

The 7 Best Graphic Design Schools in San Francisco (2022)

Looking to become a graphic designer in the San Francisco Bay Area? The Golden Gate City is definitely the place to study design. It's a city packed with inspiration—from outstanding museums, such as SFMOMA and the Legion of Honor, to amazing architecture, including the Painted Ladies, Coit Tower and, of course, the famous red bridge that gives the city its nickname. The Bay Area has got it all—and there's absolutely no shortage of places where you can study graphic design.

We're going to take you through 7 of the best graphic design schools in San Francisco and the Bay Area to help you make your decision about where to study—and also offer some compelling alternatives.

Though, did you also know that you don't actually need a degree to be a graphic designer? There are some excellent graphic design short courses and bootcamps out there that mean you can become a graphic designer without investing the huge amount of time and money it takes to gain a degree. The best of these courses is Shillington's innovative graphic design course that gets you fully prepared to work as a graphic designer in a seriously short amount of time.

1. California College of the Arts

Location: Showplace Square, San Francisco

Duration: 4 Years

One of the best San Francisco graphic design schools is California College of the Arts or CCA as it is known. CCA was founded in Berkeley in 1907, before moving to Oakland 15 years later before finally settling on its current location in Showplace Square, San Francisco in 1996. A college of around 1500 students, CCA offers 22 undergraduate and 12 graduate programs including a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Graphic Design.

CCA's Graphic Design offering teaches a range of different design skills, including motion graphics, user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) design, environmental graphics and more. CCA Graphic Design students are also taught how to use the essential Adobe Creative Cloud software, InDesign, Illustrator and Photoshop. They also have access to a dedicated graphic design studio, complete with all the necessary equipment and CCA's Hybrid Lab, a studio filled with innovative technology to test out designs and experiments.

2. San Francisco State University

Location: Stonestown, San Francisco

Duration: 4 Years

Founded in 1899, San Francisco State University, known as SF State or simply SFSU, is located on its own campus close to the city's Lake Merced Park. SFSU is made up of six separate academic colleges, which in turn are made up of 118 bachelor's degrees, 94 master's degrees and 5 doctoral degrees—bringing SFSU to a total of 217 degree offerings. Among these is the SFSU School of Design's Bachelor of Science (BS) in Visual Communication Design—this makes SFSU one of the best San Francisco graphic design schools.

Visual Communication Design? Don't worry, we're not leading you astray here—visual communication design is just another name for graphic design. SFSU just call it this as their degree combines graphic design with digital media. Across the four years that make up SFSU's Visual Communication degree, students will learn graphic design literacy, the history of design and technology, modern letterpress and more—making it a varied option for studying graphic design in San Francisco.

3. San José State University

Location: San José

Duration: 4 Years

At the bottom of the San Francisco Bay Area is the city of San José, which houses one of the best graphic design schools in San Francisco Bay: San José State University. SJSU as its shortened to, is the oldest public university on the West Coast. Founded in 1857, it was the founding college of the California State University (CSU) system (of which SFSU above is also a part of). Its Department of Design provides a BFA Graphic Design program which helps to cement its status as a

top San Francisco design school.

Across the four years of the degree program, students undertake core topics and electives which cover typography, form and image, information architecture and interactive design amongst other topics. Admission to the program is based upon a portfolio review of preliminary course work—and reviews continue every semester to make sure students keep on track. SJSU students are additionally required to complete a professional internship during their studies, which helps them gain essential industry experience and knowledge.

4. University of San Francisco

Location: NoPa, San Francisco

Duration: 4 Years

On its large campus, just north of Golden Gate Park, University of San Francisco or simply USF is very much a part of the city, which is backed up by its motto which translates into English as “For City and University”. Home to over 10,000 students, USF offers more than 230 degree programs, both undergraduate and graduate, including a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Design. This makes it one of the best San Francisco graphic design schools.

Offered by USF’s College of Arts and Sciences, their Design BA encompasses graphic design, digital media design, information design and environmental design. As well as this, students have the opportunity to take more advanced courses in interaction design, exhibition design, design activism and more. Students also have exclusive access to USF’s Graphics Center, Design Collectives and are encouraged to enter design competitions and exhibitions.

5. Dominican University of California

Location: San Rafael

Duration: 4 Years

In San Rafael, across the Golden Gate Bridge and north of San Francisco, is the Dominican University of California. Founded in 1890, it is one of the oldest universities in the state of California. Dominican University is home to over 1300 students across 60 different academic majors, minors and concentrations. One of these majors is a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Graphic Design. On top of this, Dominican likewise offers a Graphic Design Minor. Combined, these make Dominican one of the best graphic design colleges in San Francisco and its surrounding areas.

Part of the Rosary College of Arts and Sciences, Dominican's Graphic Design BA is built on practical experience and developing an understanding of the creative process. It teaches students how to master the art of visual communication through a mixture of core, art core and specific graphic design courses. These graphic design courses cover web design, motion graphics, typography and more to help produce well-rounded graphic design graduates.

6. Academy of Art University

Location: SoMa, San Francisco

Duration: 4 Years

With its main campus located on New Montgomery Street in San Francisco's South of Market district, the Academy of Art University is truly part of the Californian city. Originally founded in 1929, AAU has grown to become the largest private art and design school in the United States. It is home to just under 8000 students and over 800 full and part-time staff

members. But what's best about AAU is that it houses a Graphic Design School which offers a range of graphic design degrees including Bachelor of Fine Arts, Master of Fine Arts and a Certificate in Graphic Design.

AAU's Graphic Design School makes it one of the best colleges for graphic design in San Francisco and its teaching backs this up. AAU gives graphic designs students the chance to study communication design, editorial design, branding, typography, packaging and more. The school also has dedicated and shared workspaces for its students, including a MacLab with the latest technology and software, a library and plenty of collaborative spaces.

7. University of California, Berkeley

Location: Berkeley

Duration: 1-2.5 Years

University of California, Berkeley, known in brief as UC Berkeley or just UCB, is located across the Bay from San Francisco in the city of Berkeley. Founded in 1868 under the name University of California, UCB was the first campus of the University of California system which now includes UCLA, UCSF and eight other campuses across the state. Among its 14 academic schools and colleges is UC Berkeley Extension which offers a Professional Program in Graphic Design.

UCB Extension's Graphic Design program helps students build a comprehensive graphic design portfolio so they are able to advance in the industry. Across seven required courses, all taught by industry professionals, students gain skills in the design principles, the Adobe Creative Cloud programs, typography, web design and more. This professionally focused course makes UCB one of the best graphic design schools in San Francisco.

These may be some of the top graphic design schools in San Francisco and the Bay Area but what if we told you that there was a cost effective, faster way of becoming a graphic designer? One that fully prepares you for a job in the design industry? One that allows you to pursue graphic design without college? Well, look no further...

8. Shillington

Location: Online, New York, London, Sydney and Melbourne

Course Duration: 3 months or 9 months

Shillington's graphic design course covers everything you need—from design theory to design programs. Whether on campus or online, you'll learn from experienced, practicing designers before immediately applying your skills in a studio environment. And, this all happens in just three months full-time or nine months part-time. There's four campuses around the world—in New York, London, Sydney and Melbourne—so you can choose your nearest campus or even study graphic design abroad. Or, if you'd rather study online, there's four different time zones to choose from so you can study whenever works best for you.

Learn more about the Shillington graphic design bootcamp today or come along to one of our Info Sessions to learn about the course and chat to some teachers and graduates.

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