

AWP

Director's

Handbook

Guidelines, Policies, and Information
for Creative Writing Programs

A Publication of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs

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A Letter from AWP's Executive Director

Dear Creative Writing Program Director:

AWP was established in 1967 by fifteen writers representing thirteen programs in creative writing. Our association has grown since then. Creative writing is now taught at most of the 2,400 departments of literature in North America. More than 300 graduate programs in creative writing have been established in the U.S., Canada, U.K., Europe, and Australia. AWP's membership includes 500 colleges and universities and 34,000 writers, teachers, and students.

Academe in North America has excelled in providing access to education for all economic classes and races of peoples. Creative writing programs have been part of an amazing experiment in democratic participation in higher education and the arts; our programs have helped democratic nations produce literature that more closely represents their peoples. Our literature now includes multitudes.

In the United States, AWP has helped to establish the largest system of literary patronage for living writers that the world has ever seen. A conservative estimate of our programs' support for writers exceeds \$250 million in annual expenditures on salaries, honoraria, lectures, readings, library acquisitions, conferences, and publications.

If you consider that, in a typical recent year, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) dispensed \$7 million to literary projects and fellowships, you can appreciate how successful AWP and its members have been in building a new network of support for contemporary literature.

AWP once concentrated its energies upon the establishment of new programs. Most institutions at first provided tough resistance to the building of our programs, as most departments of English preferred their authors long dead and safely entombed in libraries. Now that hundreds of programs have been established and creative writing is one of the most popular academic disciplines in the arts and

Creative writing programs have been part of an amazing experiment in democratic participation in higher education and the arts.

humanities, we are free to devote ourselves to building audiences for literature while we improve our programs. AWP's members have an important role to play in restoring the prominence of literature in the academy and in the public square.

As a portion of all BA degrees conferred in all disciplines, BAs in English have fallen from 7 out of every 100 BAs conferred in the 1970s to less than 4 out of every 100 conferred today. Because classes in creative writing are among the most popular and over-subscribed electives among undergraduates, our programs are in a unique position to help develop new audiences for literature. As a result, the AWP Board of Directors has recently given special attention to undergraduate education; there are four sets of recommendations in this handbook for undergraduate teachers and programs.

AWP recommends that programs adjust their curricula in keeping with the changing skills and needs of their students as readers, as writers, and as professionals in the workplace.

AWP's most experienced Program Directors and teachers developed these documents to help you build a better program for the study, creation, and appreciation of literature.

AWP welcomes your suggestions toward making these documents more useful. Please write to hallmarks@awpwriter.org. Thank you for your work in helping the next generation of writers and readers flourish.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Fenza". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "D" and a stylized "F".

David Fenza
Executive Director

AWP Guidelines

for Creative Writing Programs & Teachers of Creative Writing

Introduction

The institutional membership of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs, a national nonprofit corporation founded in 1967, includes a majority of the graduate programs in creative writing in North America. AWP is the primary source, internationally, of information on creative writing programs in English. *The AWP Official Guide to Writing Programs* is the only comprehensive listing available.

Enrollment in writing workshops continues to grow, and new writing programs are established regularly, but the Master of Fine Arts in creative writing—the degree supported by AWP as the appropriate “terminal degree” for the practicing writer/teacher—is still misunderstood by many administrators whose responsibilities include the evaluation of writing programs and the recruitment, employment, and retention of teachers of writing.

Therefore, the Board of Directors of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs has developed this information on writing program curricula and policies regarding the hiring, promotion, and tenure of writers teaching in higher education. This statement was shaped by a two-year study conducted by the AWP Curriculum and Academic Policy Committee, chaired by Ellen Bryant Voigt (Warren Wilson College) and Marvin Bell (University of Iowa) in 1979. Since then, the document has been revised and reaffirmed by the AWP Board of Directors for each successive edition of *The AWP Official Guide to Writing Programs*. Aside from this document, we know of no other comprehensive set of guidelines regarding the hiring and tenure of writers who teach, their appropriate credentials, or academic policies affecting them. This document reinforces AWP’s commitment to the quality of teaching in this field, and it reflects AWP’s continued support of writers in the academy.

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS OF WRITING

Hiring, Rank, and Tenure

It is the position of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs that decisions regarding the hiring, rank, and tenure of teachers of creative writing should be based on the quality of the individual's writing and teaching. Academic degrees should not be considered a requirement or a major criterion which would overrule the importance of the writer's achievement in the art. In the hiring and promotion of a professor of the art of writing, significant published work should be viewed as the equivalent of a terminal degree by administrators and personnel committees.

If, however, a terminal degree is required, it is recommended that the Master of Fine Arts be considered the appropriate credential for the teacher of creative writing. Holders of this degree may also be prepared to teach literature courses as well as composition and rhetoric. AWP reminds institutions that the degree itself, and programs that award the degree, vary considerably; it is recommended that a prospective teacher's individual competencies be examined closely.

AWP assumes that the Master of Fine Arts in creative writing or its equivalent includes at least two years of serious study; a creative thesis (book-length collection of creative work); completion of course work in form, theory, and literature, including contemporary writers; and a substantial amount of individualized writing study, with criticism and direction of the student's writing by experienced writers through workshop, tutorial, independent project, or thesis preparation.

AWP believes that writing program faculty, who as creative writers are best qualified to make assessments of a candidate's work, should be given the responsibility of making professional decisions about their peers, and that their evaluations of the candidate, and their recommendations, should be given the utmost weight in the review process.

Parity

It is the position of AWP that creative writers be given parity with scholars in terms of salary, including senior positions at the top of the salary range, and that the MFA degree be considered the equivalent of the PhD in literature, linguistics, or composition. While the system of part-time or visiting writing faculty is often used to increase the breadth of a program's offerings, such a system should not exclude writers from access to full-time, tenure-track positions and the possibility of renewal.

Course Load

According to AWP surveys, the majority of writing faculty members carry a course load of either two or three courses per semester or quarter in graduate creative writing programs. It should be noted that many institutions define "writing workshop" as equivalent to teaching two courses because of the additional work required in conferences, tutorials, and thesis preparation that writing students need for the development of their work. Other institutions consider a writing workshop equivalent to one literature course. AWP recommends that the course load for both undergraduate and graduate writing teachers be defined in a way that recognizes the importance of individualized attention to the student's creative work and increased amounts of conference and preparation time required. AWP also reminds institutions that a teaching writer needs large amounts of time to do his or her own creative work.

Workshop

AWP surveys conducted periodically since 1978 indicate that most teachers of writing find they are most effective in the workshop format, and that the majority of workshops have a class size of 11–20 students. AWP recommends that workshop size not exceed 15, and that 12 be viewed as desirable and most effective.

Additional Recommendations

It is the position of AWP that teaching writers must have access to a liberal policy of leave and sabbatical. As with other arts, the writing teacher will be effective as a teacher only insofar as he or she is active and engaged as a writer; large, recurring periods of time devoted to the writer's own work are crucial to continued effective teaching.

AWP believes that writers should have the major voice in decisions concerning the hiring and retention of creative writing faculty, admission of students to the writing program, the awarding of degrees in writing, the writing program's budget, and the allocation of physical resources. AWP believes that writers in the academy are best qualified to make such judgments in regard to creative writing programs.

A DESCRIPTION OF WRITING PROGRAM CURRICULA

Although they share common goals, criteria, and characteristics, writing programs in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia are now many and diverse. AWP does not advocate one approach to the study of writing over another, but does seek, through *The AWP Official Guide to Writing Programs*, to help the student writer locate those programs which are most compatible with his or her goals and expectations. Prospective students using the Guide are urged to read each program description carefully, and to pay special attention to the faculty listing, the coursework distribution and other degree requirements, and the statement of the program's aims.

The AWP Official Guide to Writing Programs makes a distinction between, on the one hand, courses in writing offered by an undergraduate or graduate literature program or department, and, on the other, a coherent curriculum in literature and

creative writing designed for writing students. The primary aim of writing programs, through work in writing, form, and theory, and through the study of contemporary writers and past authors, is to help students become better writers. An education in the liberal arts and/or vocational training may be secondary aims. Writing programs are also characterized by the presence of active and experienced writers on their faculties, and the student's own creative work is seen as the primary evidence for decisions about admission and graduation. It should be noted that "creative writing" has traditionally encompassed poetry, playwriting and screenwriting, translation, fiction, creative nonfiction, and other imaginative prose.

Graduate writing programs are listed in *The AWP Official Guide* in the following descriptive categories: **Studio**, **Studio/Research**, and **Research/Theory/Studio**. Although the aims and specific curricula of programs within each category differ, the following general distinctions may be fairly made:

Studio writing programs place primary emphasis on the student's writing experience within the program. In this way, they most closely parallel studio programs in music, dance, and the visual arts. Most of the degree work is done in workshops, independent writing projects or tutorials, and thesis preparation. The study of contemporary literature and the forms, craft, themes, and aesthetics of writing may be incorporated into workshops or offered through separate seminars. Faculty members of such programs are selected for their achievement in the creative or artistic genres of literature and not for scholarly work. Students are admitted to such programs almost wholly on the basis of a writing sample, and in turn, the significant degree criterion is the quality of the thesis manuscript.

Studio/Research writing programs usually place equal emphasis, in their curricula, on the student's writing and literary scholarship, with the belief that the study of literature is crucial to one's development as a writer. Seeking a balance between literary scholarship and literary artistic practice, these programs vary in the structure and amount of literature requirements, but they frequently rely on the regular English department faculty, noted for scholarly

achievement, for many of the literature course offerings, while writers on the program faculty offer form, craft, and theory courses, workshops, and thesis direction. Studio/Research programs often require comprehensive examinations, and candidates are expected to be equally well-prepared in literature and in writing. Admission is determined primarily by the quality of the original manuscript.

