

Creative Writing, Publishing, and Editing MFA

Develop Skills And Knowledge Base In Creative Writing

Goal Description:

MFA graduates should be well prepared to pursue careers and vocations in creative writing, editing, and publishing.

Providing Department: Creative Writing, Publishing, and Editing MFA

RELATED ITEMS/ELEMENTS -----

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

To Engage In Extensive Literary Study

Learning Objective Description:

In accordance with the Association of Writers & Writing Programs' Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing, our program will require "extensive literary study," as writers must become "expert and wide-ranging reader(s)" in order to become successful writers. Our curriculum will "balance the practice of the art of writing with the study of literature."

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Significant Coursework in Literature, Language, and Pedagogy

Indicator Description:

All students in the MFA program shall be required to earn at least 15 hours of graduate credit in literature, language, and pedagogy courses.

Criterion Description:

100% of MFA students shall average at least a B for those 15 hours of graduate credit in literature and language courses.

Findings Description:

Our students continue to perform well in these courses. For fall 23, spring 24 and summer 24, our students took 26 of these courses (78 credit hours), earning a collective a GPA of 3.96 (one student received a B in one of these courses; students received As in the rest of these courses).

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Significant Coursework in Literature, Language, and Pedagogy

Action Description:

Our students are doing well in these courses, but in my first year as program director, I've found that the department offers many courses that clearly fall in this category but that are not listed as part of our degree plan. We need to review our degree plan to see if there are some of the newly added department offerings that we want to add as options on the degree plan.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

To Prepare Students for Careers in Editing and Publishing

Learning Objective Description:

In accordance with the Association of Writers & Writing Programs' Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing, our students will be prepared to seek vocational opportunities in editing and publishing.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

A Two-Course Sequence in Editing and Publishing

Indicator Description:

Students enrolled in the MFA program will be required to successfully complete a two-course sequence in editing and publishing. The first course will provide training in the theory and practice of editing and publishing, while the second course will provide hands-on experience with the Texas Review, a literary journal.

Criterion Description:

All students enrolled in the MFA program will earn at least a ‘B’ or better in both courses in the editing and publishing sequence.

Findings Description:

The Editing and Publishing course was offered in Spring 2024. One student dropped the course. All others received an A.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

A Two-Course Sequence in Editing and Publishing

Action Description:

This course has been working well, but Prof. Lantz is the only faculty member to have taught it for the last decade. We've instituted a new course rotation that will include other faculty, primarily Dr. Ko but also Drs. Kaukonen and Shinkle, in rotation for this course.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Additional Internship Opportunities with the Texas Review and Texas Review Press

Indicator Description:

In addition to the coursework required of all students, MFA students who wish to pursue a career in editing and publishing will be afforded additional training and experience through internships (in the form of graduate assistantships) with Texas Review and Texas Review Press.

Criterion Description:

At least two MFA students each semester will hold graduate assistantships with the Texas Review and/or Texas Review Press.

Findings Description:

In 2023-2024, seven MFA students held graduate assistantships at Texas Review Press.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Additional Internship Opportunities with the Texas Review and Texas Review Press

Action Description:

We don't see the need for any changes to these internships.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

To Produce Creative Work of Publishable Quality

Learning Objective Description:

Students in the MFA program will be able to produce quality literary works of publishable quality.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Opportunities to Provide Critical Feedback on Creative Work

Indicator Description:

A vital pedagogical element of the workshop is the opportunity to provide feedback on the in-process work of student peers. The opportunity to provide this feedback enables students to sharpen their own critical eye not only in regard to the work of others, but to their own work.

Criterion Description:

Each year, the students enrolled in the graduate writing workshops will provide a sufficient amount of thoughtful and engaging critiques of each other’s work, as reported on the GSAR. “Sufficient” is defined in prose workshops as at least 48 critiques (24 per workshop), and “sufficient” in poetry

workshops is defined as 60 poems or pages (30 per workshop).

Findings Description:

Students reported giving weekly feedback on peers' assignments in all workshops. Again, the structure of the nonfiction and poetry workshops in 2023-2024 didn't follow the "traditional" workshop model but instead focused on generative process and collaborative writing, but students still reported submitting an equivalent (or more) amount of peer review writing in all classes.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Opportunities to Provide Critical Feedback on Creative Work

Action Description:

We think this aspect of the program is working well and doesn't require any changes at this time. While the array of courses offered provides students with a variety of workshop structures that don't always adhere to the "traditional" model, students continue to consistently give and receive substantial amounts of critical feedback in these courses.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Opportunities to Receive Critical Feedback on Creative Work

Indicator Description:

These writing-intensive workshop courses will offer students multiple opportunities for submission and revision of their work. The range of commentary from close and attentive readers will provide the authors with essential feedback, both objective and subjective, for the revision and completion of their work.

