

Top 13 Graphic Design Schools In California (2022 List)

Are you based in the West Coast and looking to study graphic design? We've compiled a list of the top graphic design schools in California. These schools will take you on a traditional education journey, but is there another way? Read on to the end to discover an alternative option. Studying online or on campus with a bootcamp like Shillington could save you time and money!

1. California Institute of The Arts

Location: Santa Clarita

Course Duration: 4 Years

One of the best graphic design schools in California if you'd like to know how to learn graphic design. CalArts was founded by Walt Disney and his brother Roy. Disney envisioned a multidisciplinary arts community, grounded in the real-life experience of working artists instead of the structured and sometimes detached principles of an academy. They wanted to merge disciplines and encourage cross-collaboration to create new ideologies and creative methods. This all came to fruition in 1970 when CalArts opened its doors. The current-day culture of the school focuses on inclusivity and diversity in the thoughts and demographic makeup of its students. They aim to represent a colourful mix of socio-economic and culturally creative individuals.

With admissions decided purely on creative and artistic merit—CalArts pride themselves on the creation of an intimate creative environment. This features individually assigned faculty mentors (who are all practicing professional artists) for students throughout their time at the institute. Including Graphic Design—the California Institute of the Arts has six schools which offer comprehensive degree programs across the arts.

2. ArtCenter College of Design

Location: Pasadena

Course Duration: 3 Years

Started by Edward A. 'Tink' Adams in 1930. The former advertising executive had radical ideas around education—with the vision of up-skilling artists and designers by equipping them with real world skills. And the goal to launch them into

leadership roles in advertising, publishing and industrial design. Fast-forward to the current day, part of their original mission holds true. Now one of the top graphic design schools in California, they're still a college focused on developing leaders and innovators in the creative sphere. They offer undergraduate and postgraduate degrees as well as trans-disciplinary programs and tangible maker-spaces. With an aim to be an answer to and active impact on global society—ArtCenter offers a comprehensive course on how to become a graphic designer.

3. California College of the Arts

Location: San Francisco & Oakland

Course Duration: 2-3 Years

With a global outlook and hands-on 'maker' centred approach to learning—California College of the Arts primes their students to become '*versatile makers with inventive solutions to advance culture and society*'. They're a private non-profit college with a wide curriculum—and offers 22 undergraduate and 11 graduate programs with a focus on social responsibility. As a student you can expect to immerse in an experience that offers a balance of theory and practice. The college also has a commitment to sustainability—to which this ethos expands to the spheres of environmental focus, creative practice, leadership, local knowledge and sustainable career opportunities upon graduation. This makes it one of the best graphic design schools in California.

4. Otis College of Art and Design

Location: Los Angeles

Course Duration: 4 Years

Established in 1918, Otis College of Art and Design is one of many graphic design colleges in California that aim to educate

their students by equipping them with practical and global focused-lens—to empower them to shape the world through their creative careers. With a proactive and playful ethos, their curriculum encourages their students to actively engage in the world around them: make, play and experiment. The college is grounded in the culture and resources of the Los Angeles city community *'Where dreams meet discipline'*. Their four year cross-disciplinary program diverges into one of two areas of emphasis: illustration or graphic design. Students will have the opportunity to develop their skills to deliver effective visual communication across a wide variety of applications.

5. Laguna College of Art and Design

Location: Laguna Beach

Course Duration: 4 Years

Amongst other graphic design schools in California, Laguna College of Art and Design was founded in 1961—and emerged from a thriving community of creative culture in Laguna Beach. The college emerged in the early 1900s where the brainpower and influence of artists, intellectuals and entertainers pioneered cultural ventures which culminated in the formation of the college. Laguna has expanded significantly since its founding and now offers undergraduate, graduate, minors and post-baccalaureate programs. Their current design education hones in on the preparation of their students to become bold and innovative designers—who embrace innovation and technology. They nod to their roots by continuing to foster the cultural and community aspects of the creative practice by sharing resources with the broader community and holding exhibition programs.

6. University of California Los

Angeles

Location: Los Angeles

Course Duration: 2-3 Years

Named '*one of America's leading public research universities*' UCLA's extensive campus also offers majors in the field of graphic design. Under the umbrella of The School of the Arts and Architecture (UCLA Arts)—students can expect to receive a design education that encompasses a global perspective and a multidisciplinary digital focus. Like other graphic design schools in California, the curriculum covers practices from typography to branding, printing, 3D modelling and more. Entry to the course is very competitive, with admission based on a combination of creative talent (in the form of a portfolio of creative work) and academic achievement. The larger campus also builds upon the internal creative community in UCLA with the school's public arts institutions like The Hammer and Fowler Museums which bring performance, art and culture together in collaboration and celebration.

7. University of Southern California

Location: Los Angeles

Course Duration: 4 Years

One of the oldest art colleges in California, USC's first art school was founded in 1895. USC's course offers an open approach that allows their students to explore and diverge in their design education throughout the four year course. Part of a trio of undergraduate degrees under USC Roski—the design course is an intensive program that immerses the student in design media. A combination of studio courses in tandem with theory seminars, critique studios, capstone courses and senior thesis projects round off Roski's design education. Being one

of the top graphic design schools in California—students also have the option to extend their degree through optional courses that include professional internships and international art study tours led by faculty. High-achieving students can also progress to an advanced degree in their junior year. Admission is relatively extensive and requirements include a portfolio, artist statement, list of creative accomplishments and record of academic transcripts and test scores.

