

## MFA INFORMATION PAMPHLET

This pamphlet provides you with all the pertinent information you will need as an MFA student. In the event you misplace this, you may access it on the MFA website or pick up another copy from the MFA office, Flowers Hall, Room 359.

### SECTION ONE

#### Handbooks

The Graduate College Catalog contains basic information pertinent to all graduate students. The Graduate Thesis Handbook contains a comprehensive guide to thesis requirements. The Thesis Handbook can be found on the MFA website (under the link "Additional Resources for Students"). The Graduate College Catalog can be found online at the Graduate College website.

#### Degree Outline

In your first semester of enrollment, you will receive an Official Degree Outline from the Graduate School. For any adjustment of this outline, such as a substitution of courses, including undergraduate courses taken for graduate credit, please contact the MFA Administrative Assistant for a Degree Outline Change Request Form. This must be completed and submitted to the Graduate College. Note: Students cannot take undergraduate courses and use them for credit in their graduate Degree.

#### Coursework

To graduate in three years, (if you DO have an Assistantship), plan to take five 9 hour semesters and one 6 hour semester to complete a total of 51 hours. We recommend that you take 9 hours each semester during your first year, as you need 18 graduate English hours to apply be considered for a TA position. **(This is especially important for those of you working as IAs and receiving in-state tuition as a result. During the summer, unless you have Texas resident status or are working for the university, you have to pay out-of-state tuition.)** At the same time, it is a good idea, if possible, to plan to attend summer College at least once to spread your course load and allow for additional, steady writing time.

If you do NOT have an Assistantship, plan to take four 9-hour semesters, and two 6-hour semesters to complete a total of 48 hours in three years.

12 of your degree hours are comprised of four sections of workshop (5315). After two workshops, you might want to consider taking a break to digest what you've learned and to write on your own while taking literature classes.

In addition to the 4 workshops, you must take one section of Form & Theory—5320 (fiction) or 5322 (poetry)—and also one section of Literary Techniques (5395). Form & Theory is currently offered once a year and Literary Techniques is offered twice a year. It is advisable to take these courses early, not simply for graduation purposes—you might miss a rotation—but because they are designed to inform your writing. Students who have had few encounters with literary theory may find themselves rethinking their own writing strategies and processes, which can take some time to sort out and

effectively incorporate. Literary Techniques can be repeated (twice) for Literature or Cognate credits.

You must also take 6 hours of thesis work, which is discussed under section two, and 9 hours in a Cognate.

Literature courses (15 hours) and cognate courses (9 hours) compose the balance of your 48 hours. Courses in contemporary fiction and poetry may be repeated up to a total of 9 credit hours, if you choose to concentrate in a certain area of study. However, a broad range of coursework is encouraged, particularly if you plan to go on to teach or to apply for a Ph.D. program.

### Cognate

With an English Cognate, you will strengthen your resumé for possible teaching jobs in the future by demonstrating a broad knowledge of English literature. Also, in order to apply for a Teaching Assistantship you must complete 18 Graduate hours in English. However, a Technical Writing Cognate may also be used. The Technical Writing Cognate will allow you to gain experience that many of our graduates have been able to translate into employment in the business world. An "Open Cognate" (which means an area of no particular emphasis), is comprised of graduate hours from up to 3 different disciplines, which may include English. Note: If you take courses for your Cognate outside the English Department, you will need to get permission from the other department to take their graduate courses.

### Workload

Please remember that the most difficult task in a writer's life is to make the time to write. It isn't handed to you—you create it. So, if you work full time (40 hours), expect to put in an additional 30 hours per week: 15 hours to take 6 credits per semester and 15 hours of writing time per week.

