



Frequently Asked Questions

FIRST YEAR DESIGN STUDIO 2025-26

04/09/2025

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION?

The education you will receive in University is broad, interesting and stimulating and also very different from the one that you will have experienced to date.

You will not be governed by rules and regulations in the same way, and you are largely free to come and go as you please. **You must, however, learn to be responsible for organising your own time and workload.** Remember the taught workload in UCD Architecture is greater than that of many other courses and you will be expected to attend all lectures and studio sessions in the course of the week and hand up all assignments on time. To succeed requires you to be highly disciplined and self-motivated.

The discipline of architecture has a long history and this story of making represents a body of knowledge that you are invited to study and explore; importantly, you are also asked to add to this knowledge reflections that have not yet existed. In undertaking assignments you will find **there is no right answer to any set task**, but there is a body of precedent that might support a way of working: a way of seeing things.

Architecture is a creative discipline and your pursuit of all avenues of interest should translate into creative work. The act of engaging, enquiring and questioning are both encouraged and required and this will lead in turn to the production of increasingly innovative and varied proposals.

At the beginning of the course the most important attribute you can bring to the studio is your own innate curiosity.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO OUTSIDE OF ARCHITECTURE?

You are encouraged to take part in all aspects of the life of a student, including joining societies (of all disciplines) and sports teams, and being active members of the Architects Society "Arcsoc" and other external organisations such as the Architectural Association of Ireland (AAI membership is free for students).

The geographic location of UCD Architecture and its studios in the campus should not discourage you from taking an active part in the broader University life offered by UCD.

WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION YEAR?

The Foundation Year is the collective name for students, staff and the programme offered in the First Year of UCD Architecture.

The Foundation year is the beginning of your architectural education and introduces you **to a way of observing, thinking about and making the built environment.**

WHAT IS A TRIMESTER ?

The School year is divided into two trimesters (previously known as semesters) each twelve weeks long.

In the middle of the second trimester there is a field-work period which can allow for periods of travel etc. associated with your course.

There is the possibility of a study trip abroad during this period (to be discussed in studio).

AND A MODULE?	A module is a discrete body of work with associated learning outcomes for which you are awarded credits on foot of successful completion.
I'VE HEARD PEOPLE TALK OF A VERTICAL TRIMESTER, WHAT IS A VERTICAL TRIMESTER?	<p>In some parts of the course students from different years sometimes work together on the same projects hence the title, "Vertical Trimester." These arrangements change from time to time.</p> <p>This year there will not be a vertical trimester for first year but there is a recently completed vertical project on the subject of 'Building Change' in which the school was collectively studying how architects can respond to the climate crisis (this will be discussed in the Introduction to Regenerative Practice module).</p>
WHAT IS A HORIZONTAL TRIMESTER?	<p>The individual year groups work independently of one another following their own programme and time frame. These arrangements change from time to time. First Year will be largely independent, hence "horizontal" this year.</p>
WHAT IS THE TEACHING STRUCTURE IN THE FOUNDATION YEAR?	<p>There are two distinct trimesters in Year 1, in the first trimester the class will divide into two groups and each group is assigned four staff members. They will be your tutors for the trimester. During this period we will complete 3no. three to six week long projects.</p> <p>In the second trimester there will be 1 no. project that runs across the trimester, staffing arrangements might vary slightly from the first trimester.</p>
HOW ARE THE GROUPS DIVIDED?	Groups are divided so that each group has, where reasonable, a balanced mix of students. There is significant diversity amongst the student population of the Foundation Year. To ensure this diversity is distributed across the groups staff organise the groups; students do not select the group that they work in.
WHAT IS A STUDIO?	<p>Each year in the school has a dedicated studio space. The studio is a "Design Laboratory." This is generally one large open shared space or set of connected rooms where each student has a dedicated workspace.</p> <p>The studio programme is core to your learning within the School and the studio the centre of activity for the year.</p>
WHERE DO WE WORK?	<p>Most of your work will be completed in the First Year Studio located on the top floor above the Red Room (the main lecture and meeting venue for the School) and in the room beside this on the top floor above the Café. In one of these rooms you will be assigned a workspace for the trimester. Lectures and workshops will take place in other venues around the School, although sometimes the studio is used. The Studio will be the focus for both the Design and Drawing and Making programmes. Between the rooms is a smaller common space known as the Crit Room or Review Room or Middle Room, which is used for group teaching and sometimes for reviews.</p>
WHAT TIME DOES THE STUDIO OPEN FROM/ UNTIL	<p>The Studios are generally open from 8.00am to 10.00pm. You are encouraged to work as much as possible in the studio and complete all your assignments there. You will find that you will learn a lot by sharing your thoughts and ideas with your colleagues.</p> <p>The idea of the Studio is that you learn and work together in a shared space and not in isolation. This is an important part of the experience of an architectural education. Each Year has its own atmosphere, it is up to you as a year cohort to create this within the Studio.</p>
CAN I WORK THERE WHENEVER I WANT?	You can work in the Studio anytime during opening hours. Regardless of whether or not the staff are present, even if it is outside scheduled studio times you can and should work in the Studio, it is your permanent base within the school. There are shared lockers where you can store your drawing equipment etc. It is important that you respect other people's equipment.

