KUSSKE DESIGN INITIATIVE
CALL FOR CO-PRINCIPALS 2024–2026

Overview

The College of Design’s Kusske Design Initiative (KDI) is Advancing the Dialogue across disciplines, to generate solutions for planetary-scale challenges. We are seeking two tenure-stream faculty members to serve as co-principals for 2024–2025 and 2025–2026.

KDI co-principals collaborate in focusing, steering, and further developing the initiative. They ensure connections between KDI programming and College of Design (CDes) research and teaching, while imbuing the initiative with insights and expertise from their own experience. The co-principals contribute to cultivation of KDI themes, evolution of the initiative’s portfolio of scholarship and creative work, and identification of guest designers as well as design-related researchers and practitioners who participate in KDI projects and events.

The co-principals are open-minded, highly collaborative, visionary, and accustomed to engaging dialogue as a method for creative inquiry. They are determined to integrate design and other disciplines to develop solutions for pressing issues, locally and globally. Interests and expertise of the co-principals involve any and all design and design-related disciplines. These colleagues are versatile, nimble, and cooperative, responding to ideas that emerge as dialogues advance.

All tenure-stream faculty in the College of Design are eligible to become a KDI co-principal. Each co-principal receives a support package of $50,000 for each year of their appointment, for a total award value of $100,000. See below for additional details about the co-principal role, including responsibilities to the initiative and allowable uses of KDI support. Details on how to craft and submit your brief expression of interest also appear below. Faculty interested in becoming a KDI co-principal should consult with their department head, to ensure appropriate planning for the two-year appointment.

Expressions of interest are due by December 8. Selected co-principals will be notified in January 2024. Please consider this unique opportunity and encourage colleagues to get involved!
Evolution of the Initiative and the Co-Principal Role

This year, 2023–2024, we are completing the KDI pilot and planning the initiative’s next three-year phase. From the start, our partners at Manitou Fund asked that we “build KDI into the DNA of the college.” We have been doing so both programmatically and structurally, by exploring topics relevant to all CDes disciplines and by constructing an annual rhythm of college-wide events along with the paired, collaborative role of faculty co-principals.

Going forward, we will continue this signature approach by pairing both the co-principals and the roles responsible for implementing the initiative. KDI Coordinator Alanna Nissen will continue in her role focused on logistics and administration, and a new (soon to be searched and hired) P&A faculty member, with qualifications on par with tenure-stream faculty, will ensure that KDI programming is imbued with both depth and breadth of scholarly content. With this substantive anchor and administrative support in place, the KDI co-principals will be able to focus more on connecting KDI purposes and themes to their own research and teaching.

The co-principals are vital members of the KDI core team, which also includes Dean’s Associate Carol Strohecker, KDI Coordinator Alanna Nissen, KDI Advisor Allen Kolkowitz, and (beginning in summer 2024) the new P&A faculty colleague to follow through with development of program content and mentoring of the KDI-funded student cohort. The KDI core team meets weekly throughout the calendar year and benefits from regular attendance of the co-principals.

The core team guides the annual sequence of events from the fall-semester Kusske Lecture & Dialogue to the spring-semester Burst workshop/s, while anticipating and realizing opportunities for Exchange dialogues and Vista exhibits. The team interconnects annual event content through a broad theme, maintaining flexibility for serendipitous incorporation of emergent programming.

Each co-principal continually works with their department head, program director, and faculty peers to coordinate KDI commitments and determine how they interact with the nature and percentages of the co-principals’ faculty responsibilities for research, teaching, and service.

Co-Principal Responsibilities

(1) “Advance the Dialogue” through design inquiries
Conduct research and/or creative scholarship, with any associated community engagement and/or teaching, related to interdisciplinary inquiry and KDI themes (such as design methodologies, interdisciplinary collaboration, intersectional cooperation, systems thinking, stewardship of natural environments, ecologies of humans and other living beings and systems,
circular economies, and conscientious technological innovation). Interests and expertise of the co-principals may involve any and all design and design-related disciplines. Topics and collaborations range widely and deeply, to span and integrate various methods for engagement and creativity.

To support these inquiries and the broader KDI research agenda, co-principals receive generous funding that may include support for graduate-student research and/or teaching assistants.

