

# UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI MFA HANDBOOK

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## I. Entering the Program

### DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

The MFA program at the University of Mississippi consists of 42 total hours to be completed in three years. These hours are broken down as follows:

- ENGL 600 (Introduction to Graduate Study)
- ENGL 617 (Teaching College English) to maintain teaching assistantship
- 12 hours in creative writing workshops
- 12 hours in literature seminars (6 hours before 1800, 6 hours after 1800).
- “Form, Craft, and Influence” is repeatable for credit, and up to 3 hours of post-1800 literature may be F, C, I.
- 3 hours of course work in literary, critical, cultural, rhetorical, or composition theory
- Up to 9 hours in related disciplines and/or directed readings

### FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Upon acceptance to the program, students will be awarded either a **Teaching Fellowship**, consisting of \$11,500/academic year, or a **John and Renee Grisham Fellowship**, consisting of \$14,000/academic year. Both fellowships provide both in-state and out-of-state tuition coverage as well as health care coverage. For more information on the health care plan as well as how to waive this coverage, see the Graduate School website [here](#).

Additional financial aid includes:

**Graduate School Excellence Fellowships** of \$3,000/academic year awarded to qualified via the English department upon acceptance for outstanding GRE/GPA scores. This fellowship can, but does not necessarily, last during all three years of full time enrollment.

**Underrepresented Minority Fellowships** of \$7,000/academic year are awarded to qualifying students via the English department upon acceptance to the program.

**Summer Graduate Research Assistantships** of \$2,000/10 weeks of summer research can be applied for via the Graduate School for those remaining on campus in pursuit of a degree.

**Graduate Dissertation Fellowships** of \$6,000/academic semester can be applied for via the English department upon early completion of the comprehensive oral examination. This fellowship relieves the student of his or her teaching duties for one semester to focus on their thesis work.

More information on all of these fellowships as well as other financial aid can be found at the Graduate School website [here](#).

## TEACHING LOAD

**Teaching Assistants** work with a professor in the English department who is teaching a 200-level course. TAs are required to attend 2 lectures a week headed by the professor and 3 discussion sections of 20 students each led solely by the TA. On average, TAs are in charge of 60 students/semester. TAs are randomly assigned a 200-level course at the start of each semester. A list of 200-level courses can be found in the undergraduate course catalog.

**Instructor of Record:** students can be an instructor of record by teaching composition courses or creative courses. All students on the teaching fellowship are required to take ENGL 617, a pedagogical course designed in preparation for teaching composition. Positions as an instructor of record are most often awarded during the summer or in the second or third years in the program. More information on the Center for Writing and Rhetoric (CWR) can be found [here](#).

## II. Suggested Timeline

### Suggested MFA TIMELINE

Year/Term	Coursework	Tasks	Paperwork
1/Fall	ENGL 600 Literature Seminar, CW Workshop		
1/Spring	ENGL 617 Seminar 2 Workshop 2		
1/Summer	3-6 Summer Thesis Hours		
2/Fall	Seminars / Workshops 5-7	Contact prospective committee chair and 2 other members. Take comps if planning to apply for fall dissertation fellowship.	Submit <a href="#">GS2</a>
2/Spring	Seminars / Workshops 8-10		
2/Summer	3-6 Summer Thesis Hours	Begin researching and writing thesis	
3/Fall	Workshops / Thesis Hours	Continue researching and writing thesis	
3/Spring	Workshops / Thesis Hours	Complete Reading List  Complete Comprehensive Exam  Complete Thesis  File for Graduation (check GS	Submit authorization for final exam <a href="#">GS7</a>  Apply for graduation <a href="#">GS8</a>  Sign <a href="#">Thesis Signature Page</a> upon successful thesis defense  Distribute Departmental Assessment

		deadlines; can be done ahead and rolled over to next semester)	Form to committee members ( <a href="http://english.olemiss.edu/category/assessment/">http://english.olemiss.edu/category/assessment/</a> )
		Schedule Thesis Defense (2weeks ahead)	Prepare Thesis MS; consult Graduate School's <a href="#">Thesis Manual</a>
		Defend Thesis, Graduate	

### III. Graduating from the Program

#### FORMING A COMMITTEE

The thesis committee must consist of two MFA faculty and one non-MFA; these faculty members cannot be adjunct professors. The student must ask one of his or her MFA professors to serve as committee chair. Have professors sign off on the [GS2 Form: Update Advisor/Advisory Committee](#) in advance of submitting the book list, and well in advance of thesis work.