Research/Theory/Studio writing programs emphasize literary scholarship and the study and practice of literary theory. These programs also offer writing workshops, independent studies, seminars on contemporary literature and the craft of writing, and the opportunity to complete a creative thesis, but these programs require that a majority of the degree-candidate's course work will be completed in literary scholarship and theory, usually in seminars taught by English department faculty. The course of study typically spans three or more centuries of literature from three or more continents, and proficiency in another language besides English is usually required in earning the degree. Such programs align themselves both with academic traditions of literary research and with anti-traditional modes of cultural criticism that have become prevalent since the 1970s. These programs actively use the same criteria for admission and degree award that are applied to candidates in literary scholarship, including the comprehensive examinations, grade point averages, and previous undergraduate course work in literature.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

It is generally felt among creative writing program faculties that a series of readings and/or brief residencies by established writers is an important dimension of a writing program, offering students an immediate connection to contemporary literature and exposure to a variety of voices and aesthetic approaches. Because such a series is seen as integral to the curriculum, writing faculty should have the largest voice in determining the participants in such a series.

—The AWP Board of Directors

AWP Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing

Graduate programs in creative writing have evolved since the 1930s to offer a range of artistic experiences, approaches, and courses of study. Because there are many paths by which one may become a writer, the curricula vary from program to program. AWP encourages this variety and innovation while it sets general guidelines to help ensure a high quality of artistic literary training within these programs. Although the courses of study vary, AWP has noted the following shared characteristics among successful programs that nurture a culture of creativity, vitality, intellectual rigor, artistic discipline, and collegiality. These definitive hallmarks also form the basis for “The AWP Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing.”

A successful MFA program has accomplished writers as faculty members, a rigorous curriculum, talented students, and strong administrative support, all of which are complemented by the assets that distinguish a generally excellent academic institution. The AWP Board of Directors recommends that MFA programs undergo an annual self-evaluation and periodic independent assessment in an effort to offer the best education for writers and to make the best possible contributions to contemporary letters. Independent assessments are especially valuable to programs that have been operating for less than ten years.

To facilitate, structure, and focus a program’s self-evaluation or independent assessment, the AWP Board of Directors has established these “Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing.” The hallmarks are grouped within five general categories.

Rigorous and Diverse Curriculum

The curriculum is consistent with the mission of the program as “studio” or “studio/research,” two types of programs established by *The AWP Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing*. This curriculum requires 48 to 60 semester hours or credits of study over two to three years. At the heart of this curriculum are graduate-level creative writing workshops and seminars taught by core creative writing faculty on craft, theory, and contemporary literature. The institution also provides challenging elective, graduate-level classes in the literature of many centuries and continents. The program should provide an enabling progression of both practice and study in the literary arts in order to prepare the student for a life of letters and to equip the student with the skills needed for writing a publishable book-length creative work for the thesis.

1. Philosophy. The program has an overarching set of values, beliefs, and pedagogy that reflect: (a) the best practices of creative writing programs; (b) an awareness of the needs of its students; and (c) an understanding of the currents of contemporary literature and culture. The program's philosophy is appropriate to its institution's mission and the goals of its strategic plan. The curriculum requires studies that employ this philosophy effectively.

2. Consistent and Frequent Course Offerings. Required courses are offered regularly in the actual course schedule every semester or quarter. Most of the courses are taught by permanent full-time (tenure-track or tenured) faculty members.

3. A Challenging Workshop. The writers' workshop is a seminar in which students critique one another's work under the mentorship of an accomplished writer-teacher. The workshop is writing intensive, offering each student multiple opportunities for submission and revision of creative work.

4. Extensive Literary Study. One must become an expert and wide-ranging reader before one can hope to become an accomplished writer. The curriculum balances the practice of the art of writing with the study of literature, requiring at least 21 semester hours or credits in literature courses, outside of workshops and independent study. Of this total, 6 to 9 semester hours or credits may be in seminars on craft, theory, and technique taught by MFA faculty. Extensive and diverse reading lists for such courses should inform creative and critical writing assignments. Courses might

cover topics such as the following: The Evolution of the Short Story; The Architecture of the Novel; Traditional Forms of Verse; The Craft of Translation; Magical Realism and Its Influence on Contemporary Authors; Post-Modern Theory and Contemporary Literature; The American Long Poem Sequence; etc.

5. Attentiveness to Revision. In addition to frequent reading and writing, the curriculum requires frequent revision of student work, and the teacher provides suggestions for improving the work as well as references to literary models that may be helpful. Thesis advising focuses on specific suggestions for revision of creative work and includes feedback on successive drafts.

6. A Variety of Seminars and Workshops. As study with writers of varied artistic sensibilities serves a student best, students should have the opportunity to study with a different accomplished writer in a workshop each semester. Topics for literature seminars should also be diverse along several axes, offering exposure to many literary periods and cultural traditions, to literature that reflects a multicultural American society, and to varied craft topics.

7. A Variety of Lectures and Readings. The program broadens the student's knowledge of literary techniques and aesthetics through literary lectures, craft lectures, and readings by the faculty, visiting writers, and scholars.

8. Strong Thesis Advising. Faculty members excel in providing both holistic and line-specific suggestions for revision of each student's thesis. Students are required to produce a publishable literary work, and they must demonstrate expertise in a primary genre to graduate. Rough guidelines for the page range of a thesis manuscript vary by genre: 50-80 pages for poetry, 150-200 for a short story collection or collection of nonfiction essays, 200-350 for a novel or book-length work of creative nonfiction. Where a mixed-genre thesis is accepted, the form should demonstrate coherence—i.e., the compositional quality that would make it a publishable work—and the page range should correspond to guidelines for prose manuscripts.

9. Residential Course Work and Mentorship. Although AWP recognizes the effectiveness of electronic learning and Web-based classrooms, face-to-face mentorship is crucial to an artist's education. Because residential learning and individualized instruction foster the best retention and graduation rates among

matriculated students, every MFA program, including a low-residency program, requires at least 14 days of residential study annually.

10. Cross-Genre Study. The program may require the student to take one seminar or workshop in a genre other than the student's declared specialty. A nonfiction writer, for instance, often benefits from learning the narrative strategies of fiction writers, while fiction writers often benefit from learning the research techniques of nonfiction writers. Although this feature is not a necessary part of a program's curriculum, it is a feature of many effective programs.

11. Vocational Study Options. Students may have access to elective classes in journalism, publishing, composition, theater, screenwriting, technical writing, teaching writing, or communications taught by distinguished faculty. The program may also provide internships through an affiliation with a journal, press, publishing venue, or other community literary programs that provide editorial experience.

Accomplished Faculty

These qualities distinguish a program that supports excellent teaching:

1. Accomplished Writers Who Teach Well. The program has a faculty of published writers who have distinguished themselves as teachers and as artists. As teachers, they command the respect of their peers, and they receive generally good to excellent student evaluations. Each faculty member has published significant work in one or more of the following genres: fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, playwriting, writing for children and young adults, or screenwriting. Each faculty member has published at least one book by a respected press, and that book is in the genre which the faculty member teaches. Each faculty member holds an MFA or the appropriate terminal degree in creative writing. An outstanding publications record of literary book publication may serve as an equivalent for the degree.

2. Stable Faculty. Most of the faculty are tenured or tenure-track so that students may rely on continuity in instruction, mentorship, thesis advising, and

recommendations for professional advancement. Faculty members routinely make themselves available to students outside of class. The intensive nature of advising on a creative thesis should be a factor in determining a teacher's course load. Senior tenured faculty, who have distinguished themselves by their national publications, have a teaching load of 2-2 or lower in order to support their advising of theses, their mentorship of students, and their research, writing, and contributions to contemporary letters.

3. Diverse Faculty. A program's faculty provides depth and expertise in each genre and variety in aesthetic sensibility. A diverse faculty provides a range of aesthetic viewpoints related to literary, ethnic, cultural, or other influences, and a range of approaches to craft. A visiting writer's position often helps to enhance this diversity.

4. Community Service. Faculty members are professionally active, not only publishing creative work, but also providing leadership in the profession through national, regional, and local service. The faculty members are dedicated to making sure their program provides a supportive literary community in addition to effective instruction.

5. A Low Faculty-to-Student Ratio. A good program has a faculty-to-student ratio of one to twelve, or better. Because of this low student-to-faculty ratio, students have the opportunity to receive frequent and extensive critiques of their work and their theses.

Excellent Students and Support for Students

In its efforts to serve its students well, an effective program offers these features:

1. Small Classes. To facilitate extensive critiques of student work, workshops should have no more than 14 students, and class size in other graduate seminars should range from 11 to 20 students. Online classes are no larger than seven students. A mentor in a low-residency program conducts no more than five tutorials a semester.

2. Regular Evaluation of Faculty and the Program. The program is responsive to the needs of its graduate students, and students evaluate their courses and instructors each semester. At least once every four years, the program also conducts exit surveys

of students after they have completed the program. The exit survey seeks an overall evaluation of the program's effectiveness in curriculum, thesis advising, and other areas that are not evaluated in course evaluations.

3. Selective Admissions. With generally high and selective admissions standards, the program sustains a high ratio of applicants to admissions.

4. Strong Recruitment of the Best Students. Both the institution and the program work in concert to enroll qualified students of different backgrounds, social classes, and races.

5. Financial Aid. Programs offer some financial aid in the form of scholarships, waivers, assistantships, fellowships, internships, subsidized loans, travel support, or other forms of support in order to attract the best students.

