

## Experiments in Visual Culture in Olympia and New York City Spring 2026

*Credit options:* This is a 16-credit full-time program. [CRN:30307 (16) includes NYC trip; CRN:30308 (12) no NYC trip; CRN: 30309 (variable) requires permission from faculty]

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visual arts and critical visual studies, painting, drawing

### Description

This full-time, low-residency visual arts and studies program integrates in-person and remote learning to explore not only art-making but also trends in contemporary art criticism, with a focus on this year's Whitney Biennial. Our work will be driven by a spirit of experimentation and criticism, two forms of generative inquiry that exist in dialogue with each other through practice. "Experiment" is from the Latin verb *experiri*, signifying the process of observing, risking, and testing through experience, and "criticism" is from the Greek, *kritikos*, which means to make judgments, to decide, to discriminate, essential capacities for art making and the study of visual culture. By embracing experimentation as both method and ethos, this program will help to develop a studio practice using form, basic materials, and research, and an art writing and criticism practice using analysis and interpretation of visual culture to help us decode our ways of seeing, judging, and forming tastes in an image-saturated culture. As we encounter imagery through contemporary art and art history, our local physical surroundings, social media, the internet, and advertising, how are these contributing to visual sign-systems, histories, and politics that shape our constitution of self, other, and culture in ways beyond language and conscious awareness?

**What to expect:** Classes include lectures, seminars, critique, studio workshops, student-led salons, and the Evergreen Art Lecture Series featuring artists, writers, scholars, and activists. Students develop artistic practice and critical visual studies experience through challenging texts and images by John Berger, Barthes, Freud, Merleau-Ponty, Thomas McEvilly, Holland Cotter, Fred Moten, Susan Sontag, and artists including Francis Bacon, Robert Rauschenberg, Kara Walker, Louise Bourgeois, and work from the Whitney Biennial. **Assignments include** weekly progress reports, creative materials exercises, three critical visual essays, and an individual art project with annotated bibliography, proposal, project essay, and ongoing critique of studio work. The first part of the quarter prepares students for individual art projects through studio workshops experimenting with materials, abstract forms, and processes, alongside critical writing assignments exploring reflective practice, formal description, and analysis. Students then develop an individual project including research, proposal, and final essay, with formal critiques throughout and culminating in a final exhibition.

This program is for students who are ready to commit to their studies, to engage deeply, take risks, remain open to discovery, and accept that meaning emerges through process rather than

being predetermined. It serves exploratory and entry-level students in the Visual and Media Arts and Humanities Paths; students with appropriate backgrounds can do intermediate- and advanced-level work.

**Required books:**

*Ways of Seeing* by John Berger

*What It Means to Write About Art: Interviews with Art Critics* by Jarrett Earnest

**Anticipated Credit Equivalencies:**

4 - Visual Art: Experimental Studio Practice, Material Investigation, and Critique

4 - Writing: Critical Analysis, Experimental Writing, and Visual Studies

4 - Research Trip to New York City or Equivalent Regional Experiential Research

4 - Individual Studio Project

**Weekly Schedule:**

|           |            |                               |
|-----------|------------|-------------------------------|
| Monday    | 10:00–1:00 | Seminar                       |
| Tuesday   | 10:00–1:00 | Studio workshop<br>+ Critique |
| Wednesday | 10:00–1:00 | Lecture +<br>Discussion       |
| Thursday  | 10:00–4:00 | Salon & Open<br>Studio        |

**Low-Residency Schedule:** Students are required to meet in person at the beginning and end of the quarter and may use the on-campus designated studio for the entire quarter or set up a home studio.

Weeks 1-2 and 8-10: Required to be in-residence in our campus studio (there is some flexibility for out-of-state or not local students).

Weeks 3-6: Class sessions will be mostly remote. Students may work remotely or in the campus studio, which will be available all quarter.

**Travel to New York City:** In Week 5, there will be an optional research trip to NYC to attend the 2026 Whitney Biennial exhibition. This one-week immersion treats the city as a laboratory for visual culture, with visits to museums, galleries, artist studios, and foundations moving between traditional and avant-garde work at both the 'centers' and 'margins' of visual culture. Students who plan to go on this trip register for 16 credits.

Students can expect to pay \$2000 to \$2300 to cover airfare, local travel, lodging and food: \$500-750 airfare, \$240 local travel (public transportation to and from the airport and around the city), \$700-800 board (at \$90-100/night for 7 nights), \$280-420 food (\$40-60/day)