

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI CREATIVE WRITING MFA HANDBOOK

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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:

- ENG 600 (Intro to Graduate Study)
- ENG 617 (Teaching College English)
- 12 hours in creative writing workshops
- 9 hours in Literature Seminars (*700-level only)
 - 3 hours of pre-1800
 - 3 hours of post-1800
 - 3 hours any literature seminar
- 3 hours of Form, Craft, & Influence (FCI)
- 6 hours of electives (including workshops, FCI, additional literature classes, classes in related disciplines, and/or directed readings)
- 6 hours of thesis hours/directed readings

***“Literature seminars” are 700-level classes only. This means that FCI, Studies in Genre, or any other 600 level class will NOT count toward the 9 total hours of literature requirements for all MFAs.**

The College of Liberal Arts general requirements for our degree program can be found here: <https://catalog.olemiss.edu/liberal-arts/english/mfa-cr-wr>

Attendance and Residency Requirement

All MFA students must be in attendance on the first day of their classes, and are allowed no more than 2 absences per semester in each class. Students enrolled in thesis hours who are not currently taking coursework are still required to be in residence in Oxford for the duration of each semester. This requirement applies to all students, including Grisham Fellows and others who do not hold a graduate assistantship. Exceptions may be made to this requirement with prior approval of the graduate program coordinator and their thesis advisor.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Upon acceptance to the program, students will be awarded either a **Teaching Fellowship** or a **John and Renee Grisham Fellowship**. These fellowships include stipends, tuition coverage, and subsidized 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 from the Graduate School, including various recruiting and academic excellence fellowships, may be awarded to eligible students when available.

Summer Graduate Research Assistantships

Students who have participated in the Graduate School’s Three-Minute Thesis competition may apply for the Summer Graduate Research Assistantship, which provides summer funding for

students who will remain on campus during summer. This award is competitive and not guaranteed.

Graduate Dissertation Fellowships

Students who have completed their Comprehensive Written Exam and participated in the Graduate School's "3-Minute Thesis" competition are eligible to apply for the Graduate Dissertation Fellowship. This fellowship relieves the student of his or her teaching duties for one semester during their third year to focus on their thesis work. This award is competitive and not guaranteed.

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

TEACHING

Teaching Assistants work with a professor in the English department who is teaching a 200-level literature course. TAs are required to attend two 50-minute lectures a week headed by the professor, and serve as section leaders and graders. Each TA is assigned three sections per semester of around 15-20 students each. TAs meet with each section once a week for 50 minutes, and serve as principal grader for each section.

Most graduate students will be a TA their first two years in the program.

In their third year, graduate students usually work as consultants in the Writing Center or teach a 100-level composition course in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric.

Pending availability and selection, students might also serve as a research or program assistant, receive a writing fellowship, or teach an introductory creative writing course. Specific responsibilities for any position are communicated by the faculty supervisor, graduate program coordinator, and department leadership.

All our positions are considered ½ time (20 hours per week maximum) by the Graduate School. They are in person, and we do not offer remote assignments. There are also some limited summer teaching and writing fellowship opportunities for additional funding that students may apply for each year.

All students with teaching fellowships are required to take ENGL 617, a pedagogical course designed to prepare grad students to teach composition courses. More information on the Department of Writing and Rhetoric (DWR) can be found here: <https://rhetoric.olemiss.edu/>

SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR COURSEWORK AND THESES

Students must be enrolled in 9 hours each semester. This may be a combination of courses and thesis hours. Thesis hours may be taken during any semester, but most students choose to complete the majority of their course requirements during the first two years, complete the written comprehensive exam during the second year, and focus on the thesis during the third year. Below is a sample schedule:

First Year

Fall: ENG 600, Lit Seminar 1, Workshop 1

Spring: ENG 617, Lit Seminar 2, Workshop 2

Second Year

Fall: Lit Seminar 3, FCI, Workshop 3

- Choose Thesis Committee and have director Submit Form GS2
- Take Comprehensive Exam if planning to apply for Fall Dissertation Fellowship

Spring: Workshop 4, 6 Hours Electives (Lit Seminars, FCI, Workshop, other courses)

- Begin (or continue) thesis work
- Take Comps Exam if planning to apply for Spring Dissertation Fellowship

Third Year

Fall: 9 hours of thesis hours and/or electives; Continue work on thesis

Spring: 9 hours of thesis and/or electives

- Complete Reading List and Comprehensive Exam at least 2 weeks prior to thesis defense
- Apply for graduation:
<https://olemiss.app.box.com/s/xroep8e7dn7sopoz02tyji7ngb3bn9pr>
- Complete Thesis and Schedule Thesis Defense
- Submit authorization for final exam Form GS7:
<https://olemiss.app.box.com/s/gdoql5zhr2ccn5t0343pllu7kvgg4atx>
- Defend Thesis and Sign Thesis Signature Page upon successful thesis defense
- Prepare Thesis MS; consult Graduate School's Thesis Manual:
<https://olemiss.app.box.com/s/qymdwjz48as3kju0x4gaetoykx5x3b1a>
- Distribute Departmental Assessment Form to committee members
(<http://english.olemiss.edu/category/assessment/>)
- Graduate

THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM AND THESIS

MFA students must pass a written comprehensive exam and write and defend a creative thesis in order to graduate. Students work closely with faculty of their choosing, especially during the third year.