6. A Student Handbook. Students are given clear guidelines for the structure of a tutorial or online coursework, which protect their right to consistent, regularly scheduled feedback and provide appropriate means for redressing any grievances. The handbook also clearly defines the etiquette for online classes and discussions, and it explains the requirements for earning the degree, including guidelines for a creative thesis and expectations for any requirements in addition to course work (critical papers, lectures, or oral or written exams).

7. A High Retention Rate. A high percentage of matriculated students graduate from the program, and a small number of students drop out or transfer to other programs.

8. Publication by Students and Graduates of the Program. The number of publications by students and alumni is the ultimate measure of an MFA program's effectiveness. A high number of students go on to publish significant literary work and to win honors and awards for their writing.

9. Mentorship for TAs. If teaching assistantships are available, a regular program of TA training and mentoring ensures that TAs develop good pedagogical methods and benefit from the experience of a skilled teacher.

Strong Administrative Support

An effective program has these features in its administration:

1. **Strong Leadership.** The MFA program director provides strong leadership in planning, in staffing, in devising curriculum, in training new faculty members, in recruiting the best students, and in advocating program needs to the host institution's administration. The program director also facilitates alumni relations and fund-raising for the program.
2. **Sufficient Autonomy.** The institution's administration gives the program sufficient autonomy with regard to curriculum, admissions, budget, graduate support, physical facilities, and personnel to ensure quality, stability, flexibility, and the capability to take advantage of opportunities quickly.
3. **Strong Financial Support.** The institution provides financial resources to facilitate excellence in the recruiting and retaining of faculty, in providing services to students, in providing administrative support for the program director, and in maintaining the facilities used by the program.
4. **Good Collegial Relations.** If the program is part of a department of literature or another larger entity, the program has a supportive relationship with that department. The program has good working relations with the university's leadership.
5. **Community Outreach.** The program director and the institution's administrators seek, whenever possible, to establish a strong, positive presence in the local community. Typically, several events of the reading series or lecture series are open to the public, and the marketing of these open events is effective. Affiliations with community literary centers is also encouraged.
6. **Diligent Quality Control.** The program director makes sure that students have the opportunity to evaluate their faculty annually. In a low-residency programs, the students know that they have the right to a productive tutorial with a frequent exchange of packets, or to a rigorous online class that demands participation of the students and timely instruction, guidance, and responses from the teacher. The program director will take immediate action in counseling faculty members and in replacing faculty members if high standards of instruction are not consistently maintained. Although the faculty are entitled to some flexibility in the quantity of

assignments, as justified by the varying difficulty of those assignments, the program director monitors the assignments to ensure that the program remains rigorous and challenging.

7. Clear Criteria for Evaluation of Faculty. Faculty members are promoted and tenured based on publication of creative work, demonstrated ability as teachers, and contribution to the university and greater literary community. The program should have clear criteria for designating, hiring, and promoting creative writing faculty, and the criteria should be specific to creative writing faculty, whose respected venues for publication may reside outside the usual circle of university journals and presses that publish scholarship and theory.

8. Participation in Professional Networks. A good program provides membership in AWP and other appropriate local, regional, and national associations to assure that faculty members and students have access to timely information about contemporary letters and the teaching of creative writing.

9. Administrative Support Staff. To facilitate excellence in administration, the program director has the administrative support of one to two full-time workers, depending on the size of the program.

10. Release Time for the Program Director. Depending on the size of the program, the program director has his or her teaching load reduced by one or two courses a year.

Other Assets and Infrastructure

An effective program also has the assets and infrastructure that characterize any good college or university:

1. Accreditation. The program, institute, or department is part of an accredited institution of higher education, or it is an accredited institution in and of itself.

2. Good Infrastructure. Classrooms, offices, and other spaces are adequate to conduct workshops, conferences, readings, and informal student and faculty gatherings. Spaces assigned to the program promote an atmosphere conducive to

concentration, listening, social exchanges, and focused work. When students are housed on campus, they are housed in close proximity to each other to provide more opportunity for them to develop the kind of lifelong friendships that are often crucial to sustaining the writing life after the completion of the degree.

3. A Computer Lab. The lab is open at least twelve hours a day for students to work on manuscripts and conduct research on the Internet.

4. An Excellent Library. Faculty and students have access to a library with extensive holdings in canonical and contemporary literature.

5. A Unique Educational Feature. A special focus, initiative, resource, archive, project, or other opportunity for students distinguishes the program from other comparable programs. Such a feature might be a literary magazine, an emphasis on translation, a small press, special internships, or the archives of a literary author.

6. A Campus Bookstore. The program has a campus bookstore that supports the curriculum, special events with visiting writers, and faculty and student authors.

7. An Affiliated Literary Publication. The program is affiliated with a journal, press, or other publishing venue that can provide editorial and publishing experience.

—The AWP Board of Directors

AWP Hallmarks of an Effective Low-Residency MFA Program in Creative Writing

Since the first low-residency MFA program in creative writing was developed in the 1970s, higher education has established over thirty such programs. With various combinations of residencies, workshops, lectures, online workshops and classes, study abroad, correspondence, and one-on-one mentoring, low-residency programs vary; however, their chief attributes are individualized instruction and structural flexibility for students. Low-residency programs require at least two years of study. Students study literature and craft by writing original fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, translations, screenplays, or plays; by analyzing contemporary and canonical works of literature; and by writing critical papers. Programs also require culminating projects focused on the craft of writing—an extended craft essay, a lecture, or the teaching of a seminar. The centerpiece of the course of study is a creative thesis, an original literary work in the student’s chosen genre(s).

With its mentoring relationships involving one teacher and one student, or with small online workshops and seminars, the low-residency program excels in expediting the development of a writer. Students in low-residency programs tend to be older than traditional graduate students. Many students enter these programs intending to continue in their already established careers; these students find that their professional work is often improved by the skills they acquire in their artistic avocations. Low-residency programs have a strong record of preparing graduates for careers in teaching, editing, publishing, public affairs, advertising, and administration.

To facilitate, structure, and focus a program’s periodic self-evaluation or independent assessment, the AWP Board of Directors has established these hallmarks, which are also addressed to administrators who seek to establish low-residency programs at their institutions. The hallmarks are meant to be aspirational rather than prescriptive, reflecting current best practices. Specific details associated with some of the following hallmarks are included because of the relative newness of the low-residency

model, still unfamiliar to many academics and administrators. As these details are considered, one should bear in mind that one program's particulars may differ dramatically from another's, even as both achieve goals common to most programs.

Hallmarks: A successful low-residency MFA program has a rigorous curriculum, accomplished writers as teachers, talented students, strong administrative support, and the infrastructure and complementary assets that distinguish a generally excellent academic institution.

Rigorous and Extensive Curriculum

Two primary models for low-residency programs have been established: those that conduct mentoring for distance learning and those that conduct classes through electronic media for distance learning. Some programs utilize a hybrid of both models. AWP encourages variety in the structure of courses so long as the program remains rigorous and demands extensive reading assignments, practice in critical analysis, productivity in frequent writing and revision, and a residency component.

The quantification of requirements outlined below provides general illustrations only. Individual programs and their faculty will exercise flexibility in the number of assignments as their varying natures and difficulty justify.

Typical curricula for the two primary models of low-residency programs are described below.

Low-Residency Programs Based on Mentoring

Mentor-based low-residency MFA programs typically involve two main components: *residency* and *mentoring*. During the residency, students attend intensive workshops, lectures, panel discussions, seminars, and literary readings. At the residency, a student often develops a reading list and study-plan for the upcoming semester. During the off-campus mentoring period, students work one-on-one with a faculty writer who guides the student's study of literature and craft; the mentor also provides

written commentary on the student's work.

Mentoring addresses two general goals:

- Development of each student's creative work and writing skills. There is a regularly scheduled exchange in which the student submits original creative work, critical responses to reading assignments, and responses to the mentor's critiques and advice about that work. These exchanges are often called "packets."
- Development of each student's analytical reading skills in individually tailored instruction in craft, literature, aesthetics, and criticism. Typically, student and mentor establish a challenging list of literary works and texts on the craft of writing, and the student regularly submits critical papers or analyses for the mentor's commentary.

Residencies address themselves to three general goals:

- Broadening and deepening each student's knowledge of diverse artistic sensibilities. This is provided by lectures, panel discussions, and seminars on canonized and contemporary literary authors, by the study of literary criticism and theory, by writing workshops, and by a reading series involving faculty, students, and visiting authors.
- Developing a literary community that provides students with peer review, encouragement, and criticism. This is provided in the residency's workshops, in seminars, and in informal discussions outside of class.
- Educating students about publishing and editing by regularly bringing magazine and book publishers, editors, and agents to residencies for panel discussions and informal conferences with students.

An effective curriculum in a mentor-based low-residency program will often have the following characteristics:

1. Philosophy. The program has an overarching set of values, beliefs, and pedagogy that reflect: (a) the best practices of creative writing programs; (b) an awareness of the

needs of its students; and (c) an understanding of the currents of contemporary literature and culture. The program's philosophy is appropriate to its institution's mission and the goals of its strategic plan. The curriculum requires studies that employ this philosophy effectively.

2. A Studio/Research Course of Study. Typically, an integrated course of study of at least 48 semester hours consistent with the “studio/research” program as defined by *The AWP Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing*. One must become an expert reader before one may hope to become an expert writer. A studio/research program requires a student to study a variety of canonical and contemporary literary works, and it requires the student to create original fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, translations, screenplays, plays, or other literary writing. The program provides an enabling balance and progression of both practice and study in the literary arts in order to prepare the student for a life of letters and to equip the student with the skills needed for writing an original book-length creative work.

