



THE MFA FACTOR

Should I go to graduate school?
Do I need to? Do I want to?
Am I ready?

Everyone who has seriously studied ceramics has asked themselves these, and other, seemingly straightforward questions. The trouble is, the answers to all of them begin with “It all depends.” Graduate schools vary in their focus, approach, facilities, geography, size, cost—and countless other ways we simply aren’t able to list here. The point is, you have to look at your personal needs, professional goals, creative requirements and life situation to figure out what you are looking for in a graduate school—or even if graduate school is what you want or need. If you are thinking seriously about a school, you need to go visit. There is no substitute for seeing what a program has to offer in person.

In this article, and in each issue through the end of this year, we will be profiling some of the top graduate-study programs in ceramics rated by *U.S. News and World Report* (rankings in *U.S. News and World Report* are determined by ceramics professors nationwide). The reason for this is not to tell you which schools are best, but to give you an idea of what is out there and what you need to consider in looking at graduate programs in ceramics. Also, it’s exciting to see a snapshot of the work being made by the artists and crafts people who will arguably have the greatest impact on our field in the foreseeable future. They will instruct subsequent classes and generations of ceramics students (some are already doing so through teaching assistantships). And one hopes that they will take their experiences from graduate study and expand the field of ceramics both creatively and professionally well into the future.

The faculty at these institutions have provided their respective schools educational philosophy, an outline of their program (cost, available assistantships, graduation requirements, etc.) and highlights of their facilities. The M.F.A. candidates share their reasons for choosing the programs they did, whether or not they took time off between undergraduate and graduate study, and numerous reflections on their experiences and plans—plus we get to see work from all of them!

The Ohio State University

Established in 1926, the Ohio State University Ceramics program is one of the oldest in the country. The educational philosophy of the program, which operates inside the larger graduate program in the OSU Department of Art, encourages students to bridge the boundaries of both concept and material. The program promotes a cross fertilization of media and methods and places a high value on intellectual research. Ceramics graduates are expected to take part in cross-disciplinary critiques and seminars, and to take advantage of the opportunities to interact with the constantly rotating roster of guest artists and critics that passes through the university. The faculty looks for students with a love of material and process who wish to pull from a broad conceptual base.

OSU Program Details

- 2-year program, minimum of 6 quarters requiring a solo exhibition and thesis
- 50 applicants per year, 4 accepted
- In-state tuition: \$9527
- Out-of-state tuition: \$22,791
- 95% of enrolled OSU studio art graduate students receive Graduate Teaching Associateships or University Fellowships

Highlights of the Facilities

The ceramics facility is comprised of twenty large, communal, private and semi-private rooms. Each graduate student has approximately 10x20 feet of private studio space. There are stocked and ventilated glaze and clay mixing areas with 4 clay mixers, 2 slip mixers, pugmill and a walk-in glaze spray booth. In addition, students have access to the Arthur E. Baggs Memorial Library which contains more than 2500 ceramics-related books and objects.

- 10 electric kilns totaling more than 100 cubic feet of firing space
- 6 gas kilns totaling more than 180 cubic feet of firing space
- 20 wheels, 1 slab roller, 2 extruders with large sets of dies
- Prototype milling machine
- 20-ton RAM press
- Sandblaster
- Welding equipment
- Printer equipped with ceramic toner for decals

OSU [faculty]

Rebecca Harvey earned her M.F.A. at Cranbrook Academy of Art and began teaching at OSU in 1994. Her specialties include dinnerware design, glaze formulation, porcelain bodies, slip casting, wheel throwing, moldmaking and critical theory. Currently she is researching the subliminal uses of the decorative arts and recently participated in an artist residency at a former communist porcelain factory in Dresden, Germany. Below: "Cherry," 8 in. (20 cm) in height, slip-cast, press-molded and assembled porcelain.

rebecca harvey





steven thurston

Steven Thurston is a graduate of the Cranbrook Academy of Art M.F.A. program and has been teaching at OSU since 1994. Prior to teaching at OSU, Thurston worked in the design department at General Motors as a clay modeler. His area of concentration is ceramic design, industrial sculpture and the integration of computer-based and conventional ceramic technologies. Thurston recently completed residencies in Dresden and Berlin, Germany. Above: "Retribution" (front view), 91 in. (230 cm) in height, poplar, Ultracal, Rayite beeswax, miscellaneous hardware, 2006.

I wanted a school that focused on where clay is headed rather than where it has been. I got it.

—Holly Goring
M.F.A. candidate,
Ohio State University



mary jo bole

Mary Jo Bole earned her M.F.A. at the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University and has been a faculty member at OSU since 1987. Bole specializes in mosaics and labor-intensive pieces with multiple firings. She exhibits nationally and internationally and has participated in numerous residencies both in the United States and abroad. Right: "Fifty Turns," 34 in. (86 cm) in height, enamel on steel.

1 carly glisson

I attended The Ohio State University because of the opportunity to teach, and to conduct interdisciplinary research in the arts, which included the use of a range of concepts and materials both in the College of the Arts and in the university at large.

