

## *MFA PROGRAM IN WRITING*

I. ADMISSIONS. Individuals with at least a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent from an approved undergraduate institution may apply for admission to the English MFA program in Writing. Applicants need not have been undergraduate Writing or English majors but should be prepared to submit a sample of writing in the genre in which they wish to specialize. Applicants will be evaluated on their personal statement, writing sample, GRE scores (general aptitude only), undergraduate grades, and recommendations.

## II. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### *A. General Requirements*

1. The MFA in Writing will be awarded for the completion of a minimum of 36 credit hours with a minimum grade average of 3.0, plus the completion of an acceptable final manuscript (see "Final Manuscript Requirement" below).
2. In the final year of coursework, MFA students are encouraged to register for 3 credits for manuscript preparation (ENGWRT 2900: Manuscript Writing for the MFA) under the supervision of their final manuscript committee Chair, or another committee member. This course will count, only once, as an elective towards the 36 credits required for the degree. ENGWRT 2900 is an option, not a requirement. It is designed to give MFA students greater flexibility in planning their final year of coursework and completing their final manuscript. It is available to all MFA students who have completed most of their coursework.
3. MFA students may not take more than 12 credits of their required 36 credit hours in undergraduate courses from the 1000 level. Courses numbered below 1000 are not accepted as graduate credit.

Below are the particular requirements for each area of major interest in the Writing Program.

### *B. Fiction and Poetry*

1. 12 credits in four graduate Writing courses:
  - a. A minimum of 9 credits is required in three graduate Writing workshops in the student's area of major interest (fiction or poetry). The first workshop taken in a student's first term should be in his or her major area of interest.
  - b. Students are required to take 3 credits in graduate-level readings or topics courses. Students should enroll in a readings or topics course in their area of major interest as soon as possible in their careers (i.e., before any elective seminar or course other than a Writing workshop). The courses designated Readings in Contemporary Poetry and Readings in Contemporary Fiction vary in content from term to term.
2. 12 credits (4 seminars) in graduate English courses in Composition, Film, or Literature. These credits can include ENGLIT 2500: Seminar in Pedagogy. In extraordinary circumstances, and with the approval of the student's advisor, a maximum of 3 credits may be taken at the 1000 level to satisfy part of the 12-credit graduate English requirement. Any 1000-level course counted toward the MFA must include a graduate component in the form of additional and advanced readings and writings to be determined by the instructor. A statement from the instructor describing the graduate component should be placed in the student's file.
3. 12 elective credits:
  - a. A maximum of 6 credits at the 1000 level or above may be taken outside the Department of English if they are relevant to the student's program and approved by the student's advisor.
  - b. A maximum of 3 credits may be taken in Writing courses at the 1000 level.

### C. Creative Nonfiction

#### 1. 18 credits in six graduate Writing courses:

a. 3 credits in ENGWR 2400: Structures and Techniques are required. This course covers strategies in advanced research, interviewing, saturation reporting, and the use of fictional techniques in nonfiction. Students who can demonstrate previous training and practice in this area may, with the permission of the nonfiction graduate committee, substitute a Writing workshop or an appropriate topics course.

b. A minimum of 9 credits is required in three graduate Writing workshops in creative nonfiction.

c. 6 credits are required in nonfiction readings courses—one in shorter forms and one in book-length forms.

#### 2. 18 credits in additional courses:

a. A minimum of 9 elective credits is required in other English courses outside the Writing program, which may include ENGLIT 2500: Seminar in Pedagogy. A maximum of 3 of these credits may be earned in Department of English 1000-level courses in Composition, Film, and Literature.

b. A maximum of 9 elective credits is required in other areas of interest deemed appropriate preparation, as determined by the student and approved by his or her advisor, for the individual student's particular endeavors. These 9 credits may be taken outside the department, at the 1000 level or above, if they are in classes particularly appropriate for a major writing project of the student and are approved by his or her advisor. These electives may, of course, be taken entirely within the Department of English.

Note: The MFA does not have a foreign language requirement, but study of a foreign language is encouraged. 6 credits in foreign language study may be counted toward the degree as elective credits under section 3.a of "Fiction and Poetry" above and under section 2.b of "Creative Nonfiction" above.

III. FINAL MANUSCRIPT. The final manuscript consists of a book-length manuscript of the student's best work in his or her area of major interest.

*A. Formation of Final Manuscript Committee.* Each student will form a final manuscript committee consisting of three English department faculty members: two graduate Writing faculty members in the student's area of major interest, and one member of the graduate faculty in Composition, Film, or Literature. A fourth committee member may be drawn from another department within the University if a faculty member in another area is deemed to have expertise that relates to a student's particular subject matter. No later than the beginning of the student's second year in the program, the student should complete the MFA Manuscript Committee Form and return it to the Graduate Administrator, with the signatures of each of the committee members. The Chair of each committee shall call an initial meeting as soon as possible after the committee's formation to review the student's work to date.