Note: for the below requirements, all committee members must receive exam dates at least a month in advance. The book list must be submitted at least two weeks before the written comprehensive exam.

#### CREATING A BOOK LIST

The thirty-book list, composed by the MFA degree candidate, will be used by his or her committee members to form the written comprehensive exam. This list should demonstrate both breadth and depth as defined by the [Reading List Rubric](#). These thirty books should focus on your genre of interest, but should also include books from other genres, books in translation, or theory/critical writings. The reading list rubric should be made available to each of the student's committee members but does not need to be officially submitted to the department.

#### COMPREHENSIVE WRITTEN EXAM

This open-book exam takes place over a period of four hours in a location designated by the committee chair. On the date of the exam, the committee chair will email a document consisting of anonymous questions from the committee members based on the thirty-book list. Typical questions focus on comparisons between texts, questions regarding historical or theoretical contexts for these works, close readings of individual poems, and pedagogical questions. It is often helpful to brainstorm questions with committee members prior to the exam. Upon completion of the exam, committee members will evaluate your responses and reply with their assessment typically within two weeks. Make sure to give committee members at least two weeks between the exam date and date of completion of the thesis work. When the date of the comprehensive exam is set, the [GS7 Form: Authorization of the Final Oral/Written Examination](#) must be turned in.

## **THE MFA THESIS**

The thesis is designed to be a book-length document; i.e. at least 48 pages for poetry or 120 pages for fiction. Most MFA candidates work closely with their committee chair on drafts of this manuscript over the course of the third year. Upon completion of the thesis, and after passing the oral defense (see below), the manuscript will be submitted to ProQuest with the option of a two-year embargo. A rubric for the thesis can be found [here](#).

## **ORAL DEFENSE**

The oral exam takes place over the course of an hour in a location, typically on campus, reserved ahead of time by the student.

## **FINAL STEPS**

After completion of the written comprehensive exam, thesis, and oral defense, all students must submit self-evaluations of the [book list](#), [written exam](#), and [thesis](#) and must complete the [exit interview](#).

## **IV. Organizations, Readings & Awards**

### **EGSB BOARD**

The EGSB Board serves as the representative student-run group for all English students (MFA, MA & PhD). All questions and concerns regarding the MFA program should be directed to the current MFA Liaison, Andrew Freiman, at [afreiman@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:afreiman@go.olemiss.edu). In a student's second year, he or she may apply for any position—MFA Liaison, President, Vice President, Secretary, or Treasurer—on the EGSB Board.

Most importantly, this board sponsors Professional Development panels throughout the academic year that focus on concerns of the English and MFA Department student bodies. All panels consist of both literature and creative faculty and are designed to aid MAs, MFAs, and PhDs equally. Recent panels have included: Creating a CV, The Teaching Application Process, and The Job Market: Fellowships, Teaching, and Other Options. All students are encouraged, though not required, to attend.

### **BROKEN ENGLISH READING SERIES**

Broken English is the public MFA graduate student reading series coordinated by two second-year MFA students, most often one poet and one fiction writer. First year students are encouraged to read in the fall to present their work to the program. In spring of their third year, students return to Broken English to demonstrate the growth of their work during their time in the program. For more

information, contact the current Broken English hosts, Andrew Freiman [afreiman@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:afreiman@go.olemiss.edu) or Elizabeth Tran [etran@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:etran@go.olemiss.edu).

### **THIRD YEAR READING**

This reading is separate from the Broken English Reading Series and takes place at Off Square Books in May. This reading is open to family members and the public and represents the culmination of the MFA candidates' time in the program. Traditionally, the 3rd year students are asked to select someone special to introduce them (parent, sibling, friend, etc.). A second-year student is responsible for handling the event, which includes: securing the date with Off-Square, securing funding from the department for refreshments, organizing and publicizing the reading ahead of time (e.g. making a poster for the event, coordinating with the readers, organizing the line-up, and making sure the introducers know what to do), and hosting the event itself (i.e. to make the introductory and/or closing remarks, as well as to provide general guidance through the event). Additionally, the host should print the event poster on cardstock and have the graduating students sign it as a final gift to the department.