	Please also be vigilant, do not leave valuables (laptops, cameras, phones, wallets etc.) lying around the Studio. If you see anything suspicious you should report it immediately.
WE'VE BEEN ASKED TO DO GROUP WORK WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?	<p>At times you will work on individual projects on other occasions will be asked to undertake group work and your tutors will assign you to a group.</p> <p>This is a very important part of your education. Architects in practice seldom work on their own, they work in groups or teams, often multidisciplinary. So you must learn to work with other people sharing the workload and responsibilities, learning how to share information efficiently between people and communicate ideas and draw conclusions. Both group work and individual work carry the same weight in terms of marks.</p>
SO I WANT TO PLAY MUSIC IN THE STUDIO, CAN I? CAN I WATCH PROGRAMMES ON MY TABLET?	<p>Remember the Studio is a dedicated workspace so for this reason in scheduled studio hours music is not allowed. You should not wear headphones as you must remain attentive to what is going on around you and participate in conversation and discussion. Outside scheduled studio times you can listen through your headphones etc.</p> <p>However, remember at all times that this is a shared space and so you need to have consideration for others who may be trying to concentrate on their work; some find noise a distraction. During scheduled studio times you are not allowed to watch programmes on your tablet, lap-top or other device, unless they directly relate to your current project.</p>
WHEN WILL STAFF BE IN?	<p>There are three common days per week when staff may attend studio, Monday, Wednesday and Friday (see Trimester Introduction). This is common across the whole school. Each day has its own particular emphasis. All Staff will not be in on all of these days. Timetables for each group will be discussed with tutorial staff on an ongoing basis over the course of the Trimester.</p>
I SEE POSTERS FOR LUNCHTIME AND EVENING LECTURES, SHOULD I GO?	<p>Yes. The School usually runs lunchtime and evening lecture programmes. You will see posters for these around the School. You must make every effort to attend these events unless there is something else scheduled. They are an opportunity for you to hear all manner of subjects discussed and debated and talks given by architects on their work.</p> <p>Immerse yourself in the world of architecture and related disciplines.</p>
WHAT IS A REVIEW AND HOW MANY ARE THERE?	<p>A Review (sometimes known as a Crit) is a public discussion of your work in front of internal and sometimes external staff, and your peers. Your work is pinned on the wall and you present it briefly and a discussion follows.</p> <p>A review is not a defence of your work and you should aim to engage with and participate in the discussion when possible. It is most advisable to have another student take notes during your review so that you get maximum benefit.</p> <p>A review is not a judgement of your work, nor is it part of the marking process. It is a presentation, review and a public airing of your work - involving skills vital to your future life as an architect.</p> <p>In First Year we will not have formal reviews in the first trimester; you will make an exhibition of all the work at the end of each project instead and there will be a discussion. In the second trimester we will have some group reviews, dates and details will follow during the course of the trimester.</p> <p>Reviews are also held in the upper years of the school. You are free and encouraged to attend all of these reviews, they are open reviews. In particular you should make a point of seeing those of the second and third year in order to get a sense of what is happening in the rest of the School and to familiarise yourself with the review process, as this will be a common feature of your learning experience over the next five years.</p>

