



MFA Visual Narrative Frequently Asked Questions *Updated February 2017*

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THE TOP QUESTIONS!

What is the difference between MFAVN and a comics, illustration or solely visually-based graduate program?

The MFAVN program is a rich, interdisciplinary and low-residency graduate program in visual storytelling like no other. We focus on and explore what story is and how it functions in all visual storytelling mediums. Our program is also equally balanced between the visual arts *and* creative writing. Our students don't just "illustrate" assignment or rough narratives, they find, write, produce and tell their stories from the ground up as original content creators and authors. They take ownership of their narrative voice and define their career and professional journey - *The "Artist as Author"*. Students find their direction as professional creators of original content and gain a greater understanding of their own foundation for becoming future arbiters of visual storytelling.

What type of students are you looking for?

We are looking for visual storytellers from all visual disciplines interested in creating their own original content as both author and artist. This creates a diverse and rich student body of interdisciplinary visual storytellers. We are interested in working with all self-driven creatives from designers, animators, professional writers, illustrators, photographers, and film makers to information graphics specialists, game designers, concept artists, children's book illustrators and more. The type of students we want to collaborate with are students interested in digging deeper into themselves in order to understand where they come from, what story means to them and want to explore in telling their story(s) in any medium that best suits their voice, message and narrative.



What is “Low-Residency”?

MFAVN is a fully accredited, low-residency, MFA degree program - requiring only three eight-week summer sessions in NYC, a schedule which allows students to maintain their professional practices and personal lifestyles. The two intervening academic years are online only through the SVA learning management system. Classes are accessible 24/7 and primarily self-paced, with manageable deadlines.

Why is there such a broad approach to storytelling and how will that benefit my experience as a student?

Story doesn't really belong to one specific medium, profession, format or audience. The fundamental principals of story, are for the most part, universal. We are bombarded with different forms and mediums of story every day that permeate and influence almost all that we do, see and feel as visual storytellers. To harness and gain a more focused understanding of these universal, multimedia story fundamentals, we feel that a diverse student body creates a rich and unique studio environment, and informs and challenges every student to engage in the ever-expanding profession of visual storytelling beyond their own chosen medium. Our faculty and curriculum reflects this broad approach to story, with professional expertise in areas like children's literature, comics publishing, television writing, information graphics, typography, game design, theatrical direction and illustration.

What are some career paths for the MFA in Visual Narrative graduate?

In all forms of advertising, plus fine arts, game design, picture books, graphic novels, film, illustration and animation, there is a growing demand for talented and original content creators. The MFA Visual Narrative program fills that need—regardless of medium or style—enabling students to become creative, responsible arbiters of visual storytelling who shape their own identities, artistic voices and narrative art. Potential job pathways might be Creative or Art Director, Story Editor, Editorial Designer, Storyboard or Concept Artist, Animator, Editorial and/or Commercial Freelance Artist, Copywriter, Scriptwriter or Screenwriter and more.

We encourage all of our students to pursue clearly defined career pathways as well as blazing their own new trails and defining their own careers as their work and narrative voices dictate.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Who is the ideal candidate and what skills do they need to bring to the table?

Every year, we look for talented storytellers who are interested in generating their own original content as both authors and artists.

That being said, students will need to be well - versed in traditional forms of art, familiar with digital art practices and possess a thirst for the English language and open communication, with



a passion for putting it to good narrative use. The study of what story is, how it functions and communicates, plus short story writing, scriptwriting and the visual development of each student's original short story will dominate the first year of the program along with advanced digital techniques. Students will also engage in traditional book arts and digital publishing, experimental writing, dabbling in a range of writing genres along with character development and theatrical techniques. This process will prepare every student for the second year thesis project that will culminate in a graduate thesis presentation, professional practice development and an immersive gallery exhibition.

Though the MFAVN program is a broad approach to the craft and process of storytelling, the first spring semester short story and the final thesis projects are opportunities for each student to concentrate on a professional focus and/or direction of their choosing.