### **YR: YALOBUSHA REVIEW**

Yalobusha Review is our online, student-run literary journal that "seeks to showcase work that alters or subverts mainstream forms of expression." Founded in 1995, YR publishes two issues (fall and spring) each year via their website, and recent issues have featured the likes of Cole Swensen, Dan Beachy-Quick, D.A. Powell, Jesmyn Ward, and John Brandon, among others. The magazine is run by two co-editors (a 3rd year and a 2nd year), who are assisted by a managing editor, fiction editor, and poetry editor (2nd or 3rd years), as well as staff members who read submissions in a designated genre. First-year students are invited to serve as such readers, with interested students invited to apply for editorships after completing one year of service. Yalobusha Review also attends the national AWP conference each year and occasionally hosts an off-site reading with other magazines. Students involved with the journal may request travel funding to attend the conference and assist with YR's activities. For more information, please contact the current editor, Michael Shea ([mmshea@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:mmshea@go.olemiss.edu)).

Website: <http://yr.olemiss.edu>

### **BONDURANT PRIZE**

This prize is awarded each spring to one poet and one fiction writer within the MFA department. Each student is awarded \$150 for one manuscript (3 poems or 1 short story). For more information, contact Blair Hobbs at [vhobbs@olemiss.edu](mailto:vhobbs@olemiss.edu).

### **ELVIS MEETS EINSTEIN**

This \$1,000 award is given to one poet and one fiction writer within the MFA program each spring. Creative work submitted must be no longer than a single page and must be both “funny” and “smart.” For more information, see the Scholarships & Awards page [here](#).

## **V. Faculty Contacts & Visiting Writers**

### **FACULTY MEMBERS**

[Ivo Kamps](#)

Department Chair & Professor  
[egkamps@olemiss.edu](mailto:egkamps@olemiss.edu)

[Beth Ann Fennelly](#)

Director of the MFA Program & Associate Professor  
[bafennel@olemiss.edu](mailto:bafennel@olemiss.edu)

[Peter Reed](#)

Director of Graduate Studies & Professor  
[preed@olemiss.edu](mailto:preed@olemiss.edu)

### **Poetry Faculty**

[Chiyuma Elliott](#), Assistant Professor

[Ann Fisher Wirth](#), Professor

[Derrick Harriell](#), Assistant Professor

[Gary Short](#), Visiting Assistant Professor

[Dave Smith](#), Visiting Distinguished Professor

### **Fiction & Screenwriting Faculty**

Megan Abbott, Grisham Writer in Residence

[Richard Ford](#), Visiting Professor

[Tom Franklin](#), Associate Professor

[Chris Offutt](#), Associate Professor

[Jack Pendarvis](#), Writer in Residence

### **JOHN & RENEE GRISHAM WRITER IN RESIDENCE**

John and Renée Grisham Writers in Residence are emerging writers selected for each academic year on the strength of their writing. They teach one class each

semester are closely involved in the MFA community. The 2013-2014 Grisham Writer is [Megan Abbott](#). For more information on the Grisham Writers in Residence please see [here](#).

### **SPiR: SUMMER POET IN RESIDENCE**

The Summer Poet in Residence Series is awarded to an emerging poet for four weeks of writing time in Oxford. Summer poets give a reading and visit summer classes during their time in the program. More information on Joshua Kryah, the 2013 SPiR, can be found [here](#).

### **VISITING WRITERS SERIES & COORDINATORS**

The MFA program at Ole Miss has a thriving Visiting Writers Series headed by two students each year. For more information on upcoming readers, see [here](#). Students may apply to be a coordinator at the end of their first year; this is a great way to get to know writers outside the department. For more information on this position, contact the current Visiting Writers Series coordinators: Joe Zendarski [jmzendar@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:jmzendar@go.olemiss.edu) or Kieran Lyons [klyons@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:klyons@go.olemiss.edu).

### **VI. Forms & Links**

Ole Miss English Department: <http://english.olemiss.edu>

Ole Miss Creative Writing Department: <http://mfaenglish.olemiss.edu>

Ole Miss Graduate School: <http://www.olemiss.edu/gradschool/>

Ole Miss Center for Writing & Rhetoric: <http://cwr.olemiss.edu>

Graduate School Forms: [http://www.olemiss.edu/gradschool/forms\\_library.html](http://www.olemiss.edu/gradschool/forms_library.html)

MFA Forms: <http://mfaenglish.olemiss.edu/forms/>