Forming the thesis committee

The thesis committee consists of one MFA faculty member who serves as committee chair (also known as thesis director), one MFA faculty member to serve as a second reader, and one non-MFA professor in the English Department to serve as third reader. Note: These faculty members cannot be adjunct professors. Faculty in other departments may occasionally serve on theses with special permission. Grisham Writers in Residence are also able to serve on thesis committees if they are in residence during the third year.

Choosing a director

It is recommended that students work with and get to know as many faculty as possible before choosing a committee. Many students therefore wait until the second year to decide who they would like to work with. Generally students choose faculty members whose classes, sensibilities, and feedback are well suited to the student's work. The student should have a conversation with any potential director about their style of directing and their degree of involvement in the student's writing process, and strive to find a director who is a good fit for the work they wish to produce.

Once you have chosen your committee chair, they will enter the information about the thesis committee via myolemiss. This should be done in advance of submitting the book list, and well in advance of thesis work.

What the Committee Does

The thesis director works closely with the student on the book list and throughout the process of writing the thesis. Most directors look at multiple drafts of the thesis, especially in the third year.

The director and second and third readers may suggest texts for the book list before approval. Each committee member will supply questions for the comprehensive written exam and assess the exam.

In addition, the second and third readers will read the final version of the thesis, participate in the thesis defense, and assess the final manuscript and oral defense. Some committee members may want to be more involved in the writing process, though this is not required. Students should discuss with committee members early in the process what level of involvement they wish to have.

COMPREHENSIVE WRITTEN EXAM

Creating the Book List

The thirty-book list is composed by the MFA degree candidate in consultation with the thesis director and other committee members. The list must be approved by the entire committee, and will be used to form the material of 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, and should also include books from other genres, books in translation, theory/critical writings, and books from a variety of time periods.

The book list must be approved by the committee at least two weeks before the written comprehensive exam.

Scheduling the exam

The student schedules an exam time in consultation with the committee. The exam should be scheduled at least a month in advance, and must be taken at least two weeks before the thesis defense.

Students who wish to apply for the Dissertation Fellowship for fall of the third year should schedule the exam in fall of the second year. Students who wish to apply for the Dissertation Fellowship for spring of the third year should schedule the exam for spring of the second year.

Exam Format

The Comprehensive Exam is administered via email and takes place over a period of four hours in a location chosen by the student (usually the student's home). Because the exam is made up in advance by the committee, the members of the committee need not be present during the taking of the exam.

The exam consists of three sets of two to three essay questions about the texts on the book list. One question from each set must be answered, for a total of three essays. The essays should cover a variety of texts, and the same text should not be written about in more than one essay.

Typical questions focus on comparisons between texts, questions regarding historical or theoretical contexts for these works, close readings of individual poems or passages, and pedagogical questions. Students will not be asked specifically about books that are not on their 30 book list.

Procedure

At the predetermined exam time, the committee chair will email the exam to the student. The student will write the three essays and email them back to the thesis director four hours after the exam is sent. Committee members will evaluate the essays, and the thesis director will reply to the student with the committee's assessment, typically within one week.

The exam is graded on a Pass/Fail basis.

THE MFA THESIS

The thesis should be a book-length creative work of publishable quality. Poetry theses must be a minimum of 48 pages. Prose theses must be a minimum of 120 pages. Most MFA candidates work closely with their committee chair (and sometimes with other committee members) on drafts of this manuscript over the course of the third year.

Oral Defense

When the date of the thesis defense is set, the GS7 Form must be turned in to the Graduate School. The form can be found here:

<https://olemiss.app.box.com/s/gdoql5zhr2ccn5t0343pllu7kvgg4atx>

The oral exam (also referred to as the thesis defense) takes place over the course of an hour in a classroom or office reserved ahead of time by the student. The student should be prepared to discuss the thesis and its development. Questions from the committee members might address themes, influences, revision strategies, etc. as well as any weaknesses and strengths of the thesis. The defense is open to the public but the student may choose whether to publicize the time and location to all, to a small group, or keep it private.

Upon a successful defense, the student and committee must sign the Report of Final Exam Form (provided by the Graduate School upon completion of Form GS7). The thesis director must sign the GS11 Form with the option for a two-year embargo:

<https://olemiss.app.box.com/s/p64zvgzlpjtrnf128hmkq9cjbjt2n8cg>

These signed forms should be turned in to the English Department office which will submit copies to the Graduate School on behalf of the student.