If you are a TA, plan for teaching two courses to consume 15-20 hours per week on average. Incoming TA's, however, will only be teaching one course in the Fall (two in the Spring), and thus might have to spend fewer hours a week in preparation. IA's will be assisting in the teaching of one course per semester under the direction of a professor. Your hours will vary more in accordance with how much grading your supervising professor requires for you to do. Every MFA Student should expect to average 8 hours per week for each graduate course she/he is taking. During your 9-hour semesters, this means you will average working 40-45 hours per week. Plan on writing 15-20 hours in addition to this.

60-70 hour work weeks are commonplace in writers' lives. This is a fact. But then, you are doing what you love. If you don't write, the program can't help you. Writing itself is your best teacher, followed by careful reading. There are no shortcuts, so learn now to make the time.

## SECTION TWO

### Thesis

The MFA thesis is a book length work of literary merit. While individual theses will vary in length, the program has established guidelines of 50 pages for poetry, 100-125 pages for short fiction, and 150 pages and up for a novel.

Students must complete at least 30 hours of coursework before thesis enrollment. You must register for thesis credit in any semester you work with your thesis director.

To enroll for thesis A, first request an MFA faculty member to serve as your thesis director. If the faculty member agrees, select a second reader and a third reader from the English faculty (students can also select a faculty member from another department). Note: Your thesis committee must be graduate faculty. Inform Karen Bryson, the Chair's Administrative Assistant, which MFA faculty member has agreed to be your thesis director and she will give you a call number to enroll for thesis A.

To enroll in thesis B, you must complete the Proposed Research form (which can be found in the MFA Graduate Thesis Handbook on-line) and submit it **in duplicate** (with the signatures of your thesis committee) to Karen Bryson for the Department Chair's signature. When this is done, Karen Bryson will issue you a call number to enroll for thesis B.

You will enroll for a total of 6 thesis hours in your final two semesters. Ideally, begin your first thesis semester with a rough, but virtually complete manuscript. Begin revising the manuscript in consultation with your thesis director and select an adjunct faculty reader.

Then, between semesters—either summer or winter break—complete the revisions and return the revised manuscript to your director for further suggestions. Make any further revisions at this point, prior to submitting your manuscript to your adjunct reader. A finished, revised thesis manuscript insures that you will receive the best possible reading and commentary from your adjunct reader.

### MFA Thesis Faculty

Fiction: Dagoberto Gilb, Tom Grimes, Debra Monroe

Poetry: Cyrus Cassells, Roger Jones, Kathleen Peirce, Steve Wilson

### Adjunct Thesis Critique

Adjunct thesis faculty are nationally recognized writers who will critique your thesis via mail. Adjunct faculty books are available in the MFA office. It is recommended that you familiarize yourself with the work of prospective adjunct readers; then, with your thesis director, select an adjunct reader based on sensibility and style. Also, some prior critiques from adjunct readers are on file in the MFA office for your consideration.

Inform the MFA director about your selection of an adjunct reader. The director or the MFA Assistant will then contact the adjunct faculty member. If the adjunct agrees to take on your thesis, you will receive a written critique from that reader. Adjuncts have been generally available for thesis reading; however, they may on occasion be unable to read a thesis, in which case you must select another adjunct reader. All contact with adjunct faculty is conducted through the MFA office. Advise the MFA administrative assistant of your choice for adjunct reader **by September 15, in the semester before you graduate.**

### Current Adjunct Faculty

Fiction: Lee K. Abbott, Rick Bass, Ron Carlson, Charles D'Ambrosio, Rick DeMarinis, John Dufresne, Shelby Hearon, Beverly Lowry, Kent Nelson, Jane Anne Phillips, Marly Swick, Sharon Oard Warner, Katherine Wheeler, Terry Tempest Williams, Eleanor Wilner, and Mark Wunderlich.

Poetry: Craig Arnold, Gillian Conoley, James Galvin, Hettie Jones, Patricia Spears Jones, Li-Young Lee, Philip Levine, Heather McHugh, Jane Mead, W. S. Merwin, David Mura, Naomi Shihab Nye, Alberto Ríos, Pattiann Rogers, Nicholas Samaras, Reg Saner, Gerald Stern, and Rosmarie Waldrop.

