

# *JENNIFER CRATON*

## **DIGITAL MEDIA MS PROGRAM APPLICANT PURPOSE STATEMENT**

As an applicant for this program, my main goal is to examine the relationship between digital media and its impact on society, use the insight of that relationship to inform my artistic practice, and positively influence my community by promoting platforms that rectify the underrepresentation of traditionally excluded populations in digital media. I have a degree from Georgia State University in Philosophy and a Minor in Art where I graduated with distinction in the Philosophy Department, Magna Cum Laude, and a 3.76 GPA. At the intersect of my two fields of study, philosophy and art, includes how digital content impacts an audience and the collective culture of society as a whole. In my professional, academic, and artistic careers, I explore the relationships of creators and their artifacts with the society in which they were produced. Building on this, I use digital media as a platform to directly and indirectly address the disparity in representation that people of color, first-generation college students, and lower socioeconomic populations face, and aid in supporting those populations with platforms to contribute their own voices to the digital world.

During my undergraduate program at Georgia State, I initially started out as an Art Education major with a Philosophy minor. I knew that I wanted to help people, but I wasn't quite sure how. I knew how much art had helped me, so I figured that would be a good avenue to begin pursuing. I also was very interested in the creative thinking that philosophy presents, and I knew that I wanted to explore that arena more. The Art education program at Georgia State is very extensive, and it requires students to take an extended amount of studio art classes. In these classes, I learned and developed multiple skills, everything from metal working to Adobe Suite. I became absolutely immersed in learning as much as I could about art; I was fascinated with its rich history and theories, working with my hands to develop my own aesthetic style. I threw myself into all my studio classes, and my education classes started taking a back seat in my mind. As I was in the last year of my Art Education program, I had an experience that would forever change the trajectory of my career. At this point I had done many teaching observations, however upon arriving at the school, the day had I was informed that a bombing threat had been written on a bathroom stall the day before, but that the school had taken precautions and did not deem school closure necessary. Later that day, one of the students called 911 dispatch to report an active shooter. I was about to walk out the front door at the time Georgia State Patrol came running in with automatic weapons. I later found out that the student had called 911 as a prank call, and there was no real threat.

In that moment, I had an overwhelming feeling of uselessness. All the reasons that I had started an art education career began to seem very unclear. The more I thought about it, it seemed like I chose that pathway because I wanted to be an artist and not so much because I actually wanted to make a tangible difference in people's lives. Later, I reexamined my life, and decided that I would have to make some changes. I switched my major to my minor and, my minor in Philosophy became my major. This was in part because I wanted to graduate, and in part because I knew that it would give me time to think about my purpose and scrutinize what really mattered. It was during this time I began working with Kennesaw State University's TRIO Programs.

I was drawn to KSU TRIO because I saw just how much they did for students on their website. KSU TRIO Programs are federally funded, grant-awarded programs that works with local high-schools to provide qualifying students with free services designed to help them achieve successful entry into college, the workplace, and beyond. KSU TRIO's main goal is to make sure that TRIO families have everything they need in order to succeed and positively impact their community, and this fit with my newly defined purpose that I had been agonizing over since the observation experience that I had. My new goal in life was ultimately pretty simple and relatively close to where I started – I just wanted to help people, although not in the way that I had before. In my relatively privileged life, I had been afforded many opportunities that others had not due to my parents and through no action of my own. It is because of this that I was in a position to even begin worrying over my conflicting interests and career path in the first place. Acknowledging this, I wanted to be a part of fueling those with less advantages than I had able to have the opportunity to pursue whatever they want, not just artistic careers.

KSU TRIO does that by taking care of students comprehensively, making sure that their educational experience is equitable to those who may be able to afford more than just the baseline that public schools cover. I was looking for a part-time job to supplement my freelance design work so I could finish my degree, and they were hiring for a math tutor position. I applied on a whim, not wanting my education classes to be in vain and doubting I would be hired. After interviewing, I was hired to work after school a few days a week. I began to make connections with the students, and fulfilling my want to help people, though it was not in a creative capacity. After another position in our program became vacant, I began to eagerly take on some extra responsibilities including various digital media tasks, for which I was well-prepared for given my experience at GSU. My immediate supervisor's supervisor began to take notice of the quality of my work, and eventually interviewed me for a brand-new position at KSU TRIO in October of 2019. I am currently still working with Kennesaw State University's TRIO Programs where I am now the Digital Media Specialist for all KSU TRIO Programs, and I actively produce digital content for the purpose of encouraging local high school students from populations that qualify as historically marginalized in collegiate environments to pursue and succeed in their postsecondary goals.

My work with KSU TRIO has taught me much more about what is possible to achieve in the world of digital media than I previously thought possible. By offering these services at no cost to our students, we hope to remedy the disproportional lack of representation low-income families face in collegiate environments and help make college an achievable dream for so many who thought that it was out of their reach. 68.8% of KSU TRIO students are both from low-income families and will be first-generation college students. My job here not only provides other employees with the promotional materials needed in order to obtain more resources for students, but I also have the opportunity to help ensure that TRIO students see that their peers succeed and are recognized for their achievements in various media. I write articles for the local newspaper, create social media posts, design the graphics for our various distributive materials, and even get to do stuff that I enjoyed during my undergrad like designing and printing t-shirts. While access to the features our program aims to offer underprivileged students is just one piece of the puzzle that bars many families from equitable representation, there is much more that must be done on a cultural level in order to right the inequality of our society.

