**2022 Fall Exam Procedures**

**MFA Creative Writing**

**Purpose**

The purpose of The MFA Creative Writing Graduate Exam is to give you the opportunity to read widely in literature beyond seminar reading lists. Although called an exam to satisfy graduate school requirements, it consists of a Reading List, an Annotated Bibliography, and a Craft Essay (a.k.a. Critical Preface), which are undertaken over a roughly six-month period. The process is designed for you:

* to gain a broader and deeper understanding of creative writing craft within and across genres.
* to demonstrate this understanding through a clear, detailed analysis.
* to set your own work in a larger context.
* to learn craft skills that will enhance your own creative writing.

The exam is also an opportunity to refine your understanding of how your own creative writing situates itself within or pushes against the influences of the wider literary community. The process will be a good foundation for developing the Critical Preface for your creative writing thesis.

**Highlights**

* In Spring 2022, you will meet with the Creative Writing Faculty (Chair and Second Reader) on your Thesis Committee to create your **personalized Summer** **Reading List**.
* Within the first two weeks of Fall 2022, you will meet with these two faculty members and discuss your **Annotated Bibliography** with notes from your reading (4-5 pages).
* This meeting will prepare you to write a **Craft Essay** of 10-12 pages that will discuss a minimum of four writers. See Composing Craft Essay section below for details.
* The **Annotated Bibliography** and **Craft Essay** together constitute your **Written Exam.**

**Your Personalized Reading List**

The creative writing faculty has created core reading lists in four genres: **Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Poetry, and Hybrid Works**. These reading lists are available on the Canvas Graduate Programs Page, in the MFA folder. These lists are revised by faculty every few years and represent a wide cross-section of both canonical and contemporary work.

These lists are meant to be a starting point as you discuss the composition of your personalized Summer Reading List with your Exam Committee.

### Creating Your Personalized Reading List

1. Choose **two out of four** genres on which to focus.
2. Set up a meeting early in Spring quarter with your Thesis Chair and 2nd Reader to discuss the formation of your list (see Timeline). You may meet with them individually or together, depending on their preferences.

Come to this meeting with the core reading lists in hand, some sense of other works you might want to study, and a rationale for reading these works.

1. In consultation with your Thesis Chair and the 2nd Reader, you will choose a variety of works from each of the two lists.You must include some theory from each genre on this list.
2. You may include works from outside the core reading lists in consultation with your committee. You should have a clear rationale for including other texts in line with your research and writing interests.
3. Your final two-genre list will contain approximately **20 authors** altogether. Some of your readings will be entire books, while others may be a selection of individual pieces. Your Chair and 2nd Reader will guide you in creating satisfactory combinations and will have final approval.

**Studying Your List Over the Sumer**

* Over the summer, read all texts on your two-genre, personalized reading List. Read the texts with some essential questions in mind to focus your study; you can formulate this thematic focus based on your work in graduate seminars, your own writing concerns, and discussion with your committee members.
* Look for *connections* between the works on your list, both within genre and across genre. These connections could be similarities in content, theme, or form; or these connections could show the differences/contrasts within and between genres.
* Read closely, choosing and marking passages that you might utilize in your Annotated Bibliography and, later, your Craft Essay. Type up quotes from each text to have handy for further discussion.

**The Annotated Bibliography**

An Annotated Bibliography serves a few purposes:

* Documents that you have read the texts on your list.
* Demonstrates that you have gleaned at least a few key points from each reading.
* Organizes your thoughts in a clear manner.
* Creates an overview of the predominant themes and craft elements that drew your focus.
* Provides a map for developing your Craft Essay.
* Provides a resource document for further study, writing, and teaching.

To create the Annotated Bibliography, take good notes as you read the texts on your list.

Your notes for each text or author (if you have multiple texts from one author) should highlight key ideas, themes, craft elements, phrases, etc. You might include a quote from the text that, to you, encapsulates that work and acts as a springboard for discussion.