NOTE: Books by adjunct readers are available for check out in the MFA office (359), and there may be videotapes by other authors. available

### Thesis Submission to Adjunct Reader

Your complete, revised thesis manuscript, with a cover letter from you to your adjunct reader, must be in the director's hands **no later than the third Friday of February during the semester you plan to graduate. If you miss this deadline, you forfeit your right to an adjunct thesis reader's commentary. No exceptions will be made to this rule.** Manuscript turnaround time is generally six weeks, meaning that you will have your thesis manuscript back from your adjunct reader around mid-April in the semester that you graduate.

At this point, discuss the adjunct's commentary with your thesis director, and make any further revisions you feel are necessary.

### Thesis Distribution to Second and Third Readers

Your complete thesis manuscript must be delivered to your second and third thesis committee members **no later than two to three weeks prior to defense. Once again, no exceptions will be made as regards this deadline.** Early delivery will allow second and third readers more substantial and productive reading time.

### Thesis Copy to MFA Office (optional)

Present a final copy of your thesis to the MFA office (printed on regular paper). This copy will be kept on file with all other MFA Graduate thesis manuscripts.

## SECTION THREE

### Checklist for Graduates

There is a copy of the MFA Thesis and Graduation Checklist attached to this pamphlet. The Master's Degree Candidates sheet put out by the Graduate College each semester can be found on their website (be sure to follow the one for the specific semester in which you plan to graduate). Read and comply with each checklist, which provide dates for thesis and exam submissions to the Graduate and MFA offices.

### Degree Outline Update

Request this from Kristin McDaniel (cm48@txstate.edu or 245-7763) in the Graduate College Office or through the MFA office during the semester **prior to** the semester you plan to graduate. This update will inform you of any problems with your degree outline.

### Diploma

See the Master's Degree Candidates sheet for the deadline for filing for graduation. Generally, the date is early in the semester you plan to graduate. You can apply for graduation on-line at the Graduate College's website.

### Comprehensive Exam

Generally, once you have sent your manuscript off to your adjunct thesis reader, you may schedule your comprehensive exam with your thesis director. In any case, the exam may be taken **no later than the tenth week of the semester you plan to graduate to insure that your committee will have ample time to read your exam. Again, no exceptions will be made for those who cannot meet this deadline.**

The comprehensive exam is a take home essay exam. The exam requires you to write two to three essays, not to exceed 7500 words total, on each of two or three categories—theory, pre-20th century, and 20th century literature, based on your genre. You have four days to complete the exam.

You must compose a reading list for your exam in consultation with your thesis director. The list must contain ten works of theory, ten pre-1945 works, and ten works, post-1945, in your genre.

Your comprehensive exam questions are then composed by your thesis director, who may consult with your second and third reader if so desired.

Once you complete it, return your comprehensive exam to the members of your committee. Your committee members are not required to offer commentary unless they decline to assign a grade of "Passing" to the exam. In extraordinary cases and with unanimous approval of the thesis committee, a student may receive a "Pass With Distinction" grade on the Comprehensive Examination Report to be filed with the Graduate School. Student grade appeals follow the procedures outlined in the MA examination guidelines.

Overall, completing your comprehensive exam by mid-semester will insure that you run into no delay filing your exam reports in time for graduation. Schedule the exam at your and your thesis director's earliest possible convenience, allowing your director ten days to compose your exam.

### Oral Thesis Defense

This follows the successful completion of the written portion of your comprehensive exam. Your oral defense generally runs about sixty minutes. Candidates should expect questions concerning literary technique, influence, aesthetic choices, and further resolution of technical matters as they apply to the thesis.

You are responsible for scheduling a date for your oral defense. For your defense, **select a date no later than two weeks prior to the date for thesis submission to the**

**Graduate College. No exceptions will be made in relation to this deadline.**

Generally, you will want to schedule your oral defense no later than two weeks prior to the end of the semester.