3. A Substantial Number of Days in Residence During the Student’s Course of Study. For example, many two-year/four-semester programs include five residencies of ten days each, for a total of 50 days in residence overall. (Although the half-year duration of study from residency to residency may not coincide with the calendars of an institution’s traditional semesters, they are still referred to as semesters here.) With the exception of the student’s final semester (which includes a second residency at the term’s conclusion), such programs typically require one ten-day residency at the beginning of each term. However, the number of days scheduled for each residency may vary among programs, depending on the number of semesters required to complete the program, as well as the number of residencies required per semester. Students are required to fully participate in each residency.

4. Challenging Individualized Assignments. Over the course of a six-month mentor-based semester (which includes a residency and an off-campus mentoring period of up to five months duration), a student will typically do creative and critical work equivalent to the following:

- read at least ten books, or their equivalent
- produce craft-based analytical writing in each packet
- draft and revise 3 to 5 short stories, or a novella, or equivalent sections of a

novel; or 15 to 20 poems; or 3 to 5 short nonfiction works, or equivalent sections of a book

A typical packet from the student will include such things as:

- new and/or revised creative work
- a bibliography of the reading the student has completed
- critical analysis of the reading
- responses to directions and questions posed by the mentor in the previous exchange of packets

In the third or fourth semester of many programs, the assignments change in order to facilitate the students' preparations of an essay and a lecture. This work necessarily displaces some of the reading and writing assignments quantified above.

A typical packet from the mentor will include:

- a holistic critique of the student's creative work with suggestions for new and substantially revised work
- a return of the student's manuscripts with marginalia and line-specific suggestions
- comments on the student's critical analyses of reading assignments
- suggestions for related reading, especially books that provide models of craft pertinent to the student's particular ambitions and style of learning
- individualized instruction about specific aspects of craft

5. Frequent Exchange of Packets. When a student works with a mentor by exchanging packets, clear guidelines are provided for regularly scheduled exchanges and substantive critical responses from the mentor. For a mentoring period roughly equivalent to five months (excluding the residency), students should typically submit packets and receive corresponding critical responses from their mentors at least once a month.

6. Attentiveness to Revision. In addition to frequent reading and writing, the mentor requires frequent revision of student work. The mentor provides suggestions for improving the work as well as references to literary models that may be helpful. During the residencies, workshops also focus on specific suggestions for revision of

creative work.

7. A Variety of Mentors and Workshop Leaders. A student typically studies with a different accomplished writer each semester, and with a different workshop leader each residency, thus exposing the student to a variety of artistic sensibilities and pedagogical approaches in the study and practice of literary writing.

8. A Variety of Residency Lectures, Seminars, Panel Discussions, and Readings. The residencies broaden the student's knowledge of literary techniques and aesthetics through craft lectures, seminars, panel discussions, and readings by the faculty, visiting writers, scholars, and other students.

9. Strong Thesis Advising. Faculty members excel in providing both holistic and line-specific suggestions for revision of each student's thesis. In order to graduate, the student must demonstrate expertise in at least one genre and produce a substantial original literary work.

10. Cross-Genre Study. Many mentor-based programs allow the student to work for one or more semesters in a genre other than the student's declared specialty. In some programs, working in a second genre may increase the number of semesters required to graduate.

11. Student Lecture and Essay. In addition to required creative work, mentor-based programs typically require students to write at least one substantial essay on an issue of literary craft or tradition, and to give a public lecture. During the student's final two semesters, mentors help students prepare for these assignments.

Low-Residency Programs with Electronic Classrooms

Programs with electronic classrooms typically involve two main components: *residency* and *classes online*, but some programs require mentoring as well. During the residency, students attend intensive workshops, panel discussions, lectures, seminars, and literary readings. During the classes online, students work in small discussion groups, in writing courses, and in literature courses.

Low-residency classes online address themselves to three general goals:

- Development of each student's critical reading skills in courses on craft, literature, aesthetics, criticism, and literary theory. Students regularly submit critical papers and Web board postings for the teacher's and students' commentary. In online workshops, students develop critical skills in evaluating the work of their peers.
- Development of each student's creative work and writing skills. In regularly scheduled exchanges, the student submits to an instructor or mentor original creative work, critical responses to reading assignments, and responses to the instructor's or mentor's critiques and advice about that work.
- Development of a literary community. In a successful low-residency program with electronic classrooms, students will learn from one another as well as from their assignments and their faculty. They also become acquainted with a greater variety of artistic sensibilities.

Residencies in electronic classroom-based programs address themselves to three general goals:

- Broadening and deepening each student's knowledge of diverse artistic sensibilities. This is provided by lectures, panel discussions, and seminars on canonized and contemporary literary authors, by the study of literary criticism and theory, by writing workshops, and by a reading series involving faculty, students, and visiting authors.
- Developing a literary community that provides students with peer review, encouragement, and criticism. This is provided in the residency's workshops, in seminars, and in informal discussions outside of class.
- Educating students about publishing and editing by regularly bringing magazine and book publishers, editors, and agents to residencies for panel discussions and informal conferences with students.

An effective curriculum in a low-residency program with electronic classrooms will often have the following characteristics:

1. Philosophy. The program has an overarching set of values, beliefs, and pedagogy that reflect: (a) the best practices of creative writing programs; (b) an awareness of the needs of its students; and (c) an understanding of the currents of contemporary literature and culture. The program's philosophy is appropriate to its institution's mission and the goals of its strategic plan. The curriculum requires studies that employ this philosophy effectively.

2. A Studio/Research Course of Study. Typically, an integrated course of study of at least 48 semester hours consistent with the “studio/research” program as defined by *The AWP Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing*. One must become an expert reader before one may hope to become an expert writer. A studio/research program requires a student to study a variety of canonical and contemporary literary works, and it requires the student to create original fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, translations, screenplays, plays, or other literary writing. The program should provide an enabling balance and progression of both practice and study in the literary arts in order to prepare the student for a life of letters and to equip the student with the skills needed for writing an original book-length creative work.

3. A Substantial Number of Days in Residence During the Student's Course of Study. Programs that provide rigorous online classes, as opposed to more informal discussion groups, sometimes require fewer residencies than mentor-based low-residency programs. For this reason and others, the total number of required days in residence during the student's course of study (often around 30) is usually less than that of mentor-based programs. With the exception of the student's final semester (which includes a second residency at the term's conclusion), most programs require a residency at the beginning of each term. However, the number of days scheduled for each residency may vary, depending on the number of semesters required to complete the program, as well as the number of residencies required per semester. Students are required to fully participate in each residency.

4. Challenging Online Assignments. Typically, a student will have an online writing workshop in tandem with one or more classes in literature. Over the course of a six-month semester (which usually includes a residency and a mentoring period of at least five months), a student will typically do creative and critical work equivalent to the following:

- read at least ten books, or their equivalent
- produce craft-based analytical writing
- draft and revise 3 to 5 short stories, or a novella, or equivalent sections of a novel; or 15 to 20 poems; or 3 to 5 short nonfiction works, or equivalent sections of a book
- write critical analyses of the reading assignments
- respond to directions and questions posed by the instructor on the Web boards or via email
- compose and submit formal written critiques of fellow students' work

Over the course of a typical semester of online teaching, the instructor will do the following:

- provide a holistic critique of the student's creative work and suggestions for revision
- return the student's manuscripts with marginalia and line-specific suggestions
- comment upon the student's analyses of reading assignments
- suggest related reading, especially books that provide models of craft pertinent to the student's particular ambitions and style of writing

5. Reliable Software to Host Virtual Classrooms. The software enables the instructor to post a syllabus, assignments, and responses to student work; it enables students to share work, comment upon reading assignments, the work of their peers, and questions posed by their instructor. The software also provides quantifiable data on student participation and attendance.

6. Strong Technical Support. Training in the software for distance learning is provided to new faculty and students in their first residency. The college or university has its own technical support staff to answer questions and resolve technical problems.

7. Frequent Assignments and Interchanges. Clear guidelines are provided for regularly scheduled exchanges and substantive critical responses from the instructor and for frequent exchanges and online discussions among students about their work or their assignments.

8. Attentiveness to Revision. In addition to frequent reading and writing, the

instructor requires frequent revision of student work. The instructor provides suggestions for improving the work as well as references to literary models that may be helpful. During the residencies, workshops also focus on specific suggestions for revision of creative work.

9. A Variety of Online Classes, Workshops, and Instructors. A student typically studies with a different workshop leader each residency, thus exposing the student to a variety of artistic sensibilities and pedagogical approaches in the study and practice of literary writing. The online literature classes are also diverse in subjects and literary periods.

10. A Variety of Residency Lectures, Seminars, Panel Discussions, and Readings. The residencies broaden the student's knowledge of literary techniques and aesthetics through craft lectures, seminars, panel discussions, and readings by the faculty, visiting writers, scholars, and other students.

11. Strong Thesis Advising. Faculty members excel in providing both holistic and line-specific suggestions for revision of each student's thesis. In order to graduate, the student must demonstrate expertise in at least one genre and produce a substantial original literary work.

12. Cross-Genre Study. Many online classroom-based programs allow the student to work for one or more semesters in a genre other than the student's declared specialty. In some programs, working in a second genre may increase the number of semesters required to graduate.

13. Student Lecture and Essay. In addition to required creative work, online classroom-based programs typically require students to write at least one substantial essay on an issue of literary craft or tradition, and to give a public lecture. During the student's final semester(s), mentors help students prepare for these assignments.

14. Compliance with State Accreditation Requirements for Distance Learning.

Hybrid Low-Residency MFA Programs

Hybrid low-residency programs include features from both mentor-based and

electronic classroom-based programs, and add variations and innovations of their own. Strong hybrid low-residency programs are rigorous and demand extensive reading assignments, practice in critical analysis, productivity in frequent writing and revision, and a residency component. Their particulars vary in ways too numerous to list here.