WHO DO I TALK TO DO IF I HAVE A QUESTION OR QUERY ABOUT THE MODULE?	<p>Queries specific to the design programme, the site or workings of the individual teaching groups should be directed to the teaching staff of the individual groups. Any queries regarding the module should be addressed to the Module Co-ordinator. (Will Dimond is the Module Co-ordinator for the first trimester design studio and Tiago Faria for the second trimester design studio).</p> <p>If you are experiencing any personal problems adjusting to college life or don't understand anything please speak to your tutors, or to the student advisor. They will be only too happy to help you or advise you as to where you can get assistance.</p>
WHAT IS A PORTFOLIO AND WHY DO I NEED ONE?	<p>A portfolio is a collated and organised record of all work undertaken by you in each trimester in UCD Architecture. You need one because it is mainly on the basis of your portfolio that your work is assessed and marked at the end of each trimester. Your portfolio is used also by the internal studio staff to explain your work to other staff members and to the external examiners. Therefore it is essential to your progress. You will have been asked to purchase an A1 card portfolio for Studio and an A2 card portfolio for Drawing and Making/Building Technology prior to beginning the programme. You should use these to keep all of your work safely and in good condition.</p>
I SEE STUDENTS WITH A1 LEATHER CASES, DOES IT NEED TO BE IN A HARD A1 CASE?	<p>No. An A1 leather portfolio is not a strict requirement, students who have been in UCD for some years sometimes have them as they are more robust. So if you do not have such a portfolio, it does not matter – you are free to put together your work in your own way – however the work must be clearly organised, annotated, easy to examine and go through etc.</p> <p>You must ensure it is well organised and your work is secure. All work, including individual and group work and sketches should be dated chronologically with initial, interim and final stages explicitly identified.</p> <p>Some students make booklets of their sketch work and assemble these in order in their portfolio. You will also need to photograph all of your working and finished models and layout them out in a presentable manner. You should think of the making of your portfolio as a DESIGN PROJECT in itself. Remember this is what is assessed and marked at the end of the trimester. It is suggested you purchase an A1 card portfolio at the beginning of the trimester.</p>
WE HEAR THERE IS AN END OF TRIMESTER EXHIBITION?	<p>There is an end of trimester and an end of year exhibition which takes place in December and in May/June of each year.</p> <p>In the first trimester the exhibition is an important indicator of your work process and your developing skills and interests. In the second it will summarise the studio intentions of the year and contribute to your grade.</p>
WHAT IS THE END OF YEAR EXHIBITION FOR?	<p>The exhibitions that take place at the end of year are open to the public and are an opportunity for you to show off your collective and individual work to a wide audience of family, friends, critics, external examiners and industry professionals and to the School itself. The standard of the exhibition and the care with which it is put together by the students of each year will demonstrate to the outside world your ambition, interest and commitment to architecture and your work. The purpose of the exhibition therefore is to make a public forum for the collective output of the studio programme. The exhibition is visited by external examiners and by all the staff in the school, when the work of each year is discussed in detail.</p>
SO WHAT GOES ON THE WALLS IN THE REVIEW SPACE?	<p>Traditionally your work is also hung on the walls by studio staff with part of the available space dedicated to a display that follows in a chronological manner the output of the various studio projects so that they can be clearly explained to visiting examiners and to the rest of the School. We may revisit this and we will discuss it with you in more detail later in the year.</p>

