Academic justification: Establishment of a degree that teaches design as a way of thought that emphasizes the centrality of human experience to and ethical issues in socio-technical systems of the contemporary world such as healthcare, urban development, online education, AI/automation and to provide practical experience. The aim is to train a new generation of design practitioners.

Planning and Budget overview:

1. Proposed initial tuition and any rate of increase: Y1: 41,000, increasing at a rate of 5% each year

2. Target enrollments for years 1-3:

15	40	60
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3. Projected net revenues for years 1-3:

(398344)	(188836)	(89870)
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4. Proposed indirect cost rate (IDC): Development costs of 86850 in Y1 (76850 for developing 5 new courses = 15370 [11200 for ½ summer ninth for participating faculty plus 50% GSR for summer months plus 4170 for course content development in instructional design] x 5) plus 10000 for extended studies of market analysis. Development costs of 80693 in Y2 (for developing 5 courses). Development costs of 33891 in Y3 (for developing 2 new courses). Increase in costs of 5% per annum.

Detailed areas of review:

5. How was the proposed IDC rate determined? Does the proposed rate appear to cover all indirect costs (facilities, IT, etc.)? What are the space needs of the program?

This is unclear from the proposal. The indirect costs only refer to costs for developing new courses and does not factor in facilities and IT other than mentioning the new DIB. No significant library acquisitions (including online databases) will be required to support the program. All learning tools and equipment are available in the unit Makerspace, which is on the second floor of the Design and Innovation Building (DIB). Studio instruction space and student team project space is available in DIB. Although the program does not require additional space, it requires preferential assignment of specific spaces in DIB.

In addition, the proposal includes direct costs.

6. What are the proposed uses of net revenues? How will they supplement [enhance] state-funded programs? Are there other ways that the program, if successful, will benefit the UC mission (e.g., filling a need not covered by state-supported programs)?

Academic unit share of revenue is 72% in the first year, 61% in the second year and 50% in subsequent years (125 of pdf). In terms of revenue for the department, the program is in the red for the first three years. It will have positive revenue in the fourth year (361037) and will break even in the fifth year, with a profit of 138996.

Training towards a professional design career may improve the attractiveness of UG offerings in Design, Engineering the Social Sciences.

There are no proposed uses of net revenue other than (1) unspecified revenue-sharing with other units from which M.Des students will take some of their courses and (2) the use of revenue to hire needed faculty for the program and to pay Unit 18 lecturers.

7. How are any potential negative impacts on state-funded programs and the research mission of the UC mitigated?

The proposal states that the Master's in Design does not compete with existing state-supported graduate programs and has no negative impact. However, it will require staff support in program management and student advising etc. In the first two years, this will draw on existing Design Lab staff and faculty and two new full-time staff hires. This will negatively impact the workload of existing staff for state-funded programs.

8. Describe disposition and compensation of **faculty** serving the program. What is the proposed ratio of UC Senate faculty to non-UC adjunct faculty? For the former category, differentiate between ladder rank and P/LSOE. How will UC Senate faculty be compensated? On-load (i.e., course buyout), overload, or some combination thereof?

The Design Lab, which is the planned administrative and academic home for the degree, is an unusual unit in that it is not an academic department but has its own FTE. These faculty are based in regular departments. The curriculum is taught by a mixture of Senate and non-Senate faculty. Core courses will initially be taught by Senate faculty to ensure quality and may be taken over by lecturers. Design project research and technical electives drawn from the campus's regular courses will be taught by Senate faculty. The proposal does not specify the ratio of Senate to non-Senate faculty. There are 15 tenure-track Senate faculty from various departments and two clinical/adjunct faculty in the list of names. However, the proposal emphasizes the importance of courses taught by practitioners since this is a profession-oriented degree and notes that it hopes to draw on a pool from instructors from the local design community. Ladder faculty will be compensated by teaching buyouts and overloads arranged through mutual agreement with the faculty member, the Design Lab and the faculty member's departmental home.

9. Describe how the program will ensure accessibility and encourage diversity. Note: these concerns may be addressed through return-to-aid used for need-based fellowships, although programs may address accessibility and diversity in a variety of ways and UCPB does not set a standard return-to-aid percentage.

The program's steering committee will select a student cohort that reflects society's diversity. It will focus on URM and gender status and nation of origin and disciplinary diversity. 10% of tuition revenues will be returned to aid. Projected surplus funds will be used for additional aid and scholarships.

10. Describe the market analysis used to justify demand and price point for the proposed program. Will the program compete with others in the system? What are projected percentages of California resident, domestic non-resident, and international students in the program?

The market analysis shows that educational supply is lower than employer demand in this field. Various positions that can be trained by the program include marketing managers, web and digital interface designers, industrial ecologists, art directors and commercial and industrial designers. It is estimated that there will be 426 annual job openings in California in this area. There are 700 design-related Master's Programs and 26 M. Design programs that charge between \$20101 and \$43343 in tuition. Competing M. Design programs include UC Berkeley, the University of Cincinnati, University of Washington, University of Michigan and Harvard. The price point for the proposed tuition is close to

the top of the range. The program's most similar competitor is UC Berkeley. UCSD's program seeks to differentiate itself by focusing on design leadership based on a deep knowledge of people from the social sciences and humanities. What distinguishes the UCSD program is the unique institutional setup of the Design Lab. The Berkeley program has a more technical focus because it is housed in the colleges of engineering and environmental design. There are no projected numbers of percentages of students from various categories of state residency and citizenship.

11. Describe relevant consultation and assessment from lower levels of review, external assessments of the proposal, and the like.

Relevant departments at UCSD were consulted and they noted that MOUs for revenue-sharing would be developed down the line.

12. Any other planning and budget concerns?

No

13. Any academic-quality or related concerns to flag for CCGA?

No

14. Are there specific areas of concern that the mandated review after the third year of operation ought to capture?

Much depends on when the program will generate positive net revenue. It is important to monitor that revenue from fees etc. is on the increase by the end of the third year and in line with the projections.

Conclusions and recommendation:

This is a unique M.Design program that is both professionally oriented and focused on design as a way of thought and comportment in the social world. It fits in with the existing Design Lab and draws on the academic and research strengths of faculty linked to the Design Lab. I recommend approval of the degree.