Accomplished Faculty

Whether mentor-based, online classroom-based, or a hybrid model, every low-residency MFA in Creative Writing Program requires an effective faculty. An effective MFA in creative writing faculty has these characteristics:

1. **Accomplished Writers Who Teach Well.** The program has a faculty of published writers who have distinguished themselves as teachers and as literary artists. As teachers, they command the respect of their peers, and they receive generally good to excellent student evaluations. Each faculty member has published significant work in one or more of the following genres: fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, playwriting, writing for children or young adults, or screenwriting. Each faculty member has published at least one book by a respected press, and that book is in the genre which the faculty member teaches. Each faculty member holds an MFA degree in creative writing or has achieved a level of publication that serves as the equivalent for that degree.
2. **Timeliness in Mentoring and/or Online Instruction.** An effective mentor or online instructor in a low-residency program expedites the exchange of packets or online responses to work. A faculty mentor will typically respond to a student packet within ten days of its receipt. Likewise, the instructor of an online class will typically require frequent, regularly scheduled assignments and additions to the discussion boards, and the teacher will respond in a timely manner to student postings. Timeliness is especially important in facilitating revision of a student's creative work.
3. **A Low Student-to-Faculty Ratio.** A successful low-residency MFA program typically has a student-to-faculty ratio of five to one. Because of this low student-to-faculty ratio, low-residency programs have the opportunity to receive frequent and extensive critiques of their work. A low student-to-faculty ratio is an essential component of a low-residency program.

4. **A Large Faculty.** The faculty is large enough that it affords the student the opportunity to study with a different accomplished writer each semester and additional different writers in workshops during each residency.

5. **Diversity in Artistic Sensibilities.** A strong program has a diverse combination of faculty members who provide expertise in various genres or subgenres of writing and approach their craft from a variety of perspectives, drawing on different aesthetic, literary, ethnic, cultural, and other backgrounds.

6. **Continuity in Faculty.** In low-residency programs, the majority of faculty members are typically considered to be part-time, and their terms are contractual. This allows for versatility and diversity in the faculty, but the program retains from this same pool a stable group of faculty who work in the program year after year. This continuity facilitates effective mentorship and advising for students.

7. **Strong Service to the Literary Community and the Profession of Creative Writing.** Faculty members contribute to the vitality of residencies, and they also do good works for the greater literary community. Faculty members are available outside of class for informal discussions. They are supportive of their colleagues and students. They work to preserve high morale and collegiality among students and faculty.

Excellent Students and Support for Students

An effective low-residency program includes these features in its efforts to serve its students well:

1. **Selective Admissions.** With generally high and selective admissions standards, the program sustains a high ratio of applicants to admissions.
2. **Small Classes.** Although numbers vary from program to program, in general:
 - Residential workshop classes are no larger than twelve students.
 - Online workshops are no larger than nine students.

- A mentor works with no more than six students a semester.

Teaching and mentoring small numbers of students facilitates exchanges of critical analysis of student work and discussions of reading assignments.

3. Regular Evaluation of Faculty. The program is responsive to the needs of its graduate students, and students evaluate their instructors each semester. The program also conducts exit surveys of students after they have completed the program.

4. A Student Handbook. Students are given clear guidelines for the structure of a mentoring relationship or online coursework, which protect their right to consistent, regularly scheduled critiques and other responses to their work, and also provide appropriate means for redressing any grievances. The handbook also clearly defines the requirements for critical papers, the creative thesis, craft essay, graduating lecture or seminar, and any other major requirements.

5. A High Graduation Rate. A high percentage of matriculated students graduate from the program, and a small number of students drop out or transfer to other programs.

6. Literary Accomplishments in Post-Graduate Student Work. Many graduates go on to publish significant literary work and to win honors and awards for their writing.

7. Financial Aid. Low-residency programs may offer some financial aid in the form of scholarships, waivers, subsidized loans, or other forms of support in order to attract the best students.

Strong Administrative Support

An effective low-residency MFA program includes these features in its administration:

1. Strong Leadership. The MFA program director provides strong leadership in planning, in staffing, in devising curriculum, in training new faculty members, in

recruiting the best students, and in advocating program needs to the host institution's administration.

2. Sufficient Autonomy. The institution's administration gives the program sufficient autonomy with regard to curriculum, admissions, budget, graduate support, physical facilities, and personnel to ensure quality, stability, flexibility, and the capability to take advantage of opportunities quickly.

3. Strong Financial Support. The institution provides financial resources to facilitate excellence in recruiting and retaining faculty, in providing services to students, in providing administrative support for the program director and other faculty, and in maintaining the facilities used by the program.

4. Good Departmental Relations. If the program is part of a department of English or another larger entity, the program has a mutually supportive relationship with that department.

5. Community Service. The program director, other local MFA faculty, and the institution's administrators seek, whenever possible, to establish a strong, positive presence in the local community. Typically, several events of each residency are open to the public.

6. Diligent Quality Control. The program director makes sure that students have the opportunity to evaluate their faculty annually, and that the students know that they have the right to a productive semester with a frequent exchange of packets, or to a rigorous online class that demands participation of the students, along with timely instruction, guidance, and responses from the teacher. The program director will take immediate action in counseling faculty members and in replacing faculty members if high standards of instruction are not consistently maintained. The program director regularly reviews faculty performance to ensure that the program remains rigorous and challenging. Just as the program holds faculty to high standards, the program holds itself to high standards as well. The program has clear guidelines and policies for counseling a student for poor performance, and, should it become necessary, for removing the failing student from the program. The program director ensures that faculty and students observe these guidelines and policies.

7. Participation in Professional Networks. A strong program provides membership

in AWP and other appropriate local, regional, and national associations to assure faculty members and students access to timely information about contemporary letters and the teaching of creative writing.

Other Assets and Infrastructure

An effective low-residency MFA program also has the infrastructure and assets that comprise any setting conducive to graduate work:

1. **Strong Infrastructure.** During the residency periods, classrooms, offices, and other spaces are adequate to conduct workshops, conferences, readings, and informal student and faculty gatherings. Spaces assigned to the program promote an atmosphere conducive to concentration, listening, social exchanges, and focused work. Students are housed in close proximity to each other, not in widely scattered locations, so there is more opportunity for them to develop the kind of lifelong friendships that are often crucial to sustaining the writing life after the completion of the degree.

2. **A Strong Set of Additional Program Assets.** These will vary from program to program, and from residency venue to residency venue. During residency periods for some programs, for instance, a computer lab is open at least 12 hours a day for students to work on manuscripts and conduct research on the Internet. In some programs, faculty and students will have access to a library with extensive holdings in canonical and contemporary literature. For programs with electronic distance learning, the library will have extensive online reading materials in literature and literary criticism, accessible throughout each term. Other assets may include a program bookstore, an affiliation with a literary publication, or some other opportunity that puts students closer in touch with the work of other writers or the world of publishing.

3. **A Unique Educational Feature.** The program or institution provides a special focus, resource, archive, project, or other opportunity for students that distinguishes the program from comparable programs. Such a feature might be a literary magazine, an emphasis on translation, a small press, special internships, or the archives of a literary author.

—The AWP Board of Directors

AWP Recommendations on the Teaching of Creative Writing to Undergraduates

AWP has created these recommendations to clarify the goals, methods, and curriculum of teaching creative writing to undergraduates. These recommendations are addressed to new teachers of creative writing, who need to have a clear understanding of how and why the pedagogy for undergraduate students differs from the pedagogy for graduate students. These recommendations are also addressed to Program Directors, department chairs, and deans who must ensure that classes in their purview meet rigorous standards of instruction.

Whereas the general goal for a graduate program in creative writing is to nurture and expedite the development of a literary artist, the goal for an undergraduate program is mainly to develop a well-rounded student in the liberal arts and humanities, a student who develops a general expertise in literature, in critical reading, and in persuasive writing. The graduate model of workshops that center mainly on analysis of student work is not effective for undergraduates. The pedagogy with which most new teachers of creative writing are familiar, the graduate workshop, presupposes an understanding of literary tradition, an extensive critical vocabulary, and the capacity to incorporate feedback and self-criticism in revision. Because undergraduates have yet to acquire such a background, the undergraduate curriculum requires extensive reading at each level of instruction, even for advanced undergraduate workshops.

An expert writer must first become an expert reader. The undergraduate creative writing curriculum seeks to inculcate an understanding of the rhetorical components, forms, genres, great works, and periods of literature. Undergraduate creative writing classes inculcate this understanding through four basic methods:

- reading and critical analysis of canonical and contemporary works of literature;

- practice in integrating the strategies of literary models, especially through isolating a specific craft technique to achieve a particular effect;
- practice in writing original poems, stories, creative nonfiction, or plays; and
- peer review of student writing in discussions moderated by the instructor.

Students study literature “from the outside” as readers and critics and “from the inside” as writers of their own works. The goals and methods of this instruction appear below.

Goals

Many undergraduate students (especially those taking only one or two creative writing classes as electives) do not intend to become literary professionals, so the pedagogical methods of the graduate seminar are inappropriate. Some of the goals of undergraduate instruction are intrinsic to the making and appreciation of literature; some goals are extrinsic to artistic study but important to the overall success of a college education and the acquisition of vocational skills.

Undergraduate instruction in creative writing seeks to provide students with the following:

1. *An Overview of Literature.* Creative writing classes and workshops introduce students to a wide range of literature, spanning at least three centuries, three continents, and a variety of cultural viewpoints. This overview, for majors and minors, is complemented by traditional courses in English literature, comparative literature, and other disciplines.
2. *Expertise in Critical Analysis.* Like any undergraduate instruction, creative writing classes teach students how to think critically; the classes give students practice in making sound interpretive arguments based on the evidence of a text and in solving analytical problems.