Throughout my academic career, I have studied the philosophy of art and aesthetics, and I learned how to evaluate the way in which ideas are communicated through visual cues like variances in form and the psychology of color. It wasn't until after I switched my major that I had the opportunity to take philosophy classes like Philosophy of Art, Feminist Philosophy, and Social and Political Philosophy that were focused on studying the sociocultural impact that things like art and visual media have on the formation of cultural ideals and perceptions. These are the classes which built the framework of my own internal worldview that drives my desire to both directly and indirectly contribute to our digital culture in a way that is meaningful and changes the injustices which plagues our cultural ideologies in the United States, specifically in the South. Artistically, I am currently being influenced by the propaganda and political art of the 1940s-1980s and the symbolism that is imbued in that art form.

During my time on the GSU Atlanta campus, I saw lots of social activism and politics being fought out in the graffiti and street art that saturates every surface of that area. One particular incidence that moved me was the Identity Europa vandalism and the resulting counter movement art that took its place. The year following Trump's election to office, there was an outbreak of white nationalist groups across Atlanta, one of them being Identity Europa. They would wheat-paste flyers across campus with Greco-Roman classical statues in the background and a call to "embrace European identity in the face of replacement." As disgusting as this is, it was not even a day later where every flyer had been, a new poster took its place: a single image of a smashed statue and the simple but effective "F\*\*k Identity Europa" tagline. It was something so small, and yet so poignantly human in that act, that I immediately was drawn to social activism through visual culture. The high-contrast effects of collaged realism and solid color blocks that characterize the political art of the 1940s-1980s had almost had a graphic quality about them, and the effects of highly emotional and effective responses

is intrinsically bound to its physical placement in the world for the people who lived through those times. I think that the dawn of social media (and the resulting influx of highly emotional images in our everyday lives) changes how we perceive and relate to visual images and has drastically altered the fabric of our visual culture forever. This is best seen in the modern-day reprisal of the political art form seen in the Obama *“Hope”* poster campaign. The image itself is iconic and still has emotional responses by its audience, however it differs from that of the *“Viva Che!”* Portrait of Che Guevarra in that it transcends a specific time or place correlation because of the setting in which it was viewed – digitally as opposed to in print. This is even more pronounced in the difference of ages of the viewers, younger generations have only seen either in digital media. This correlation between intention/setting and audience response intrigues me, and I would like to explore the juxtaposition of once physical objects in a now universal digital space in the future, as well as how incorporate the experience of digital media into the art itself.

If accepted into the Digital Media MS Program, I would hope to make connections with like-minded people who also use their understanding of digital media to positively affect our culture, become familiar with new technology to accomplish my goals, and better refine my skills in digital media manipulation. To attend Georgia Tech, I would be utilizing the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) offered to employees of the University System of Georgia through my employment at Kennesaw State University, which allows three classes to be taken at any USG institution for free. It would take me slightly longer to graduate, however being a Digital Media Specialist has the added benefit of being able to work from elsewhere and flexible hours. If accepted, I would be very determined to finish because this is such a unique program, and there is no other option in Georgia that would be able to offer me the skills and education that is needed for what I want to accomplish in the future. Most of my work is in other mediums, but in order to create the change and platforms for the underrepresented in my community that I aspire to design, digital media is vital. My current digital media skills are predominantly self-taught, but I am extremely determined to learn all that is needed to complete the degree. The skills that I would bring to your program do not necessarily lie in the hard skills of computing, but rather in vision and design experience. I am formally trained in art and aesthetics as well as the critical thinking characteristic of philosophy, which is uncommon, especially in technology fields. Right now, I think that the area of study that most pertains to what I want to do is Civic Media, even though Digital expression also plays a large role in what I do currently. I would be most excited to work with Georgia Tech faculty like Dr. Yanni Loukissas, Dr. Susana Morris, and Dr. Nassim Parvin. Dr. Yanni Loukissas seems to have a background in aesthetics, and he also is concerned with the ethics of digital expression, which is congruent to what I would like to do. My current focus in my job at KSU TRIO majorly concerns the stories and expression of people of color and other minority students, and I would love to work with Dr. Susana Morris in my endeavor of preserving those distinct voices and providing a platform for them to use in order to communicate their perspectives. I would also like to learn more about the relationship between digital media and the experience of it in

communities, and Dr. Nassim Parvin's background in philosophy and community engagement with digital media makes her an authority on the subject.

I think that I would be a great fit for your program. My diverse educational background in the fields of philosophy and art combined with my work experience with KSU TRIO Programs give me a unique perspective on how digital media reflects and contributes to communities' perception of cultural ideals and the legacy that will be comprised of the visual content we produce. The MS Digital Media Program at Georgia Tech would give me the opportunity to make connections with others who share that goal and help me to develop the skills necessary to both directly and indirectly contribute to the makeup of our society and correct the inequity in representation which still affects our digital culture.