8. San Diego State University

Location: San Diego

Course Duration: 4 Years

Priding themselves on community-engagement and cutting edge technology like other graphic design colleges in California—SDSU similarly offers a four year course that cycles through a number of core studios in design fundamentals, progressively introducing conceptual skills across a wide range of media. The college centres on diversity and capitalises on its location at the border of Mexico and the Pacific Rim—to provide an experimental and multicultural environment for students to develop their creative practice. The community focus of the college is highlighted in the opportunity to interact with real-world design problems and briefs in junior and senior years of study. The program then culminates in the final year with the creation of a professional portfolio that aims to prepare the student for entry-level positions in graphic design.

9. California State Polytechnic University Pomona

Location: Pomona

Course Duration: 4 Years

A rare college commodity—Cal Poly Pomona is one of only seven polytechnic universities in the whole of the US. As a result of this, the college is known for its hands-on, learn-by-doing philosophy. All faculties encompass the wider college ethos of problem-solving centred learning. Theory is applied to practice and students have the opportunity to collaborate in research and participate in internships and service learning programs—all within a focused and intimate learning environment with an average undergraduate class size of twenty-six students. Being one of the best graphic design schools in California, the four year course offers students a wide range of visual communication based problems and creative briefs. Where students develop creative skills in a variety of projects from typography to motion graphics and packaging design. Due to the unique location of the university a wide variety of internships are available for high-achieving students.

10. Academy of Art University

Location: San Francisco

Course Duration: 4 Years

Originally established in 1929 as an academy of advertising art—the college is now one of the largest schools of art and design in the US. The graphic design program looks to integrate art and commerce by grounding learnings through briefs in commercial and global applications. AAU's course takes the student through a thorough skill-development process through a wide variety of design applications like typography, packaging, branding, print and user experience etc. The design faculty is made up of nationally recognised professionals who uphold the academy values of '*support through collaboration*' and '*personal and professional integrity*'. Despite being one of the top graphic design colleges in California, admissions are less competitive than other schools with a 'no barrier' motto.

11. San Jose State University

Location: San Jose

Course Duration: 4 Years

The Department of Design at San Jose State University aims to take advantage of the university's proximity to Silicon Valley. With a mission to shape the next generation of '*social, political and environmental innovators*'. They describe themselves as a community of 'creative technologists'. The school sees design as a transformative practice that can be used to create positive change in the world. Like other graphic design colleges in California, the course is focused on offering real-world and practical design experiences that will prepare students to find their place in the broader design community and world. With an emphasis on co-curricular activities in tandem with foundational design course content—they hope to prepare their students with extra skills like leadership, communication and emotional intelligence. That when combined—will give their students an edge when entering the professional sphere.

12. Loyola Marymount University

Location: Los Angeles

Course Duration: 4 Years

Amongst the top graphic design schools in California, Loyola Marymount's diverse graphic design program looks to engage their emerging designers in an intersection of history, technology and community-based collaboration. They draw on the rich creative landscape of Los Angeles and perpetuate the wider college focus on social justice and the realisation of social change. The course centres its content on a human-centred approach—pushing their students to create and design solutions with global reach and impacts in mind. The four year program is also 'exhibition-oriented'—taking advantage of the

school's resident art gallery which offers students the opportunity to exhibit their work throughout the academic year in a variety of shows.

13. Chapman University

Location: Orange

Course Duration: 4 Years

Chapman University first opened their doors in 1861 and was established with an open and inclusive ethos. With their first class including women and people of different ethnicities and faiths. This dedication to diversity has persisted to the current day where they strive to continue to offer a comprehensive education in the Department of Art. Like other graphic design schools in California, their course looks to deliver a well-rounded design education with a strong belief in the synthesis of traditional, practical and current design methodologies in shaping a student's contemporary practice. Chapman's program offers opportunities for travel, internships and idea exchange—in the form of an annual symposium that deals with current-day design issues.

These schools are great but...what if there was another easier way to study design?

If you've read this article or you've done your research, you may have come to the conclusion that studying graphic design may not be as simple as you thought.

Multiple factors can stand in the way of a graphic design education. From admission requirements (many schools require a portfolio or proof of creativity), overwhelming fees (tens of thousands of dollars in tuition per semester, adding up over a number of years), to being a long term commitment (at least

two to four years of full time study). And the age-old question—do you really need a degree to become a graphic designer?

Well put those doubts aside, because there's a simple solution—studying with Shillington! In just **3 months full-time or 9-months part-time** on campus or online—you could become a fully fledged, industry ready designer.

At Shillington we believe that anyone has the potential to become a graphic designer, and our inclusive course accepts anyone from anywhere—no creative or academic proof necessary. No experience required. If you're ready to dive into design right now—hear from our global graduates and find out more.

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