**As this is the time most students schedule thesis defenses, faculty may not be available for your first choice of time and date. Scheduling the defense three to four weeks before the end of the semester—provided you have completed your comprehensive exam and submitted it, along with your thesis, to thesis committee members in ample time to allow for reading—will insure no delay in your graduation, and avoid any conflicts in scheduling.**

Once you have scheduled a date and time for your defense, email Leslie Garrett (lg33@txstate.edu) to reserve a room for your defense. Typically, FH 302, the Brasher Library Room, is used. Request that room, but if you schedule late, it may already be booked, in which case reserve an alternate site in a seminar room. Once the room has been reserved, notify your thesis committee.

At the completion of your oral defense, your thesis committee will advise you of their assessment of your defense, exam, and thesis, then sign off on the Comprehensive Examination Report and the Signature Pages (sample in the Thesis Handbook) of your thesis. Signature Pages must be printed on thesis quality paper (ck guidelines in the Thesis Handbook).

### Graduate College Submission of Thesis and Comprehensive Exam Report

You are responsible for submitting a copy of your thesis, typed according to Graduate College thesis guidelines outlined in the Graduate Thesis Handbook and accompanied by two signature pages signed by each member of your thesis committee, as well as the original signed copy of your Comprehensive Examination Report with exam questions attached, to the Graduate Office, JCK 280, by the Graduate College deadline, which can be found on the form for Candidates for the Master's Degree put out by the Graduate School. Submit a second copy of the Comprehensive Examination Report to the MFA director at this time.

Make sure you follow Graduate College guidelines for thesis margins, etc. Guidelines and sample pages can be found in the Thesis Handbook on the MFA website. The Graduate College offers workshops on Thesis Guidelines. Contact them for information regarding when and where the workshops are offered.

The Graduate College is now allowing students the option of electronic thesis/dissertation submission on a voluntary basis. When you first submit your thesis to the Graduate College for consideration, it can be on disk instead of hard copy. After the dean of the Graduate College approves your thesis, you will be given a Thesis Card. Take the Thesis Card along with at least two copies of your thesis (any additional copies are for your own purposes), on thesis quality paper, to the second floor of the Alkek Library for binding. If you opt for electronic submission, you will take the Thesis Card to the Library along with one copy of your thesis on disk and at least one copy of your thesis on thesis quality paper. The Thesis Card must be signed and returned to the Graduate Office by the Graduate College deadline.

Electronic submission reduces archival expenses and facilitates long-term preservation of manuscripts. Currently, a graduate student must submit two hard copies, on thesis/dissertation quality paper, to the Library. With electronic submission, a student will submit one hard copy and one electronic version (in Microsoft Word on CD). Students not electing the electronic submission option will submit two hard

copies to the Library, as in the past.

One advantage for students selecting the electronic thesis option will be less expense in preparing hard copies of the thesis/dissertation. A second advantage is that the student has the option of having their thesis/dissertation posted on eCommons. Currently, our students' dissertations are digitized by Proquest. The abstract is accessible to anyone logging on to eCommons. However, free full-text access is only available for Texas State affiliated personnel. Anyone outside of Texas State must purchase the text (or borrow via ILL). If dissertations are submitted electronically to the Library, the Library will be able to post them to eCommons directly and provide free, worldwide access. The same would be true of theses. The Library will facilitate author agreements for those interested in having their work appear in eCommons. A student that elects to have their work appear in eCommons will have the option of having their work posted immediately or delaying posting for up to two years.

### Summer Graduation

To arrange for comprehensive exams, adjunct readers, and oral defenses in order to graduate during the summer session, special arrangements must be made with the Thesis Committee and the MFA director, as well as with the Graduate School. All above dates apply to Spring and Fall semesters only.