Criterion Description:

Each year, the students enrolled in the graduate writing workshops will submit a sufficient amount of writing to the workshop, as reported on the GSAR. “Sufficient” is defined in prose workshops as 4 stories, essays, or novel excerpts (2 per workshop), and “sufficient” in poetry workshops is defined as 12 poems or pages (6 per workshop).

Findings Description:

Students reported receiving feedback on their submitted assignments in all workshops. Again, the structure of the nonfiction and poetry workshops in 2023-2024 didn't follow the "traditional" workshop model but instead focused on generative process and collaborative writing, but students still reported receiving an equivalent (or more) amount of critical feedback in all classes.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Opportunities to Receive Critical Feedback on Creative Work

Action Description:

We think this aspect of the program is working well and doesn't require any changes at this time. While the array of courses offered provides students with a variety of workshop structures that don't always adhere to the "traditional" model, students continue to consistently give and receive substantial amounts of critical feedback in these courses.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

To Provide Students with Strong Thesis Advising

Learning Objective Description:

In accordance with AWP Hallmarks, faculty members will “excel in providing both holistic and line-specific suggestions for revision to each student’s thesis.”

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Contact Hours with Thesis Director

Indicator Description:

Faculty members who are directing theses will meet individually on a regular basis with their students.

Criterion Description:

Thesis students will have a sufficient number of contact hours during Thesis I and Thesis II semesters with their thesis directors. “Sufficient” will be defined as 15 hours per semester (an average of one hour per week), as reported on the GSAR.

Findings Description:

Students reported maintaining weekly, one-hour meetings with their thesis advisors (average 15 hours/semester).

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3**Contact Hours with Thesis Director****Action Description:**

We continue to remain proud of the amount and quality of one-on-one work our thesis students receive. Some students report they are having regular scheduled meetings with their thesis directors up to a full year before they actually start thesis, and we think this level of advising is something our students value highly.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1**To Provide Students with a Variety of Lectures and Readings****Learning Objective Description:**

In addition to coursework led by our core faculty, the program will, in accordance with AWP Hallmarks, broaden “the student’s knowledge of literary techniques and aesthetics through literary lectures, craft lectures, and readings by the faculty, visiting writers, and scholars.”

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2**Program of Visiting Writers, Editors, Publishers, and Scholars****Indicator Description:**

In addition to the presence of the core MFA faculty, the program will bring to campus writers, editors, publishers, and literary scholars of national and regional renown each semester. When possible, visitors will present both their own creative work and offer a separate talk regarding an element of craft or the profession.

Criterion Description:

Students will have the opportunity to attend a sufficient number of readings and craft lectures provided by visiting writers, editors, publishers, and scholars. Sufficient will be defined as 6 per year (3 per semester).

Findings Description:

Our visiting writers for 2023-2024 included Darrel Alejandro Holnes and Mathias Svalina, and (through the National Book Awards Festival) Darcie Little Badger, Roger Reeves, and Marytza K. Rubio, all of whom gave a reading and craft talk. Additionally, because several faculty recently published books, for our spring reading slot, we featured four faculty (Dr. J. Bruce Fuller, Dr. Ginger Ko, Prof. Nick Lantz, and Dr. Katie Jean Shinkle) at a reading.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3**Promise of Visiting Writers, Editors, Publishers, and Scholars****Action Description:**

We continue to offer an excellent slate of visiting authors, editors, and scholars for our students (and campus and the broader community). However, ever since the National Book Awards Festival moved from the spring to the fall, our schedule of visiting writers has shifted to be very fall-heavy. In the spring, because of conference travel and the high number of thesis and portfolio defenses, scheduling visiting writers is more challenging. We'll have to assess whether we need to think of our programing schedule differently, or if the current system is working as is.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

To Undertake Challenging Workshops Consistently And Frequently

Learning Objective Description:

In accordance with the Association of Writers & Writing Programs' Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing, our program will offer "challenging workshops" each semester in fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. These writing-intensive courses will offer students multiple opportunities for submission and revision of their work. In keeping with the fundamental nature of workshop, the students will provide and receive critical feedback not only from the professor but from fellow students. The range of commentary from close and attentive readers will provide the authors with essential feedback, both objective and subjective, for the revision and completion of their stories, poems, and essays.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Nature Of Writing Workshop Experiences

Indicator Description:

These writing-intensive courses will offer students multiple opportunities for submission and revision of their work. The range of commentary from close and attentive readers will provide the authors with essential feedback, both objective and subjective, for the revision and completion of their writing.