- The co-principals select, supervise, and mentor their graduate assistants.
- Co-principals are also expected to support their grad assistants’ participation in the KDI student cohort. This group meets regularly and includes, also, other graduate students who are receiving Kusske Fellowships along with undergraduate juniors and seniors who are receiving Kusske Scholarships. Graduate assistants must be allowed enough time within their designated appointment hours for full participation in activities of the KDI student cohort and programming of the initiative overall.

Co-principals should disseminate outcomes of their KDI-funded inquiries through various modes and venues, including:

- the KDI Exchange, which convenes diverse participants for design-related conversations biweekly throughout the calendar year;
- broader professional venues such as publications, conference presentations, exhibitions, and other outlets;
- KDI monthly and annual reporting, by providing the coordinator with brief updates at the end of the fall, spring, and (if relevant) summer terms, including brief write-ups with imagery such as photos, diagrams, charts, etc., and associated captions; and
- KDI Vista exhibits and virtual displays, working with the staff/faculty dyad to create, arrange, and/or upload various documentation as appropriate.

(2) Engage and inform the KDI student cohort

The KDI student cohort consists of undergraduate juniors and seniors who receive generous scholarships, master’s students who receive comparable fellowships, and master’s and doctoral students employed through assistantships. These students convene regularly through dialogues and events designed to support their cultivation as a collaborative group. CDes graduates who have received KDI funding already consider themselves to be alumni of the initiative, as well as of the University, college, and their specific degree program.

To help ground and guide the collective of KDI-supported students, the co-principals:

- Review finalists’ applications for the two-year Kusske Scholarships and Fellowships, and recommend students to become new members of the KDI cohort. This review occurs annually in March.
• Include recognition of cohort membership in their supervision of graduate-student assistants and undergraduate students employed with KDI funds;
• Participate in thrice-annual cohort convenings (particularly the fall welcome event) and other cohort activities as schedules allow.
• Consider with the KDI core team possible directions for discussions and collaborative projects among the student cohort, based on current KDI themes and events.

(3) Contribute to program strategy and realization
Co-principals participate in weekly one-hour meetings of the KDI core team via Zoom, working collaboratively to develop program focuses, guide thematic consistency, and ensure high quality while knitting together different disciplinary perspectives.

As members of the KDI core team, co-principals collaborate to inspire and guide each aspect of KDI programming. Most are open to all College of Design students, faculty, and staff, and many also invite participation of the broader public:

• Kusske Lecture & Dialogue: Co-create a shortlist of potential speakers, themes, and formats for the initiative’s annual, signature event, staged each fall for broad attendance. Co-principals may also participate in the event as panelists or moderators.
• KDI Burst: Collaboratively determine the interdisciplinary theme and identify guest designer/s for highly participatory workshop/s offered to CDes students each spring. Work with guest designer/s to serve as co-curator and co-facilitator. Following the workshop, collaborate with the KDI staff/faculty dyad to organize the event’s creative output for inclusion in monthly and annual reports, physical and/or virtual Vista exhibits, and/or other modes of presentation/dialogue/publication.
• KDI Exchange: Co-generate ideas for topics and conversation partners to engage broadly inclusive, biweekly Zoom dialogues, scheduled and conducted by the staff/faculty dyad. Co-principals participate in the Exchange regularly and often serve as conversation partners, framing and punctuating the dialogue with comments and references.
• KDI Canopy: Advise on organization, presentation, and accessibility of KDI’s online presence and archive, which includes resources for research and creative work along with Vista documentation and displays. Use Canopy tools for teaching, research, and engagement.
• KDI Vista: Contribute to the virtual Vista gallery in KDI’s online Canopy system by working with the staff/faculty dyad to document research outcomes, including results of design-related projects, creative inquiries, and KDI events. Collaborate on counterpart Vista exhibits in CDes spaces and other galleries on-campus and throughout the Twin Cities, working with the staff/faculty dyad and other colleagues (e.g., from the Goldstein Museum of Design, other UMN museums, UMN Libraries, etc.) to curate and produce physical displays related to KDI projects and events.
• **KDI BioLab/Alcove:** Participate in curation and expansion of the emerging collection of biodegradable and otherwise eco-friendly materials, currently housed in the second-floor library at Rapson Hall. Co-principals advise development of this resource for CDes designers and researchers, guide experimental uses of the materials, and collaborate in pursuing grants to augment the KDI funding.