### Program Evaluation

At the time you submit your finished thesis to the MFA office, you may submit a narrative evaluation of the MFA program. This optional evaluation is confidential, read only by the MFA director and the English Department Chair. In your evaluation you may address the following matters:

Overall effectiveness of the program; quality of instruction at the classroom and thesis levels; quality of adjunct reading; student-faculty interaction; usefulness of overall coursework; quality of overall MFA community; usefulness of visiting writers; variety of coursework offered; suggestions for program improvement.

Prior evaluations have run from two to five pages. It is your program and you have a say in its operation. Your evaluations will be taken as constructive criticism of the program and will be employed to improve what we don't do well, and to help us see to it that we recognize that which we do carry off well and continue it.

Since this is essentially a contribution to the program made entirely on your time, we appreciate it.

**Finally, please understand that it is your responsibility to know and meet all graduate College and departmental deadlines. Please do not plan to ask for waivers or extensions.**

## SECTION FOUR

### Scholarships

Several TSU and English Department scholarships are available. Check with the English Office, FH 365, for a listing and visit **the Graduate College web page** at <http://www.gradcollege.txstate.edu/>. Also, the TSU Scholarship web-site has recently been revised. Chris Murr in the Scholarship Office has added a downloadable version

of the 2001-2002 SWT General Scholarship Application, as well as the Scholarship Resource Book. The site can be accessed through the TSU Home Page under Quick Links, or at <http://www.txstate.edu/financialaid/html/scholarships.html>.

### Letters of Recommendation

While faculty are generally more than happy to write them for you, please bear in mind that many of the requests—for scholarships, etc.—come at the same time. Please request recommendations as far in advance of your deadlines as possible. And if the letter is not confidential, keep a copy of it in your files.

### Publishing/Submissions

Some MFA faculty are willing to offer advice on submissions to literary journals and magazines. The standard source books, such as the *Writer's Market*, are always on file at any library. The MFA office also now has current copies of *the Poet's Market* and the *Novel and Short Story Writer's Market* handbooks for you to use. Also, the third floor of the TSU library contains an extensive collection of current literary journals. Check them out. When submitting work, there is only one criterion, professionalism. Submit only polished, revised work that you are satisfied with, send it to a journal you respect (and possibly even read), and enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope (SASE) with it for its (possible) return.

Rejections are simply part of the writing life. Assign no importance to them, read nothing into rejection letters (no is no; yes is yes), and continue working and submitting. Keep your cover letter extremely short. If you've published before, mention that. If not, you may mention that you're an MFA student here (being in an MFA program cuts both ways: it impresses and irks editors; assign no importance to either). Mainly, be brief and courteous. Advise the MFA office of any acceptances.

### Student Readings

These readings are student hosted and student run. You can check with the MFA Office to find out who you might contact regarding these.

Two notes about readings:

1. They are usually limited to 30-40 minutes total; therefore, no one reader should plan to read longer than 5-7 minutes. A page of fiction takes nearly two minutes to read, not one as is often thought. Time yourself in advance, as all professionals do.
2. Readings are most enthusiastically attended when a party immediately follows. The reading and party take place at a designed site (usually the library, but sometimes a local restaurant/pub), and students are asked to bring beverages and munchies.

### Jobs

The AWP (Associated Writing Programs) publishes a Job List for Writers several times per year. The current copy is always available in the MFA office. The MFA Coordinator will also post any job openings that come to our MFA mail site to those of you who turn in your e-mail addresses to the Coordinator for addition to the MFA e-mail list.

## Ph.D. Programs

A number of our graduates have gone on to programs that offer a Creative Ph.D. The literature section of the GRE must be taken in order to apply. Faculty are generally happy to advise you as to programs. *The AWP Guide to Writing Programs* includes a comprehensive list of universities offering the Creative Ph.D. and is available in the MFA office.

## Peers

In time, your peers will become your closest readers. If you leave this program with one person with whom you can share your work, you will have a gift for life.