3. *Understanding of the Elements of a Writer's Craft.* Creative writing instruction gives students an understanding of the components of a writer's craft: prosody, narrative strategies, forms, genres, and aesthetics. Students learn to write well in many forms.
4. *Intellectual Discipline.* The engagement with creative writing and criticism provides students with experience in narrowing one's focus and energies to produce the most effective work while they meet deadlines and manage their time efficiently.
5. *Understanding of Diverse Cultural Values.* Ultimately the study of literature is the study of humanity. In creative writing classes students study points of view other than their own. This makes them more effective not only as writers but as collaborators, coworkers, managers, and citizens in an increasingly diverse nation.
6. *Creativity.* By requiring students to work in various literary forms and genres, creative writing classes require creative problem-solving, experimentation, and inventiveness.
7. *A Strong Command of Grammar.* Creative writing classes require that students broaden and deepen skills they may have first developed in their classes of composition, grammar, and rhetoric.
8. *Persuasive Communication Skills.* Because literature is not mere exposition, creative writing students learn rhetorical tactics for making both emotional and rational appeals through language.
9. *An Understanding of New Media Technology.* Instruction in new technology is critically important for writers who would participate in the full spectrum of the writing world; this includes an understanding of writing on the web, website construction, integration of other media with writing, and desktop publishing.

Methods

Creative writing classes should utilize the following methods of instruction:

1. *Extensive and Diverse Reading Requirements.* Workshops at all levels of a four-year course of study should require assigned texts: anthologies, novels, poetry collections, short story collections, nonfiction, and books on the craft of writing. Major and minor courses of study should include traditional classes in literature.
2. *Study of Literary Terminology.* To prepare students to become expert readers of canonical and contemporary literature and the work of their peers, students must learn terms that identify the components of rhetoric, poetic forms, narrative strategies, genres, and critical approaches. Over a four-year course of study, this critical terminology must become more extensive.
3. *Study of Critical Approaches.* Students must become adept at analyzing and evaluating the components of literature and the manuscripts of their peers. Critical approaches should concentrate on those modes of criticism that focus on the interrelationship between theme and formal elements.
4. *Practice in Critical Reading.* Close reading of literary works and student manuscripts is the central mechanism in creative writing courses. Close reading enables students to learn craft strategies, discern authorial intentions, and deepen the pleasure they take in the work. Creative writing courses are especially concerned with the way literature exploits ambiguity, tension, and figurative language to generate meaning. In considering literary works and the manuscripts of their peers, students are encouraged to ask questions that exceed the parameters of strictly literary analysis and contend with the aesthetic and ethical challenges of artistic practice: Is this writer's use of a non-linear narrative justified? What does the writer gain from experimenting with point of view that could not be achieved by a more traditional approach? What technical strategies enable a writer to avoid creating stereotypes?

5. *Memorization.* For the study of poetry, memorization is the ultimate close reading. The memorization of poems of formal verse helps to intimate nuances of form, cadence, and rhythm. Especially in the introductory and intermediate classes and workshops, students should be required to memorize verse.
6. *Practice in Critical Writing.* In order to sharpen students' abilities as close readers, assignments in the writing of book reviews, critical analysis, or journal writing should accompany the creative exercises and practice in writing stories, creative nonfiction, poems, and plays.
7. *Practice in the Writer's Craft.* Students must be required to write frequently and to employ a variety of strategies in their creative work. For prose writing, assignments should be organized to bring students from competency to expertise in all the units of composition (effective sentences, effective descriptive paragraphs, effective narrative paragraphs, effective dialogue, effective point of view, etc.). Similarly, in poetry, assignments should be organized to present the students with increasingly complex challenges in creating various shapes of sentences, stanzas, imagery, rhythms, traditional verse forms, free-verse poetics, etc.
8. *Peer Review or Workshops.* The students' descriptive reactions to a peer's manuscript provide an essential ground for a critical or craft-conscious response. In responding to one another's comments, students acquire a more self-critical and accurate understanding of how writers narrow and define a range of themes for their audiences.
9. *Written Comments from the Instructor.* Written feedback from the instructor is crucial in providing encouragement, in recommending additional reading, and in cultivating higher critical and artistic standards. As appropriate, the instructor provides margin notes to query the student's choices in craft and grammar usage. Analogous to the verbal feedback provided in workshop, written comments should offer a descriptive response to the work, convey respect for the intentions of the writer, and comment on the potential of the draft, with specific suggestions for revision.

10. *Practice in Revision.* After peer review and written feedback from the instructor, students must be required to revise work. Students need to learn what constitutes the creative process as they struggle to translate their aims in the work to a focus on the reader's, not the writer's, experience.
11. *Grading, Testing, and Evaluation.* In undergraduate creative writing courses, it can make good sense not to grade certain types of assignments. For example, students might feel less free to experiment in a creative exercise if they fear the teacher's judgment. Grades, however, should be given for most assignments, including critical analysis of literary works, feedback on the manuscripts of peers, creative exercises, and creative manuscripts for workshops. Grades for revised work should depend on how well students demonstrate that they have transformed their processes for composing and revising. In addition, participation in class discussion, so crucial to an effective creative writing class, should be heavily weighted in the final grade for the course. Because undergraduate workshops require students to acquire a mastery of literary terms, a knowledge of prosody, an understanding of genres, and a command of narrative strategies, exams are an appropriate component, especially for introductory classes.
12. *Hands-on Experience with New Media Technology.* The institution provides students of writing with full access to computer facilities. Students must have the opportunity, and instruction that would enable them, to test their writing in a variety of formats and through a variety of technologies.

General Curriculum

Undergraduate creative writing courses should emphasize reading literary works. Students cannot fully understand the possibilities of a genre or realize their own potential without a grounding in literary tradition and broad exposure to various

literary models. In particular, creative writing courses emphasize the study of living writers in the context of literary tradition. The reading lists for undergraduate courses should be diverse on every possible axis—gender, class, ethnicity, culture, style, sensibility—in order to reflect the diverse experiences of students and to broaden their individual perspectives. Reading lists should also incorporate a range of both contemporary and classic readings so that students gain familiarity with literary tradition and understand how it influences contemporary practice.

For major and minor courses of study in creative writing, the curriculum should have tiers for introductory, intermediate, and advanced classes and workshops. (For additional recommendations, please refer to “AWP Hallmarks of an Effective BFA Program or Major in Creative Writing” and “AWP Hallmarks of an Effective Minor in the Undergraduate Study of Creative Writing.”) At the introductory level, multi-genre courses are recommended. Beginning students should be encouraged to explore more than one genre so that they may be exposed to various forms of literary engagement and communication. As students advance to intermediate courses, they should have the opportunity to acquire in-depth knowledge of a specific genre, and workshops should be complemented by at least one craft-of-a-genre course that explores the principles of craft. An undergraduate creative writing major should culminate in a portfolio of substantial length, with faculty advisors mentoring students as they learn the skills of composing and revising in a given genre.

Multi-Genre Introductory Courses. An introductory course exposes students to a variety of models and basic craft concepts useful in any genre. Given students’ lack of experience, literary discussions often focus on illustrating a specific craft element so that students can acquire a repertoire of techniques. Writing exercises implicitly teach students how to generate creative work, and they provide opportunities to imitate the style, subject, or form of a literary model. These exercises can also encourage students to seek sources outside themselves and to write in ways that are informed by their understanding of other disciplines. Often, writing exercises provide strict parameters that disrupt or re-route students’ habitual practices in order to cultivate the particular kind of attentiveness that characterizes art. Ideally, introductory multi-genre courses are structured so that time is equally divided among the study of literary works,

writing exercises in rhetoric and form, and the writing of poems, stories, or plays. The early weeks of the course should be devoted to readings and exercises before students compose a complete manuscript for a workshop. While not all students in introductory or elective courses in creative writing will pursue writing as a profession, all stand to gain from the practice in writing and in exercising the analytical skills required by close reading of student manuscripts and published works.

Intermediate and Advanced Workshops. At this level, workshops should focus on a single genre, but students should be encouraged to take a workshop in at least two genres. Tiered courses increasingly emphasize students' own writing, but this is supplemented by the continued study of literary works, which enables instructors to deepen students' understanding of craft concepts and also to draw on course readings as examples during workshop discussion of student manuscripts. Tiered courses are concerned not only with dissecting formal elements of craft, but also with considering how these elements are integrated to achieve the total effect of the work. The study of literary works increasingly emphasizes close reading and a broader vocabulary for critical response, and often students write essays that analyze craft in a specific literary work. Writing exercises, including revision exercises, again help students to generate work and to develop their own composition process. As students advance in a tiered sequence of creative writing courses, they should demonstrate an increasing commitment to revision that encompasses a holistic approach to form and theme as well as line-by-line editing.

In responding to literary works and to student manuscripts, instructors should teach conventions of a genre and also emphasize how writers exploit grammar and syntax to achieve particular aesthetic effects. Workshop feedback should be directed by the instructor so that students consider the effectiveness of the choices a peer makes and consider how their critical responses relate to principles of craft. This feedback should build on a descriptive response to the work, which respects the writer's intentions in the work and also provides a necessary basis for proceeding with critical analysis, since technique is judged

on how well it serves the (identified) aims of the work. The emphasis should be descriptive and developmental, stressing the potential of the work that might be realized in revision. Student peers should be required to submit written feedback on manuscripts.

Craft-of-a-Genre Courses. Also known as “process” or “literary forms” courses, craft-of-a-genre courses emphasize the conceptual framework in a given genre, including discussion of rhetorical strategies, formal elements, and literary theories that illuminate the practice of writing. Such courses, though they may incorporate creative exercises, emphasize the critical analysis of literary works, especially through close reading, and develop students’ ability to relate the actual practice of a writer to general craft principles.