*B. General Manuscript Requirements.* The final manuscript committee must accept the student's manuscript as a work of professional quality. "Professional" does not necessarily mean "commercial"; it does mean that the manuscript should be of sufficient excellence to deserve an intelligent and literate audience. Except in extraordinary circumstances, the final manuscript will consist of work in one genre. The student's manuscript committee shall decide what constitutes a "book-length" manuscript, but the suggested minimum page count is 50 for poetry, and 150 (typed, double-spaced, standard format) for fiction. For poems, short stories, and articles, a table of contents with page numbers should be included. For creative nonfiction students, the minimum is 200 (typed, double-spaced, standard format) pages. Realizing that nonfiction books sometimes run longer than this minimum, the faculty advises students that a committee may, in exceptional circumstances, allow the 200 pages to be part of a longer book. In such cases the manuscript must be accompanied by a comprehensive outline or synopsis for the entire book project. Poetry manuscripts must be single-spaced; nonfiction and fiction manuscripts must be double-spaced. All MFA manuscripts must have single-sided printing

(printed on one side only), must have numbered pages, and must be hard-bound or spiral-bound.

C. *Preliminary Approval.* By the first month of the term preceding the term in which the degree is expected (e.g., the end of September for April graduation), the student should present to the chair of his or her final manuscript committee a prospectus of the manuscript for preliminary approval. The prospectus should contain a general description and/or outline of the final manuscript and a sample of work to be included (suggested minimum: 20 pages of poetry or 50 pages of prose). If the prospectus is approved, the Chair of the committee will so indicate to the student in writing and will place a brief notice of that approval in the student's file in the graduate administrator's office. If the prospectus is not approved, the Chair shall call a meeting of the committee, the student, and the student's most recent workshop teacher(s) to discuss necessary changes.

D. *Final Approval.* Customarily, the final manuscript will require revisions determined by the final manuscript committee together with the student in meetings and in individual conferences. When the last draft of the final manuscript is approved by a majority vote of the committee, the student will provide the Graduate Administrator with one bound copy of the final manuscript. Students are invited to examine copies of final manuscripts previously accepted for the MFA. A substantially complete draft of all manuscripts must be submitted for approval to all committee members no later than the end of the term preceding the term in which the degree is expected in order to allow time for revisions. The department emphasizes the importance of revision in all writing and thus the necessity of allowing ample time for this process. Each committee will reserve the right to determine when a manuscript is finished, and publishable. Successful completion of this degree requirement is not guaranteed simply by meeting the manuscript deadlines.

E. *Manuscript Advisory for Creative Nonfiction.* Because there is a long tradition of MFA work in fiction and poetry, students in those areas come to the University reasonably knowing what to expect. Creative nonfiction, on the other hand, is a relatively new offering in the MFA, and may seem broader and more inclusive than the other genres. Therefore, the Writing Program offers the following guidelines:

1. The terms "creative nonfiction" and "literary journalism" should serve as indicators of the intent of our program. We expect students to work in any of a wide variety of styles and subgenres, such as autobiography, biography, history, speculative or personal essays, new journalism, investigative reporting and analysis, and feature writing of the quality that appears in publications such as *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, and literary quarterlies. More traditional journalism will not be accepted as material for workshops and/or final manuscripts.
2. In addition to the "General Requirements" for the MFA listed earlier, the nonfiction faculty sets forth these guidelines:
  - a. The manuscript should be aimed at a general, literate audience.
  - b. The manuscript cannot consist of ephemeral journalism, academic reports, scholarly papers, extended term papers, instructional manuals, or "in-house" public relations efforts.
  - c. The manuscript must focus on a single subject.
  - d. Collections of articles and/or essays will be accepted only if they have a unifying theme.
  - e. The manuscript must be composed of work written while the student is matriculated.
  - f. Acceptance of practice or work in a particular subgenre or style by one or more workshop teachers does not guarantee that the same work will be acceptable by the manuscript committee for inclusion in the final manuscript.

IV. TRANSFER OF CREDITS. A maximum of six graduate credits earned at another institution may be transferred, with the approval of the Director of Graduate Studies, toward fulfillment of the MFA credit

requirements. Any transfer of credit, however, depends on a course-by-course evaluation by the Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with Writing Program faculty, regarding the relevance and comparability of each course to our MFA program and its curriculum. Students are not guaranteed a transfer of graduate credits. Transfer of credit will not be approved for courses in which a grade lower than a B or its equivalent was received.

V. CHANGE IN MAJOR AREA OF INTEREST. Changes in a student's major area of interest must be made in consultation with the departmental advisor and workshop faculty in the new genre, and may involve additional coursework.

VI. STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS. Full-time students must complete all requirements for the MFA degree within four calendar years of the student's first registration for graduate study.

VII. ADMISSION OF UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH MFAS TO THE PHD PROGRAM IN CRITICAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES. The MFA in Writing is a terminal degree. MFA students should be aware that admission to the PhD program is extremely competitive and that an MFA degree from our department does not in any way lead to guaranteed acceptance into the PhD program. Students may transfer, with the approval of the director of Graduate Studies, up to 24 credits from graduate Literature, Film, and Composition courses taken during their study for the MFA degree in our department toward fulfillment of the PhD credit requirements. Transfer of credit will not be approved for courses in which a grade lower than a B or its equivalent was received. Students should be aware that any credit applied toward the PhD degree here may affect the number of years of support they can expect from the department and may also affect the pace at which they need to pass certain milestones towards the degree.