Applicants should be able to demonstrate technical proficiency in creative writing as well. Because of the nature of a low-residency program, successful students will be self-reliant and able to demonstrate a high level of professional discipline and practice.

All applicants to the MFA Visual Narrative program must have an undergraduate degree, or be scheduled to receive a degree before the start of the first summer semester. However, your degree may be in any discipline.

The MFAVN program is NOT a fully staffed film or animation department. Nor are we dedicated to one single profession over another. The MFAVN program provides an advanced approach to the study, craft and process of visual storytelling as both an artist and an author. The student brings the medium, choice of discipline, and professional practice to the program.

Applicants should have a basic skill level in Adobe Creative Cloud Design Suite applications and word processing. During the first semester, an advanced course in digital narrative arts is required.

We suggest you review the [student section](#) of our site to get good sense of our student body.

What is the application deadline?

All candidates are encouraged to submit applications by February to be considered for first-round reviews and merit-based awards, as well as the [Educator's Scholarship](#). Remaining admissions and awards will continue on a rolling-deadline basis as space allows. We recommend that US citizens have the [FAFSA](#) completed as soon as possible- this can be started before or in parallel to your application. Be sure to use the form for the year that you would start, through the following year. For example, applicants with a start date of June 2017 would fill out the 2017-18 FAFSA form. Once accepted, having this already in place will speed up your process of obtaining loans and other aid, which is important with a June start date.

If you are applying as an international student, be sure to allow extra time to obtain transcripts (which may need to go through an academic equivalency service) for the application, as well as be able to obtain a visa if accepted. Typically, you would need to be accepted by mid-April in



order have time to obtain an educational visa to start the program in June, although these processes vary by country. We will of course, do our best to support and accelerate this process.

Is there a simple overview of the application process?

Why, yes there is, glad you asked. *The MFAVN Application Guide* outlines all the steps necessary for the standard application, and *the MFAVN Application Guide: Educator's Scholarship* is also available for eligible instructors to apply. You can see details and download them both [here](#).

STRUCTURE, LOGISTICS & RESOURCES

Tell me more about the low residency model.

Our low residency program is structured as a combination of two academic years of web-based learning and three intensive on-campus summer periods at SVA in NYC. During the on-line periods, students engage in rich-media coursework on the Canvas system, with supervision from faculty and opportunities to engage virtually with fellow students. The student will be required to submit written material and participate in online forums, as well as contribute online content as both a writer and visual artist.

Classes are posted once a week. Although there is flexibility in the schedule, there will be some assignments with specific due dates. We will provide training for the web-based learning prior to the first fall online session.

During your online semesters, you still enjoy full SVA student status, including access to the SVA library (many online data bases and other resources), the Visible Futures Lab, the department's RisoLAB, and all other on-campus resources and services. In addition, you are entitled to unlimited classes from Lynda.com, as well as the ability to audit one tuition-free class per semester (four in total) from any department at SVA (student must pay any associated lab fees.) Some of these classes are offered online.

As an added resource, the department manages a new [RisoLAB](#). Risograph duplicator printing technology combines the vibrant spot colors of silkscreen and the high resolution and speedy mass production of offset lithography with the user-friendly automation of an advanced color copier. It was founded in fall 2015 by Chair Nathan Fox as an interdisciplinary space for printing, publishing and production of Risograph-based printed works. Students will be trained on the machines and have access during the summer semesters, and can then pay a modest access fee during the academic year if desired. Several Continuing Education courses are also offered. The mission is to become a hub of small scale and experimental printing and publishing activity that brings together artists of all backgrounds and disciplines to encourage dialogue across different creative worlds and foster discussion about the role of print media as a vehicle for art and culture, and a way to work out creative ideas to lead to unexpected results that would not be possible with a sole reliance on today's digital tools.