Media Technology for Writers: An Introduction. To prepare themselves for the full spectrum of writing in the world, students of writing must apprise themselves of their options—specifically their options as writers in the virtual world and its conjunction with other media. Increasingly writers are cultivating audiences with websites, blogs, and other mixed-media ventures. The integration of sound and image in texts, the interaction of writer and reader via web-space (e.g., the phenomenon of writers on Myspace.com), and the increasing viability of desktop publishing all compel writers today to understand, if not master, new technology. Undergraduate writing programs, therefore, are obliged to introduce students to this world in at least one course that addresses the expansion of the textual world to include visual rhetoric and the demands of different formats in which writing appears.

Senior Creative Portfolio. Students complete a creative thesis or portfolio to fulfill the requirements for an undergraduate creative writing major, and a thesis or portfolio is also strongly recommended for a minor or concentration in creative writing. This work may be largely a revision of work first undertaken in workshops, and students should receive substantial mentoring from faculty advisors, whether that is structured as one-on-one advising or in

the form of a seminar course in which students submit drafts of the thesis. The length of a thesis or portfolio may range from twenty to eighty pages, depending on the genre, and students should be encouraged to be selective about what they choose for inclusion. The manuscript must be submitted in a clean, professional form, free of errors.

Other Recommendations. The undergraduate study of creative writing ideally should be supplemented by at least one course in the study of another art form (or an interdisciplinary arts course), enriching the context in which students pursue their own creative work. Often, the best writers are those who have a command of two or more languages, because knowledge of a foreign language sensitizes one to the strengths and weaknesses of one's own mother tongue. Study in a foreign language should be strongly recommended to students if it is not a requirement of undergraduate study. Internships, work on a literary journal, and service learning courses are also recommended because they foster student writers' awareness of the world and provide hands-on experience of professional practice in the field.

—The AWP Board of Directors

AWP Hallmarks of an Effective BFA Program or BA Major in Creative Writing

For their undergraduate students, many colleges and universities offer majors in creative writing. These major courses of study lead to the BFA degree at most institutions, or to the BA degree at other institutions. The Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) recognizes that colleges and universities have different strengths and missions, and AWP encourages innovation and variety in the pedagogy of creative writing. Among its member programs, however, AWP has recognized common elements of an effective BFA program in creative writing.

Many of the hallmarks of an effective major resemble those of a strong graduate program, but the undergraduate hallmarks differ from the graduate hallmarks especially in regard to curriculum. For undergraduate writers, a good four-year curriculum requires more general studies of literature, the arts and sciences, and the fine arts; it also provides extracurricular experiences in writing, publishing, and literature. Whereas a Master of Fine Arts program in creative writing places central emphasis on students' practice of their craft, an undergraduate program complements the study of writing with a rigorous study of literary works.

One must become an expert reader before one can hope to become an expert writer. To cultivate that expertise, a strong undergraduate program emphasizes a wide range of study in literature and other disciplines to provide students with the foundation they need to become resourceful—as readers, as intellectuals, and as writers. The goal of an undergraduate program is to teach students how to read closely as writers and to engage students in the practice of literary writing. An undergraduate course of study in creative writing gives students an overview of the precedents established by writers of many eras, continents, ethnicities, and sensibilities; it gives students the ability to analyze, appreciate, and integrate the

components that comprise works of literature. By creating their own works, student writers may apply what they have learned about the elements of literature.

A successful undergraduate program accomplishes all this by various means: through a rigorous and diverse curriculum, through instruction from publishing writers who are gifted teachers, through excellent support for students, through the administration's effective management, and through the institution's extracurricular activities, general assets, and infrastructure. To help institutions structure and focus their internal reviews and independent assessments of their programs, the AWP Board of Directors has established these hallmarks.

Programs that establish the major in creative writing should also offer elective courses in creative writing for non-majors. In these elective courses students from all disciplines may acquire a deeper understanding of the components of rhetoric and the elements of literature while they gain fluency in persuasive communication. For more recommendations on the minor, please see our other document, "AWP Hallmarks of an Effective Minor in the Undergraduate Study of Creative Writing."

Rigorous and Diverse Curriculum

An introductory multi-genre creative writing course, while it is typically an essential prerequisite, would not count toward the major. Only upper-division courses should count toward the major. Students may receive credit toward a major for work on a literary journal, which may be offered as a course, and for service courses or internships offered by the creative writing program. Such courses provide fertile ground for innovation in achieving the pedagogical goals of a program.

Students who earn a BA or BFA in creative writing should fulfill the following requirements within the creative writing program:

- a minimum of three tiered workshops in their chosen genre: introductory workshops, intermediate workshops, and advanced workshops
- at least one craft-of-a-genre course in their chosen genre (a "Seminar in Poetic Forms and Poetics" is a typical course required of student poets)

while a “Seminar in Narrative Strategies” fulfills the same requirement for the student fiction and nonfiction writers)

- at least one tiered workshop in a supplementary genre (work in more than one genre is required)
- completion of a creative thesis or portfolio in the senior year

Students who major in creative writing should also meet these co-curricular requirements:

- at least three upper-division literature courses offered by the English Department (in addition to survey of literature courses offered in the first two years of their undergraduate experience) or comparable courses offered by other departments such as comparative literature
- a distribution of English or literature courses that ideally demonstrate a study of the literature and authors of three different centuries or literary periods (Medieval; Renaissance; 18th Century, Romantic and Victorian; American Renaissance/Transcendentalism; Harlem Renaissance; Modern Literature: 1900 to 1945; and Contemporary Literature: 1945 to the Present—or other epochs as defined by the Department of English)
- at least two sequenced courses in a foreign language
- at least one and preferably two courses in the analysis or practice of an art form other than writing

AWP has published “AWP Recommendations on the Teaching of Creative Writing to Undergraduates.” Please see that document for an explanation of the philosophy, goals, and methods that inform an effective undergraduate creative writing curriculum, the hallmarks of which are enumerated below:

1. Philosophy. The program has an overarching set of values, beliefs, and pedagogy that reflect: (a) the best practices of creative writing programs; (b) an awareness of the needs of its students; and (c) an understanding of the currents of contemporary literature and culture. The program's philosophy is appropriate to its institution's mission and the goals of its strategic plan. The curriculum requires studies that employ this philosophy effectively.

2. Extensive Study of Literature. Students take courses that provide a broad background in literature, the humanities, the sciences, and the fine arts; and they enjoy other extracurricular experiences essential to an undergraduate education. The institution offers courses in literary studies that are historically, intellectually, geographically, and culturally wide-ranging and varied. Students should take courses that explore a wide variety of literature, both past and present, as well as courses that emphasize close reading of literary works. Students should be proficient in a second modern or classical language.

3. A Tiered Course of Study. A tiered curriculum provides introductory, intermediate, and advanced courses. Undergraduate workshops are generally more structured than graduate workshops, since it is not assumed that students know the elements of prosody or storytelling. Especially at the introductory level, undergraduate workshops require students to work in various forms, styles, modes, and genres. Advanced courses may include an independent study, a senior thesis, or capstone course in creative writing. A system of prerequisites, which tracks courses taken and grades achieved, ensures that students take courses in an appropriate order.

4. Practice in More Than One Literary Genre. Because too much specialization too soon is generally not in a young writer's best interest, students in undergraduate writing programs typically are required to take writing workshops and seminars in more than one genre. The best undergraduate creative writing program offers advanced courses in at least three or more separate genres (fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, drama, screenwriting), and students also have the opportunity to take courses in the translation of literature.

5. A Capstone Project. A senior thesis, project, or capstone course completes the program, requiring both a longer creative manuscript and a critical paper. The length of the thesis should be appropriate to the genre: roughly 25 to 50 pages for fiction, nonfiction, and drama, and 20 to 30 pages for poetry. In the junior or senior year, a student completes an appropriate internship.

6. Consistent Course Offerings. Courses are listed in the school's catalogue and offered regularly so that students may complete the program in a timely manner consistent with other programs at the school.

7. Diversity in Literary Models. Creative writing courses, including workshops, require craft texts and literary works (anthologies, books by individual authors, literary periodicals) that offer appropriate models for student writing. Reading lists should incorporate texts by contemporary writers whose interests and backgrounds reflect a multicultural American society and an international community of writers.

8. An Emphasis on Revision. Creative writing courses are by definition writing-intensive, and they should emphasize revision of successive drafts in response to feedback from peers and extensive written comments by instructors.

9. Grading, Testing, and Evaluation. Criteria for grading in undergraduate courses should be based on the level of each student's mastery of rhetoric, literary terminology, literary forms, critical approaches, and the writer's craft. Grades for the course should also weigh students' verbal and written feedback on each other's work.

10. An Introduction to Vocational Opportunities. Programs provide a practicum, such as an internship, and advising on job opportunities and graduate schools. The program may also provide credit for editorial and production work on a student magazine.

11. Study of New Media Technology. The institution provides instruction in new technology that is critically important for writers who would participate in the full spectrum of the writing world; this includes an understanding of writing on the web, website construction, integration of other media with writing, and desktop publishing.