I wanted to maintain the energy that I had in undergraduate school, so I did not take time off before graduate school. Whether this is wise to advise to others who are in this position, I think depends on the individual.

2 meredith host

I took five years off between undergraduate and graduate school, bouncing around to residencies and “special-student-type” programs. It was extremely beneficial to get more life experience and have my work change and grow before making the move to graduate school. I know I am getting more out of the grad-school experience than I would have straight out of undergrad.

After visiting many schools, I found that OSU fit me because the work that has been coming out of the program

has a quirky sensibility, which I’m drawn to. I responded to the work of the three faculty members and their different working methods. I knew they would provide a challenging environment that would ensure my artistic growth.

3 chris tyllia

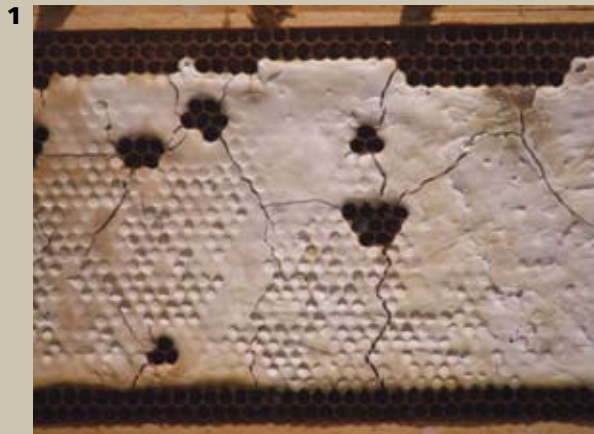
I chose OSU because I wanted to attend a large research institution that would allow me to pursue my interests within the department of art and beyond. The graduate program here gives me the flexibility and the resources I need to explore my ideas fully.

I wish to teach after completing my degree. I am not very actively pursuing exhibition opportunities. I am taking the time here to try new media and explore my ideas in new ways; therefore, I feel my work is still too nascent for exhibition.

4 lisa belsky

The ability to expand my work in whatever direction it takes was really important to me when searching for grad programs. Being able to work closely with faculty members from other areas was also a major factor and the size of the university was appealing. I liked the idea of lots of people in a setting with some hustle and bustle. Coming from Philadelphia, I knew I wanted to be in a city atmosphere, so the location also played a big part in my decision.

After graduate school, I would love to start something up of my own; whether it’s a gallery, shop, studio or some combination of the three. For now, I’m taking a lot of mental notes on shows and organizations that are out there so that when I’m done with school I can really start to pursue them. I want to focus my energy into my work right now so that I’ll feel confident in showing it when I’m done with school.



5 eileen silvia

I chose OSU for a few reasons: it has a high rank in ceramics programs across the country, and I was interested in the faculty. Also, demographically I have always lived in a state that is undoubtedly a blue state and, because some of my work tends to be politically based, I was curious about living in a state with a different way of thinking.

Exhibiting my work is not something I have actively pursued and I am not sure if it will ever be something that will take precedent over my want and need to teach.

6 naomi cleary

I took three years between undergrad and grad school. I knew my work was not up to par and I needed time to really figure out how to make things. I started at The Clay Studio my last year of undergrad as a volunteer and eventually got a part-time tech job. Being at The Clay Studio, surrounded by practicing artists, motivated me to get a good body of work together and apply to graduate school.

While in grad school, I have not applied to any shows. In order to leave school

with decent work, I needed to not worry at all about whether things might sell or if they were shippable. I think pursuing exhibitions while in school can end up limiting experimentation and exploration.

7 holly going

When I started to pursue my M.F.A., I looked for a program that offered notable differences to what I had already experienced in my undergraduate school, which had fundamental roots in pottery and a purist aesthetic. For graduate school, I wanted a school that focused on where clay is headed rather than where it has been. I got it. The breadth of the two has given me a very well-rounded attitude toward ceramics.

8 guy michael davis

After graduating from the Kansas City Art Institute, I took a couple years off from school. I had applied to several programs, but nothing felt right. I moved from coast to coast, and did everything I could to obtain space to work. I was aware of the ability of the faculty at OSU from a previous experience here. In this program,

there is access to new technology, the freedom to pursue what you want and support. The program is progressive and of the new. My career plans post graduate school? Work, Make, Sell, Grow.

9 rain harris

I decided to attend OSU because I knew that I wanted to go to a graduate program that values the ceramic material, but also allows other materials. Within my practice, it is really important to use the material that conceptually makes sense, not the materials dictated by a curriculum. The faculty also played a large role. I was interested in Steve Thurston's exploration of technology, Rebecca Harvey's use of pattern and color and Mary Jo Bole's narration within her work. Lastly, the program's generous funding also worked its way into the formula.

I took about ten years between undergraduate and graduate school. It truthfully was longer than I ever expected, but I always intended to take off time between because I believe it allows you to mature and have a more productive graduate experience.



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