Criterion Description:

Each year, students in enrolled in the graduate writing workshops will submit a sufficient amount of writing to the worksop, as reported on the GSAR. "Sufficient" is defined in prose workshops as 4 stories or novel excerpts (2 per workshop), and sufficient in poetry workshops as 12 poems or pages (6 per workshop).

Findings Description:

We offered one poetry workshop and one fiction workshop in fall 2023. In spring 2024, we offered a special nonfiction workshop on collaborative writing. Both the poetry class and the nonfiction class were structured around innovative approaches to workshop and focused on process-based and collaborative writing. So these classes don't quite map onto our usual system of quantification, but in the poetry class, students participated in 11 workshop meetings and produced a chapbook/novella-length work (well more than the target 6 poems per workshop). The nonfiction students engaged in generative drafting of collaborative projects throughout the semester, which was again more than equivalent to the standard 2 pieces of writing per workshop. The fiction workshop required students to submit 3 pieces of writing.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Nature Of Writing Workshop Experiences

Action Description:

The poetry and nonfiction workshops this year used innovative structures and pedagogies. This diversity of workshop approaches is of great value to our students, and we intend to continue to offer a range of workshop types in the future. In past years' assessments, we've noted the challenge of offering courses such as the poetry workshop on a regular basis. We've agreed on planned course rotation for the next eight years, that we believe will increase the likelihood of courses such as poetry and nonfiction making enrollment when they're offered and also allowing students to better plot out their degree plans.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Workshop Offerings And Opportunities

Indicator Description:

As the workshops form the core of the MFA curriculum and since each student must take fifteen hours of workshops, it is essential that our students be able to depend upon regular workshop course offerings so as to be able to make steady progress toward the degree.

Criterion Description:

We want to be able to offer graduate-level workshops in fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction each semester.

Findings Description:

This year, we offered three workshops: fiction and poetry in the fall, and nonfiction in the spring.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Workshop Offerings And Opportunities

Action Description:

In the past, we've struggled with how often to offer classes like poetry and nonfiction workshop. Starting this year, we've developed a schedule of course offerings for the next eight years. As we implement this schedule, we will monitor student enrollment and degree progress to ensure that it meets the needs of students.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

To Support Our Students' Travel to Regional and National Conferences

Performance Objective Description:

Recognizing the value of regional and national conferences in our students' professionalization, we will seek to provide financial support to enable our students to travel and fully participate in these conferences.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

KPI - Conference Travel

KPI Description:

We will continue to seek opportunities to support our students' registration, travel, and hotel for conferences, workshops, and book festivals in the state, region, and nation.

Target Description:

Our target is to offer some funding for all students who are participating in professional conferences.

Results Description:

We were able to fund 5 students for travel to the Association of Writers and Writing Programs in Annual Conference this year in Kansas City.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Action - Conference Travel

Action Description:

Ideally, we'd like to have the budget to fund all interested students in travel to at least one conference, but that's feasible, so we're committed to making sure that all interested students have an opportunity for conference travel funding to AWP at least once during their time in the program. This year, we created a more formal apparatus for how students can apply for program sponsorship, and we intend to continue and refine this process so that it feels transparent to students.

Student Recruitment

Goal Description:

We are a young program with a low ratio of applicants to admits. Our goal is increase the number of applicants so that we might become more selective in our admits.

Providing Department: Creative Writing, Publishing, and Editing MFA

RELATED ITEMS/ELEMENTS -----

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

A Diverse Student Population

Performance Objective Description:

Consistent with our mission as a regional state institution and AWP Hallmarks, we will seek to create a diverse population of qualified students of different backgrounds, social classes, and races.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Diversity of Student Population

KPI Description:

Consistent with the AWP Hallmarks, we seek a diverse student population, including but not limited to race and gender, reflecting the region that we serve.

Target Description:

MFA cohort will represent diversity of thought, background, and experience.

Results Description:

Of the fourteen enrolled MFA students this year, 4 identified as non-white, and 5 identify with the LGBTQ+ community. Of the eleven students we accepted (seven elected to enroll), five identified as non-white. Our students continue to mostly come from the east Texas region, though they do represent a wide range of ages and life stages.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Diversity of Student Population

Action Description:

We remain committed to recruiting and admitting a diverse range of students, but the primary challenge here is related to the larger challenge of recruitment. We've averaged 13 applicants per year for the past five years (as high as 19 and as low as 9), and so we are somewhat at the mercy of who applies. Drs. Shinkle and Ko are working on a project with social media consultant to help expand awareness of our program within the regions, which is very diverse. We intend to use the results of this project to improve our overall recruiting strategies.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Student Recruiting

KPI Description:

Through visits and advertising campaigns to English majors and minors, to undergraduate creative writing classes, in venues such as *Poets & Writers* and *The Writer's Chronicle*, and via tables at the annual *Association of Writers and Writing Programs Conference and Bookfair*, we hope to recruit between five and ten students to begin the MFA at SHSU. Additionally, we expect our annual visiting writers series to contribute to our recruitment efforts.