Formatting and Submitting to ProQuest

The thesis manuscript must be formatted according to the guidelines here:

<https://gradschool.olemiss.edu/current-students/thesis-and-dissertation-preparation/>

Theses must be submitted electronically via ProQuest. Students will create a ProQuest account and upload the final version. For more information on this process, go here:

<https://gradschool.olemiss.edu/current-students/the-end-game-preparing-to-graduate/>

Final Steps

After completion of the written comprehensive exam, thesis, and oral defense, all students must submit assessments of the book list, comps exam, and thesis, as well as an exit interview.

ORGANIZATIONS, READINGS, & AWARDS

EGSB Board

The English Graduate Student Body (EGSB) Board serves as the representative student-run group for all English graduate students (MFA, MA & PhD). All questions and concerns regarding the MFA program should be directed to the current MFA Liaison on the EGSB Board. EGSB representatives may choose to attend MFA and English Department faculty meetings and serve to relay student initiatives, concerns, etc. to faculty.

The EGSB board sponsors Professional Development panels throughout the academic year that focus on concerns of English graduate students. 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.

MissReads Graduate Student Reading Series

MissReads is the Creative Writing graduate student reading series coordinated by second-year MFA students. Generally readings are held once a month during the school year at an off-campus location, and feature first-year students in the fall and third-year students in the spring. Second year MFAs, Ph.D., and MA students moderate panels and conduct reader interviews. Creative writing undergraduate students are encouraged to attend and participate in affiliated open mics. These readings are generally held in cafes, bars, or restaurants, and are open to the public.

Visiting Writers Series

The MFA program and English Department at UM host a Visiting Writers Series coordinated by the MFA Director and faculty. Readings are held at various campus venues, and are open to all students as well as the public. Visiting writers give readings, craft talks, and Q&As, and are often available to meet with MFA students in the classroom and less formal settings.

Students may apply to be an assistant coordinator at the end of their first year; this is a great way to get to know writers outside the department.

Third Year Reading

The Third Year Reading is a celebration of graduating MFA students and takes place at Off Square Books in May. It is open to family members and the public, and represents the culmination of the MFA candidates' time in the program. Traditionally, third year students are asked to select someone special to introduce them (a parent, sibling, friend, etc.). A second-year student is responsible for organizing the event, which includes scheduling, securing funding from the department for refreshments, publicizing the reading, organizing the line-up, and emceeding 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.

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 each year. Recent issues have featured Cole Swensen, Dan Beachy-Quick, D.A. Powell, Jesmyn Ward, and John Brandon, among others.

The magazine is run by two co-editors (a third year and a second year), who are assisted by a managing editor, a fiction editor, a poetry editor, and staff members who read. First-year students are invited to serve as staff readers, and are eligible to apply for editorships after completing one year of service. Positions are open to all English graduate students.

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.

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

PRIZES

The English Department and the MFA Program administer two writing awards in the spring of each year.

Bondurant Prize

This \$150 prize is awarded each spring to one poet and one prose writer in the MFA program. Winners are chosen by MFA Faculty.

The DC Berry Prize

The DC Berry Prize (formerly known as "Elvis Meets Einstein") is open to full-time University of Mississippi MFA students in Creative Writing for one page of writing in any genre that is "funny and smart." Submissions are assessed by a judge outside the department. Three prizes are awarded: First Prize is \$1,500, Second Prize is \$1,000 and Third Prize is \$500. The 1st place winner will read their piece on the Thacker Mountain Radio show. Monetary awards will be applied to winning students' bursar accounts.

More information about awards can be found [here](#).

FACULTY

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MFA Faculty

Matt Bondurant, Fiction and Screenwriting
 Beth Ann Fennelly, Poetry and Creative Nonfiction
 Tom Franklin, Fiction
 Melissa Ginsburg, Poetry and Fiction
 Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Poetry, Nature Writing, and Creative Nonfiction
 Sheila Sundar, Fiction and Creative Nonfiction
 Michael Wang, Fiction

John & Renee Grisham Writer in Residence

John and Renée Grisham Writers in Residence serve as visiting faculty for one academic year. They teach one class each semester and are closely involved in the MFA community. For more information on the Grisham Writers in Residence please see [here](#).

FORMS AND LINKS

UM English Department: <http://english.olemiss.edu>
 UM MFA Program: <http://mfaenglish.olemiss.edu>
 UM Graduate School: <http://www.olemiss.edu/gradschool/>
 UM Department of Writing & Rhetoric: <https://rhetoric.olemiss.edu/>
 Graduate School Forms: <https://gradschool.olemiss.edu/current-students/forms-and-manuals-library/>
 MFA Forms: <http://mfaenglish.olemiss.edu/forms/>