• **KDI Network:** Co-principals are essential in *Advancing the Dialogue* across disciplines and among a growing network of collaborators and partners, some of whom also receive KDI funding and some who help to garner additional support for the initiative.

## Support Package

Recognizing the dyadic partnership of the co-principals as a key KDI structure, generous funding is available for discretionary use to support a range of faculty needs, including but not limited to: summer salary; graduate-student assistants during summer, fall, and/or spring; undergraduate assistants; materials/supplies for research; conference travel; and/or teaching-unit (TU) release.

Each co-principal receives $50,000 per year, for each year of their two-year appointment (for an overall support-package value of $100,000). Supplemental support may be available specifically for collaborative pursuits that could emerge between the two co-principals, through their dyadic partnership on Burst and as the dialogue among the KDI core group proceeds and our team approach to guiding the initiative unfolds each year.

Co-principals are highly encouraged to use a portion of their support package to hire students, usually at the graduate level, as research and/or teaching assistant/s. These Kusske Assistants become members of the KDI student cohort, which also includes undergraduate Kusske Scholars and master’s-level Kusske Fellows. Students employed with KDI funds, including both graduate students and undergraduates, are expected to participate in all events of the initiative, considered as paid hours.

When graduate students are employed, appointments should meet the minimum threshold for participation in the Graduate Assistant Health Plan. (Note that wages for graduate assistants will likely be rising; Alanna Nissen could provide details.)

Co-principals’ support funds roll over year to year within the appointed term; however, any unused funds remaining at the end of the two-year term will no longer be available.
Expressions of Interest

Expressions of interest should be sent via email to KDI Coordinator Alanna Nissen at nisse114@umn.edu on or before December 8, 2023.

Expressions of interest should include (1) a CV and (2) a statement, not to exceed three pages, describing how you anticipate contributing to ongoing realization of the initiative during your two-year term. The statement should include:

- A description of research and/or creative/engaged scholarship that you’d like to pursue, explaining how it pertains to the KDI value/goal/method of advancing the dialogue across disciplines in and beyond the College of Design, to co-develop themes such as:
  - design methodologies,
  - interdisciplinary collaboration,
  - intersectional cooperation,
  - systems thinking,
  - stewardship of natural environments,
  - ecologies of humans and other living beings and systems,
  - circular economies, and
  - conscientious technological innovation.
- An explanation of how your teaching philosophy and approach would contribute to the KDI Burst; and
- A straightforward budgetary overview, explaining how you anticipate investing your KDI support package (e.g., to support your summer salary; graduate-student assistants during summer, fall, and/or spring; undergraduate assistants; materials/supplies for research; conference travel; and/or teaching-unit (TU) release. Alanna Nissen could provide details about budgetary considerations such as TU costs and rising wages for graduate-student assistants.

Selected co-principals will be notified in January 2024.

About the Kusske Design Initiative

A generous commitment from Manitou Fund to the University of Minnesota’s College of Design honors the memory of distinguished alumnus Christopher Arthur Kusske (BLA ’78). The Kusske Design Initiative (KDI) reflects his legacy through widely inclusive events and collaborations among a growing community of broadminded designers. Chris’s emphases on interdisciplinary dialogue, co-creativity, and celebration of the natural world inspire solutions for planetary-scale
challenges. By combining values of ecological stewardship with the disciplinary spectrum that forms the college’s DNA, KDI programs and inquiries have transformative potential for the products we use, the environments we inhabit, and the systems we address.

**Goals**

Through the prestige of KDI faculty and collaborators, the curiosity and dedication of the student cohort, the vibrant events, and the broader reach enabled by online media, KDI aims to ensure the College of Design’s prominence in the global community. KDI projects and events invite diverse participants and collaborators to advance dialogues about urgent design challenges and interdisciplinary methods for addressing them. Solutions emerge through creative experiments ranging across materials and scales, demonstrating ways to sustain environmental health while ensuring social cohesion in human communities. We hope that members of successive generations of the Kusske student cohort will stay connected throughout their careers, as designers co-inventing a more resilient culture based on respect for one another and giving back to the environments we inhabit.