Target Description:

Admitting five students per year in the program.

Results Description:

We offered spots to eleven students this year. Seven students accepted and are enrolled in fall 2024 courses.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Student Recruiting

Action Description:

Recruiting has been and remains a challenge for us. Part of this involves funding: programs with more attractive funding packages simply receive more applicants. So we will continue to advocate for any funding opportunities as they become available (such as the fellowships) as well as advocate for increases to the graduate assistant pay (which has not increased in decades). Beyond that, we're pivoting to refocus recruitment more regionally than nationally, and we plan to do more direct marketing to local colleges and universities to increase awareness of our program within the area. Drs. Shinkle and Ko are also engaged in a project with a social media consultant to revamp our social media presence and come up with a set of actionable strategies that we can use to improve recruitment going forward.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

To Recruit Qualified And Exceptional Students

Performance Objective Description:

We will recruit and accept into the program only those students, ideally between five and ten a year, who can reasonably be expected to complete it.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Incoming Graduate Student GPA

KPI Description:

The program will use incoming GPA scores as one indicator of likely student success. We will aim to maintain a minimum 3.00 standard for applications, with an expectation of not more than 15% allowable exemptions.

Target Description:

We will aim to maintain a minimum 3.00 standard for applications, with an expectation of not more than 15% allowable exemptions.

Results Description:

We admitted 11 applicants (7 accepted). Of the admitted students, their GPA was collective 3.58. One student had a GPA under 3.0, but on reviewing the student's application overall we felt confident that the student would be successful in the program. All other students had a GPA over 3.00.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Incoming Graduate Student GPA

Action Description:

We feel we've maintained high standards in this regard, despite our rather small applicant pool. In the one case this year where we admitted a student with a GPA under 3.0, we gave careful consideration to the student's whole application, and we believe this student will be successful in the program. Nonetheless, we remain committed to the GPA standard we've set for ourselves.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

To Provide Financial Aid to Recruit Qualified and Exceptional Students

KPI Description:

Recognizing the role that financial aid in the form of graduate assistantships serves in recruiting qualified and exceptional students into the program, we will seek to support as many of our students in this manner and to the best of our resources as we can.

Target Description:

Our target is to offer funding to all MFA students through assistantships and fellowships.

Results Description:

We continue to offer the \$10,000 per year fellowships (renewable for up to three years) for three students each year, so at any given time, nine students are benefitting from these fellowships (the fellowship students also receive a graduate assistantship). Starting fall 2024, we'll be offering one-year "recruitment scholarships" for four students.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

To Provide Financial Aid to Recruit Qualified and Exceptional Students

Action Description:

We would of course like to expand our financial aid options, and will continue to advocate for that with administration, but we understand this is a slow process and not something we can directly control. Our goal remains to have all students fully funded.

Update to Previous Cycle's Plan for Continuous Improvement Item

Previous Cycle's Plan For Continuous Improvement (Do Not Modify):

Closing Summary

The start of the 2023–24 academic year will represent a transition point for the MFA program in creative writing, editing, and publishing, as Prof. Nick Lantz takes over as director, replacing Dr. Scott Kaukonen, who has been the director since the program's inception in 2010. Hopefully, a new director will provide some new perspective and new energy to the position.

The most significant challenge the program faces continues to be recruitment (and retention). Clearly, we haven't solved the challenge. We continue to accept and enroll a sufficient number of students, but we'd like to increase the number of applicants so that we always choose our students from the strongest pool possible. We're always sensitive to our desire to have a program whose student body reflects the full diversity of our region, which is to say Texas and the Gulf Coast. We're also aware of the challenges and obstacles that traditionally underrepresented groups face when it comes to graduate programs, MFA programs in particular. It begins with awareness--what are MFA programs, what can they do for you, what can they not do for you, what might they do for you, where are they--and preparation (what do I need to do to apply, what does it take to be admitted, what will the atmosphere be like in an MFA program), but it also includes, significantly, financial and time obstacles. Anything we can do to lower these barriers for the best students possible is not only in their interest but in our interest as a program. Going forward, we will seek tangible ways to address these concerns--from our marketing materials to our financial aid to our pedagogy.

