

Why AVT 307 and 395? Why ARTH 374?

There are several levels of answers to this simple question.

- On one level, these three courses meet institutional and accreditation requirements.
 - Every accredited art department (and we are seeking accreditation by NASAD, the National Association of Schools of Art and Design) must educate their undergraduate students in art history and art theory—at least 12 credits. When added to the 200-level ARTH survey courses, ARTH 374 and AVT 307 meet the art history/art theory requirement.
 - AVT 395, Writing for Artists, meets the institutional requirement for a post-ENGL 302 class that focuses on writing in the major. This requirement is part of the writing across the curriculum requirement. (Historical note: we used to incorporate the requirement into courses with other content, such as AVT 472, Critical Theory in the Visual Arts; but it was the determination of the department that our students required a course that focused on writing without the complication of learning other complex content.)
- On the second level, the content of these courses provide necessary information to students who are studying art and design. The faculty fully supports the inclusion of these courses in our curriculum.
 - ARTH 374, Art Now, surveys works of art, artists and trends in art since 1964 (approximately). Art and design do not occur in a vacuum—they participate in movements within the general culture and within the worlds of art and design. Seeing what artists have been doing over the last 50 years gives students contexts, exemplars, and models for their own explorations. Even design students benefit from Art Now because design and art are historically quite porous—the same trends can be seen in both, and people move quite seamlessly from art to design to art.
 - AVT 307, Aesthetics, explores historical and contemporary answers to questions such as “What is art?” and “Why do some artists make art that is difficult to look at or understand?” and “What is beauty?” and “How do standards for evaluating art change over time?” Its goal is to broaden students’ options for their personal practice by exploring contemporary ways of making art and of thinking about art practice. Most sections focus on artmaking from the early 20th century on, when art began exploring media, subject matter, and styles of presentation that were outside the bounds of traditional materials and techniques. The approach is the class is NOT historical—it’s based on experiencing a broad range of challenging artworks (including some that seem tame to us now, but cause a firestorm in their own day) and drawing on readings and discussion to learn how to move with a sense of confidence among contemporary artworks.

- AVT 395, Writing for Artists (which has a customized version for design students—same course number but specialized content and instruction), teaches students how to improve their writing by having them practice the kinds of writing that artists and designers must do. Most of the assignments are practical—artist’s statements, proposals, resumes, etc. The designers’ version includes all kinds of typical communications with clients. The artist’s version sometimes includes such new media as blogs, websites, and podcasts. The goal is to equip students to communicate in writing—whether they remain in the art and design worlds, or go on to do something else with their lives.
- At the third level, all three classes (but especially the two AVT classes) are part of a departmental philosophy of artmaking and art education that we call by the shorthand “InterArts.” InterArts is both a curricular module (undergrad and grad) and a way of looking at contemporary art and design. Nearly all of our faculty (with a couple of exceptions, but that doesn’t mean they are not supportive) are InterArts practitioners in their own studios, whatever their artistic medium may be. So what is this philosophy, you ask? Here’s an expanded version of what’s in our most recent departmental mission statement:
 - An essential principle that underlies the AVT program is its focus on fostering student understanding and experience of interdisciplinary practice in the visual arts. Contemporary art has erased traditional boundaries and invited the artist and designer to look toward multiple sources of materials and inspiration, from within and beyond the world of art and design. In addition, the integration of the plastic arts with new media arts and text requires development and application of advanced critical thinking and conceptual skills. Successful art and design students must be fully immersed in the contemporary as well as the historical aspects of artmaking to communicate effectively through visual and verbal media. All AVT undergraduates are immersed in an interdisciplinary course of study through studio practice and required InterArts courses such as AVT 307 Aesthetics and AVT 395 Writing for Artists.