The department also sponsors [CE classes](#) in other subjects, such as screenwriting, storytelling through photography, and "Myths & Media", both online and on campus. Some of these are taught by program faculty. These classes do not count towards the MFA Visual Narrative degree.



What are the dates for the summer residency?

Typically, there is a required orientation the Friday after Memorial Day, with classes beginning the following Monday and running eight weeks, through late July.

Does SVA offer housing for the summer session?

SVA housing is guaranteed for our students for the summer sessions if you apply by May 1. The fee is published in the winter.

How much time can I expect to spend on my work/classes?

For the online workload, a guideline is six to nine hours of coursework for each credit hour of "classtime". That means three hours of class weekly, plus 18-27 hours of work time. During the first year spring semester short story project and second year thesis project, those class hours and work times will be directly related to each individual's project.

During the eight-week summer semester in NYC, students will be in class or in their studios for 40-50 hours per week. We will also be planning outside studio visits and individual and group critiques, and trips to museums and galleries and other cultural events.

There is currently no alternate structure or schedule for this degree program.

What other access will I have to outside professionals?

The MFA Visual Narrative program has lined up a rich and diverse pool of cross- disciplinary professionals who will be involved in the program as guest lecturers, artists and authors. During the second year, each student will work with the chair to nominate and collaborate with a thesis advisor of their choosing for the duration of their thesis project. A roster of vetted professionals is posted on our site, although students can also arrange for their own, with approval from the Chair. And SVA's teaching model is to draw from working professionals. In addition, the Career Development Office offers extensive workshops, counseling and recruitment events.

What is the tuition for this program?

Tuition and fees are outlined [here](#). Payment plans are available.

What are my options for financial aid and scholarships?

[The SVA Office of Financial Aid](#) coordinates the many sources of aid to meet as much of the students' financial needs as possible. Their site includes a listing of free scholarship search engines, including a specific one for international students. We recommend that US citizens have the [FAFSA](#) completed as soon as possible- this can be started before or in parallel to your application. Be sure to use the form for the year that you would start through the following year. For example, applicants with a start date of June 2017 would fill out the 2017-18 FAFSA form. Once accepted, having this already in place will speed up your process of obtaining loans and other aid, which is important with a June start date.



SVA will match any outside scholarship up to \$2500. The Alumni Association offers a thesis grant award competition during your thesis year. If you are an educator currently teaching two or more classes with at least two years experience at the college or university level (including online & international), you can apply for our [new Educator's Scholarship](#), which has a few additional application requirements. MFAVN will award up to three Educator's Scholarships annually, each covering 10-50% of tuition. Download the *MFAVN Application Guide: Educator's Scholarship* document [here](#).

All candidates are encouraged to submit applications by February to be considered for first-round reviews and merit-based awards, as well as the Educator's Scholarship. Remaining admissions and awards will continue on a rolling-deadline basis as space allows.

Is the program accredited by NASAD?

Yes, we are fully accredited.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Can international students apply to this program?

It is a perfect fit as students are only required to be on campus in NYC for three eight-week periods during three summers. Because students are not considered "full-time" in the four six-credit fall and spring online semesters, the educational visa with SVA will not allow students to stay in the United States during those four semesters. Typically, students can arrive here 30 days prior to the summer session and must leave no later than 60 days after the end. Some students have enrolled in ESL studies at other institutions in NYC during the fall and spring to bridge this gap, in which case the visa gets transferred temporarily to the other school during those periods, returning to SVA for the summer sessions. Please carefully review this structure--detailed information can be found on SVA's international student page [here](#) which includes a FAQ section.

What is the English language requirement?

Fully half of our curriculum is devoted to developing creative writing skills, which makes it essential that students enter exhibiting a strong command of both spoken and written English. MFA Visual Narrative applicants must have a minimum score of 100 (internet-based) or 250 (computer-based) TOEFL to be considered for admission.

AND FINALLY....

What are you waiting for...??!!!

[APPLY NOW!](#)