We look forward this fall to the return of the National Book Awards Festival and to a continued lineup of diverse writers visiting our campus. We continue to believe that our students need to be exposed to a wide-range of writers, not just in terms of genre and forms and identities, but in terms of life experiences as writers. Not all our students will going to lives as teachers of creative writing (or teachers at all), and so the writers we bring to campus need to include those who have taken other paths.

As noted above, we will be reviewing our portfolio system for tweaks and revisions. We do think that the portfolio system is doing what we had intended for it to do, but it's something we should be reviewing on our regular basis to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of our students, especially with their eyes to post-MFA life.

We will be strategic, in conjunction with the chair of the Department of English, about our course offerings, and the ways in which we can maximize enrollments in each class and yet ensure that our students have the offerings they need each semester so that they might all graduate on time. We will also remain flexible for our students in terms of their individual needs and goals so that the program is always serving the best interests of our students and not some other entity.

We will also celebrate our successes. It was noted above that we've had more student publications this year than any other year. We're also seeing the alumni of our graduate creative writing program begin to publish books and land academic jobs. It's not something we've always been able to say, but moving forward we expect to be able to say it more often and more loudly, in ways that will make us a more attractive program to prospective students.

Update of Progress to the Previous Cycle's PCI:

We met our metrics for the previous year's PCI, but we've been informed that many of our objects do not meet the required criteria for program assessment, so we will be addressing those issues in the upcoming cycle by realigning our objectives with our portfolio process to collect better data that more directly measure our objectives.

New Plan for Continuous Improvement Item

Closing Summary:

Beginning in fall 2023, we switched program directors for the first time in the program's history, and we're using this as an opportunity to review not just our curriculum but also our internal program processes and structures, from how we schedule meetings, assign tasks, select students for competitive opportunities, manage the flow of thesis and portfolio paper work, conduct advising, and so on. Many of these factors are not explicitly accounted for or in our assessment plan, but as we endeavor to make the program run smoother, we'll also improve in our target areas. For example, streamlining and clarifying logistical processes around thesis and portfolio work will help faculty be more effective advisors in their weekly meetings with students.

We're very proud of the caliber and diversity of visiting authors we bring to campus (some in partnership with the National Book Awards Festival), but we may need to look at the scheduling of these author visits. In the past, the MFA program brought out most visiting writers in the fall, and the NBAF was in the spring. Now that the NBAF has moved to the fall, most of our visiting writers tend to appear in that semester. In the spring, with conference travel and the high number of MFA student these defenses (we had 16 defenses this spring), as well as the often high number of campus visits for departmental job candidates, it makes scheduling of author visits in the spring difficult. So we will have to examine whether we are satisfied with having a more full fall schedule, with fewer events in the spring, or if there is alternative programming we can offer in the spring, or if we'd like to pursue some other course of action.

Recruiting continues to be our biggest challenge. As mentioned above, Drs. Shinkle and Ko are engaged in a project to work with a social media consultant to generate strategies for better reaching our target demographics. We're pivoting to focus more on recruiting from the region, with less focus on on-of-state students. This strategy reflects the demographics of the applicants we already receive, but our region is also very diverse, with only a handful of MFA programs in a very large state, and we're confident that if we can raise awareness of our program among those populations, we'll see an increase in our applications. Of course, part of making the argument to prospective students to pursue a degree in creative writing is practical and financial. This is especially true for prospective students who are first-generation, come from marginalized backgrounds or are (for any reason) keenly conscious of their finances. The more comprehensive and better funding we can offer—and if we can successfully communicate the existence of this funding—to prospective students, the more we increase the likelihood that those prospective students will see pursuing an MFA with us as a viable option for their lives. We desperately need more funding lines, and we need the graduate student stipend to increase substantially (it hasn't seen an increase in decades), but in the meantime, we will continue to explore new ways to communicate the opportunities we do have to prospective students.

We've begun reviewing our portfolio processes and identified several pain points, both in students understanding of the content of certain portfolio elements, but also in the scheduling and other logistical processes of the portfolio. We plan this year to review and submit changes to these processes for next years catalog.

We've implemented an eight-year course schedule for our program classes, and we will monitor enrollments and student degree plan progress to ensure that this schedule is meeting student needs while also ensuring that these classes make enrollment whenever they are offered. We're also implementing some changes in how we do pre-registration advising with students to help them better plan their schedule of classes. We'll monitor these new process and adjust as necessary, but it may take a few years before we have a full understanding of how well they've worked.