**The Annotated Bibliography is due for your Fall Committee Meeting.**

**Fall Committee Meeting**

* Within the first two weeks of fall quarter (see Timeline) you will **meet with your** Thesis Chair & 2nd Reader to discuss your reading over the summer and areas of interest for the Craft Essay.
* It is *your* responsibility to contact your Thesis Chair and 2nd Reader to set up this meeting. You may meet with them individually or together, depending on the committee members’ preferences and availability.
* **Send a copy of your Annotated Bibliography to the Chair and 2nd Reader at least three days before the scheduled meeting**. The Annotated Bibliography will form the foundation for your discussion.
* Your conversation should demonstrate that you’ve read widely and deeply on your list. Prepare for this meeting by going over your notes, formulating possible topics for your Craft Essay, etc.
* During this meeting, you will come up with a plan for writing your Craft Essay, which is due at the end of the quarter.

**The Craft Essay a.k.a. The Critical Preface**

The Craft Essay is meant to demonstrate your ability to analyze texts from the standpoint of a creative writer—articulating clear themes, issues of craft, and connections between theory, creative writing, and your own work.

The Craft Essay can be useful for several purposes:

* Deepening your understanding of how your own work grapples with similar issues.
* Learning from other writers how to enhance and strengthen your own writing.
* Articulating ideas that can make their way into the Critical Preface for your Thesis.
* Developing a core argument that could be expanded into a publishable article in a venue such as *The Writer’s Chronicle, Poets & Writers, Literary Hub, Assay*, and others.
* Developing ideas that could be the basis for teaching courses in creative writing.

**Composing the Craft Essay**

You will work on this essay throughout fall quarter. Your Thesis Committee is not required to read and provide feedback on drafts of this essay; you are working independently.

* Faculty should receive one polished draft of the student’s craft essay **by Nov 5th**. After the faculty have provided feedback, the student then submits a final, revised essay **by the end of Fall quarter**, the last day of classes.
* The essay will consist of **10-12** double-spaced pages, 12-point type, one-inch margins.
* Successful Craft Essays will show sophistication in critical reading and fluency in the terms of the genre.
* The essay must be thoughtful, substantial, inquisitive, and offer specific examples from the texts and your own work. It should demonstrate mastery of mechanics and language at the sentence level
* Some familiarity with and application of theory should inform the essay.
* The essay should show how your own work will be influenced by this reading and study.

**Evaluation**

After you have turned in your Craft Essay, your committee (Thesis Chair & 2nd Reader) will evaluate your work based on the above criteria.

**Grading scale:** Pass with Distinction, Pass, Revise and Resubmit or No Consensus.

**Pass with Distinction:** The Craft Essay goes beyond expectation and the writing attains a professional standard. The student applies theory and performs specific close readings of selected works. The Craft Essay shows that the student read and made significant connections between works and has a strong grasp on genre conventions. The student articulates clear connections between texts on the reading list and the student’s own creative writing. The essay is strong enough to provide a basis for a professional published article on the subject.

**Pass:** The Craft Essay demonstrates the student’s thoughtful reading of select texts. The writing is clear and substantive, with specific examples that articulate the student’s main points. The student understands how theory can be applied in the analysis. The student articulates clear connections between the texts on the reading list and the student’s own creative writing.

**Revise and Resubmit:** If the Exam Committee decides that the Craft Essay does not meet the standards to pass, faculty will give the student suggestions for revision and possible further reading. A timeline will be devised for the student to revise and resubmit the exam. If the exam still does not pass, the Director of Graduate Studies will meet with the student and the Exam Committee to decide on a proper course of action.

**No Consensus:** Should your committee be unable to achieve consensus, the committee members must each write a brief paragraph offering a rationale for their assessment of the Craft Essay. The Director of Graduate Studies will read these rationales along with the Craft Essay and determine whether the exam will pass. The Director will then meet with the student to inform the student of the results and offer feedback. If the Director of Graduate Studies is one of the committee members, then the rationales and exam will go to the Chair of the department for assessment, and the Chair will meet with the student.

**Feedback (Winter Committee Meeting)**

Once you have received the official results from the Graduate Program Coordinator, you will meet with your Thesis chair and 2nd Reader to receive informal feedback on your craft essay. You are responsible for scheduling this meeting. You may meet with them together or individually, depending on their preferences.