WHEN DO WE DO THIS?	Deadlines will be confirmed towards the end of each trimester but provisionally based on past experience portfolio submission is one week after the last official day of teaching term.
CAN I PUT COPIES OF MY WORK IN THE EXHIBITION AND TAKE THE ORIGINALS?	It is a requirement that you leave original drawings on your tables or in your portfolios – this is an essential part of marking and explaining your work to others. It is not acceptable to leave photocopies of original work. The work remains the property of the School.
FIRST YEAR IS TWO TRIMESTERS - DO I PUT MY FIRST TRIMESTER'S WORK IN MY FINAL PORTFOLIO ALSO?	Yes, but divided separately .
MY WORK HAS BEEN KEPT BY UCD?	UCD Architecture reserve the right to retain any or all work done by a student. This is for future exhibition or examination board visits, or simply as a record of the work carried out in a given year. You should therefore photograph all models, copy all drawings etc.
CAN I SEE WORK FROM PREVIOUS FIRST YEARS OR OTHER YEARS?	In 2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2023-24 UCD Architecture produced a yearbook in which much of the work from Year 1 students in both trimesters can be found for reference. Take the opportunity to see the work from other years at review times and at the end of each trimester.
WHAT IS THE MARKING SYSTEM IN FIRST YEAR DESIGN STUDIO?	<p>A marking schedule will be issued towards the start of each trimester. This will indicate the % marks for each given learning outcome. In assessing your marks the yardstick used is the success of your work in achieving the stated learning outcomes.</p> <p>In addition to your 3no. projects in the first semester and 1no. in the second semester, marks are awarded for portfolio, method and contribution, this would include issues like: contribution to discussion, showing independent initiative, the quality of your portfolio. In addition, in the second trimester Technology contributes 12% of your design studio grade. A re-sit is provided for in-module (re-submission after Christmas) for the first trimester, should you not achieve a pass standard.</p> <p>Note that the first trimester is Pass-Fail only, whereas the second trimester is marked and you will receive a grade.</p>
I HAVE COMPLETED A PROJECT CAN I GET MY MARK?	No. Individual projects are not marked. All projects are marked collectively on the submission of your portfolio at the end of trimester, but based on learning outcomes. You will get your final grade for this work after the official exam board meeting that follows the internal and external examination process.
I HAD A BAD INTERIM REVIEW - CAN I GET A MARK TO SEE HOW I AM DOING?	<p>Studio staff cannot give out marks during the course of the trimester as projects are not marked. While your work is continually discussed at desk reviews etc. and progress charted, you must remember that your final mark and assessment only occurs when the portfolio is reviewed by the internal and external examiners. Nor can staff tell you if you are passing or failing during a trimester.</p> <p>However, staff are always happy to talk to you about your progress and advise you accordingly. If you have particular worries or concerns about your work that have not come up over the course of normal tutorials or reviews, please ask your tutorial staff for advice.</p>
I'M CONCERNED I MIGHT NOT BE DOING VERY WELL, WHO CAN I DISCUSS THIS WITH?	<p>The studio programme works partly on the basis of one-to-one teaching therefore if you have a query regarding your progress please discuss it with your tutors who will know the work well.</p> <p>However, remember your tutors cannot tell you if you have passed a project, this assessment only takes place at the end of the trimester on the completion of all of the assigned projects and on the submission of your portfolio.</p>

DO PEOPLE REALLY LOOK AT THE FOLIOS? HOW IS IT MARKED?	<p>Your portfolio will always be looked at and examined in detail. In the foundation Year your work is assessed and provisionally marked by your group tutors, but noting that Trimester 1 is Pass/Fail only.</p> <p>This mark is then discussed amongst all Foundation Year studio staff. Final internal provisional marks are then presented to all school staff at the Internal Walkabout at the end of each trimester.</p> <p>In the case of someone failing, the individual student's work is normally examined and discussed with the other School staff.</p> <p>Finally, following changes agreed at this Walkabout, marks are reviewed with the External Examiners and final marks agreed to go forward to the Examination Board.</p> <p>The multi-level discussion of your mark ensures the system is fair and thorough.</p>
DO WE GET TO SEE THE BREAKDOWN OF THE MARKS?	<p>You will receive written feedback at the end of each trimester. At the end of Second trimester this will include a breakdown of grades for the learning outcomes.</p>
I DID NOT DO AS WELL AS I THOUGHT I SHOULD IN MY WORK - WHAT DO I DO?	<p>We are always happy to talk to students about their work. If, when your results come out, you wish to talk to us, you should make an appointment to do so via the module co-ordinator of the trimester or your tutorial group staff.</p> <p>Please note that the University marking system is different from the one that you are familiar with and high grades are the exception rather than the rule. In the University marking system an "A" for example is an exceptional grade and relatively difficult to attain.</p>
ARE STUDENTS INTERVIEWED AT THE END OF THE TRIMESTER?	<p>Yes. At the beginning of the second trimester all students are interviewed and given feedback on their first trimester's work and progress through the Studio programme. If you happen to fail the first semester you will have been advised of the requirements for the re-sit in advance of this interview.</p> <p>However, as previously stated, if you are very concerned about your work a meeting can be arranged on a case by case basis. In the second trimester you may be asked to attend an interview with your tutors during which your work and progress will be discussed with you in detail.</p>

You are likely to have more questions than this list - we add to this list each year. Please discuss your questions with your tutors and peers.

If you would like to formally add a question to this list, please contact Y1 Design Studio Coordinators Will Dimond, Tiago Faria or programme director Alice Clancy.

Document History

01/09/25 Issued to All incoming Stage 1 students
04/09/25 Rev A: pg 2 'Where do we work?' Answer revised to top floor studio (previously, Stage 1 studio has been on the first floor. For 2025-25, Stage 1 studios will be on the top floor)