

LITERATURE CLASSES



“TO BE WRITING POETRY that works and that adds to the contemporary landscape you need to have a grasp on certain types of theory, and you need to be able to articulate, on a conceptual level, what’s going on in your work. And this program has helped me with that aspect of it, you know, thinking about those things. I think the Norse Epic class in the Fall will feed into my work in really interesting ways. I’m really stoked about that. So yeah, overall, I think the Lit element of this program is a really good thing. Another thing that’s cool about this program is that the MFAs have a big enough presence [in Lit classes] to where I don’t feel like we’re ever competing with Lit people in the classroom. We’re just sort of approaching things from a different perspective, and that’s been very good for me. That’s one aspect of an academic program [as opposed to a studio program] that’s been really cool, hanging out with Ph.D. students — who are obviously intelligent people who read a lot, but aren’t, like, inside the insular poetry world. I think the people on the outskirts of that have been good for me, helped me grow.” - **MARTY**

“ONE OF THE FORM, CRAFT AND INFLUENCE CLASSES I took was the best combination of workshop and academic work that I’ve ever experienced. It was very intensive on the academic stuff, a lot of theory, a lot of poetry books, and then we were asked to do our own work, based on that. It allowed me to come up with a new direction for a new project. Something stylistically really different. At the same time, if you’re taking a class that you don’t necessarily want to take, all you have to do is keep an open mind, and you’ll be able to use it. You’ll be able to use all of these classes for good. All of the academic classes — that is, the literature courses — have been influential classes. We had

a lot of creatives [MFAs] in the classes, too. The Ph.D.'s have always been really open to creatives, from what I see. Really open to what we bring to the class, what we write in our posts, what we write our papers on, how we read things. They always want to know what we think, and treat us as equals. Which is great. As far as the classroom goes, I don't see a split between MFAs and Ph.D.'s / M.A.'s."

- ANDREW

"EVERY SINGLE CLASS I TOOK was worthwhile and led by an accomplished and interesting teacher. The Form, Craft and Influence classes, however, are the most valuable and appropriate literature classes for an MFA student. I took several and liked all of them. They were great classes. One thing they do is allow you to get to know the personalities and interests and passions of the MFA professors. Which you get to do in a limited sense in the workshops, but in the FCI classes I read what our teachers love, and they got to know me better; they became a lot more like mentors than like workshop leaders because of those classes. And the way that we talked about the books was from a craft perspective, and it was just truly useful reading."

- MCKAY

"I LOVED THE FORM, CRAFT AND INFLUENCE CLASSES. I thought those were great, mainly because they were built around reading things that I would never, ever otherwise read, which I think is probably the best thing a literature class can do. I read *Fat City* by Leonard Gardner for the first time in Jack [Pendarvis]'s [FCI] class. That book, you would love that book. As far as the other classes, I had two good ones and one mediocre one. I mean, I didn't mind it. They could take up all your time if you let 'em. Yeah, one of [the classes] was just phenomenal, a Chaucer class with Dr. Justice. . . . I didn't love all of my literature classes, but I loved the majority of them, and I loved the FCI classes a lot. [Chris] Offutt's FCI class was amazing. He's read so many books. The faculty has read an unbelievable amount of books and are very happy to point you towards things you would like."

- JIMMY

“**MY CHAUCER CLASS** was relevant to my goals, but not necessarily to my poetry. I’m someone who wants to know what I’m getting into, and it was a really good way to get my feet wet and figure out what graduate studies looked like. I plan on getting my Ph.D. in literature after this, and it was a really good way for me to jump in headfirst and see what that was going to be. And it was difficult — the class was really challenging because it was a lot of reading in Middle English. But the class taught me how to get through a lot of work quickly. Okay, so you need to read five books. Figure out how much time you have, and just do it. Just get through it. And, like, ‘Well what if you can’t?’ — ‘Well, just do it!’
[Laughing]

- VIRGINIA

“**CREATIVE WRITING IS VERY, VERY DIFFERENT** from academic writing and academic critical thinking. I think to some extent it is helpful for us to think critically in academic settings, but in other ways it is difficult to juggle both of those areas of study at the same time. And sometimes it seeps into your writing a little bit. Sometimes I have to separate what’s good for my story narratively versus, ‘Oh, what’s good *figuratively* and *metaphorically*,’ you know. But I’ve read things that I normally wouldn’t have read. Thinking about women in early America, and how they’re portrayed as crazy, or witches, or evil, you know, that’s very relevant to me. Women are still portrayed in a certain way [today], and a lot of that is due to the context of early American religion. And it is helping me because I’m writing a lot about women, and I’m trying to present those stereotypes, while also subverting them. So it helps to know the historical context. And I might not have studied it that deeply on my own, or known exactly what to read, so [the Lit classes have] been really good in that way.”

- LIZZIE

“**THERE ARE DAYS** when I’m wading through a four-hundred page novel from the 1700s. There were definitely days where I thought, ‘I have no idea what this has to do with anything I’m doing [artistically].’ But, well, it’s funny how that turned out. [Laughing] As

you know. So, one of my professors last semester let us [the MFA students in the class] do a creative option [rather than an academic term paper]. And that project turned into the beginning of a novella, which is now the thesis project that I'm working on, as a longer work, a novel. And, you know, I wouldn't have had that idea if I hadn't had that Lit course. I was worried coming into the program that the Lit courses would get in the way of my writing, and that one definitely didn't. It exposed me to a lot of interesting writers that I've learned a lot from, and pushed my creative work further. It's the kind of medicine that you don't want to swallow, but that helps you. Even though it was hard at the time, I'm glad I did it.”

- KATE