Accomplished Faculty

An effective undergraduate creative writing faculty has these characteristics:

- 1. Accomplished Writers Who Teach Well.** The program has a faculty of published writers who have distinguished themselves as teachers and as artists. As teachers, they command the respect of their peers, and they generally receive good to excellent student evaluations. Each faculty member has published significant work in one or more of the following genres: fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, playwriting, writing for children and young adults, translation, or screenwriting. Each faculty member has published at least one book by a respected press, and that book is in the genre which the faculty member teaches. Each faculty member holds an MFA degree in creative writing or a level of literary book publication that serves as an equivalent for the degree.
- 2. Stability in Core Faculty.** Permanent faculty members—full-time, tenure-track, tenured, and adjunct—teach a majority of the creative writing courses.
- 3. Diverse Faculty.** A program’s faculty provides depth and expertise in at least three genres and in various aesthetics and philosophies of the craft of writing. A diverse faculty provides a range of aesthetic points of view related to literary, ethnic, cultural, or other influences. For each genre offered in the program’s curriculum (poetry, fiction, nonfiction, etc.), the core faculty includes one or more individual members, who each have publications primarily in that genre.
- 4. Community Service.** Faculty members are publishing writers and committed teachers who routinely make themselves available to students outside of class. Faculty members are professionally active; they publish creative work and participate in national, regional, and local organizations and activities related to teaching, literature, and the arts.
- 5. Accomplished Visiting Writers.** Distinguished visiting full-time or adjunct faculty include writers whose credentials equal or surpass the members of the program’s core faculty. Lectures, readings, and workshops by visiting writers (especially those from outside an institution’s state or region) extend the regular faculty’s ability to present a variety of approaches to the art and craft of writing. Visiting writers teach primarily, if not exclusively, courses in creative writing; they are not used inappropriately to supplement other departmental

staffing needs. Their published work merits national, if not international, attention.

6. Well-Prepared Teaching Assistants. In universities, a graduate creative writing student's training may include teaching introductory or intermediate undergraduate courses in creative writing. Most undergraduate creative writing classes are taught by the core faculty, however; and the program's faculty members prepare and closely supervise the graduate teaching associates.

7. Accomplished Scholars and Critics. Since undergraduates with a major in creative writing must also study a wide range of literature, the program, or the department in which the program operates, also has an excellent full-time faculty of scholars who teach a wide range of literature courses that cover many authors, eras, and cultures.

Excellent Students & Support for Students

The effective undergraduate program has these features in its support for students:

1. Small Classes. Introductory creative writing courses have class size restrictions equal to or less than an institution's restriction for composition classes (but no greater than 20 students). Intermediate and advanced courses have class size restrictions of 12–18 students, with a maximum of 15 students in advanced workshop classes (optimum workshop class size: 12 students).

2. Excellence in Undergraduate Instruction. Undergraduate students participate in all facets of the program, both curricular and extracurricular, and are not marginalized by graduate students or faculty. Students serve on committees relevant to the undergraduate creative writing program.

3. Regular Evaluation of Faculty and Curriculum. The program is responsive to the needs of its undergraduate students, and students evaluate their instructors each semester. The program also periodically conducts exit surveys of students after they have completed the program.

4. Excellent Advising. Each student in the major is assigned an advisor who is a core faculty member of the creative writing program. The advisor will require a meeting with the student at least once each semester. The program provides a student handbook that includes a clear explanation of course requirements and general advice on how to excel in the program.

5. A Student Literary Magazine. Students edit their own literary magazine (50% or more is devoted to literary works) with a faculty advisor who guides but does not censor their editorial process. The majority of published works are by undergraduate students. The editorial staff is not represented excessively among the magazine's contributors.

6. Student Readings. Students have regular opportunities to participate in public readings of their works, including solo readings for students completing a senior thesis or project.

7. Service Learning Opportunities. Students participate in programs that promote and celebrate literacy, literature, writing, and reading in their communities.

8. Vocational Opportunities. Internship opportunities are available for creative writing students in a variety of writing, editing, and publishing professions. A formal affiliation with a professional literary journal or press is especially desirable.

9. Selective Admissions. Creative writing majors are as academically qualified and as competitive as the majors in other disciplines.

10. Strong Recruitment of the Best Students. Financial aid for creative writing students is comparable to the support for students in other departments. Both the institution and the program work in concert to enroll qualified students of different backgrounds, social classes, and races.

11. A High Graduation Rate. A high percentage of matriculated students graduate from the program, and a small number of students drop out or transfer to other programs.

12. Literary Accomplishments of Alumni. A significant number of students continue their studies in graduate programs and go on to publish their work.

13. Support for Student Travel to Literary Conferences. The program encourages juniors and seniors to travel to readings, workshops, festivals, conferences, and literary events. As much as possible, the program provides support for student travel and participation in such events; this support is especially important for students of colleges and universities in remote areas.

14. Student Literary Competitions. Students participate in literary competitions on campus and in national competitions, including the national Intro Awards competition and the AWP Program Directors' Prizes for Undergraduate Literary Magazines.

Administrative Support

The effective major has these features in its administration:

1. Strong Leadership. The BFA Program Director provides strong leadership in planning, in staffing, in devising curriculum, in training new faculty members, in recruiting the best students, and in advocating program needs to the host institution's administration. The Program Director is a tenured member of the creative writing faculty.

2. Release Time for Program Director. In a program of appropriate size, a Program Director will be awarded at least one course reduction annually to facilitate work in advising students, recruiting faculty, coordinating the reading series, and managing other responsibilities of the program.

3. Sufficient Autonomy. The institution's administration gives the program sufficient autonomy with regard to curriculum, admissions, budget, support, physical facilities, and personnel to ensure quality, stability, flexibility, and the capability to take advantage of opportunities quickly.

4. Strong Financial Support. The institution provides financial resources to facilitate excellence in the recruiting and retaining of faculty, in providing services to students, in providing administrative support for the Program Director, and in maintaining the facilities used by the program.

5. **Good Departmental Relations.** If the program is part of a department of literature or another larger entity, the program has a mutually supportive relationship with that department.
6. **Community Service.** The Program Director and the institution's administrators seek, whenever possible, to establish a strong, positive presence in the local community. Typically, events in the program's reading series are open to the public, and the Program Director actively publicizes the events.
7. **Diligent Quality Control.** The Program Director ensures that students have the opportunity to evaluate their faculty, and the Program Director facilitates regular internal and external evaluations of the program's effectiveness.
8. **Participation in Professional Networks.** A good program provides membership in AWP and other appropriate local, regional, and national associations to ensure faculty members and students have access to timely information about contemporary letters and the teaching of creative writing.

Other Complementary Assets and Infrastructure

An effective major also has the assets and infrastructure that comprise any good college or university:

1. **Good Infrastructure.** Classrooms, offices, and other spaces are adequate to conduct workshops, conferences, readings, and informal student and faculty gatherings. Spaces assigned to the program promote an atmosphere conducive to concentration, listening, social exchanges, and focused work.
2. **A Computer Lab.** The lab is open at least 12 hours a day for students to work on manuscripts, conduct research on the Internet, and practice using new media technologies.
3. **An Excellent Library.** Faculty and students have access to a library with extensive holdings in canonical and contemporary literature.
4. **A Unique Educational Feature.** The program or its institution provides a special focus, initiative, resource, archive, project, or other opportunity for

students that distinguishes the program from other comparable programs. Such a feature might be an emphasis on translation, a literary conference, a small press, special internships, or the archives of a literary author.

5. **A Bookstore.** The program has a bookstore that supports the curriculum, special events with visiting writers, and faculty and student authors.

6. **An Affiliated Literary Publication.** The program is affiliated with a journal, press, or another literary publishing venue that can provide editorial and publishing experience.

—The AWP Board of Directors

AWP Hallmarks of an Effective Minor in the Undergraduate Study of Creative Writing

For their undergraduate students, many colleges and universities offer a minor in creative writing or a BA in English with an emphasis or a concentration in creative writing. The Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) recognizes that colleges and universities have different strengths and missions, and AWP encourages innovation and variety in the pedagogy of creative writing. Among its member programs, however, AWP has recognized common elements of an effective minor, concentration, or emphasis in creative writing. We will use the term “minor” in referring to this course of study.

These hallmarks represent the components of an excellent undergraduate minor in creative writing. For undergraduate writers, a good four-year curriculum requires more general studies of literature, the humanities, the sciences, and the fine arts; it also provides extracurricular experiences in writing, publishing, and literature.

One must become an expert reader before one can hope to become an expert writer. To cultivate that expertise, a strong undergraduate program emphasizes a wide range of study in literature and other disciplines to provide students with the foundation they need to become resourceful—as readers, as intellectuals, and as writers. The goal of an undergraduate program is to teach students how to read closely as writers and to engage students in the practice of literary writing. An undergraduate course of study in creative writing gives students an overview of the precedents established by writers of many eras, continents, ethnicities, and sensibilities; it gives students the ability to analyze, appreciate, and create the components that comprise works of literature. By creating their own works, student writers may apply what they have learned about the elements of literature.

Because the minor course of study may serve students who do not plan to become professional writers, the curriculum and its pedagogy is addressed to achieving many goals appropriate to any undergraduate education in the humanities,

arts, and sciences. For a detailed enumeration of the goals and methods of teaching creative writing to undergraduates, please refer to “AWP Recommendations on Teaching Creative Writing to Undergraduates.”

To help institutions structure and focus their internal reviews and independent assessments of their undergraduate creative writing programs, the AWP Board of Directors has established the following hallmarks for the effective undergraduate minor. AWP has also published, “AWP Hallmarks of an Effective BFA Program or Major in Creative Writing.”

Rigorous and Diverse Curriculum

An introductory multi-genre creative writing course begins the minor course of study, and it is followed by a tiered curriculum. Students may receive credit toward a minor or concentration for work on a literary journal, which may be offered as a course, and for service courses or internships offered by the creative writing program. Such courses provide fertile ground for innovation in achieving the pedagogical goals of a program.

Students who earn a minor or a concentration in creative writing should complete between 12 to 15 credits in creative writing courses:

- a minimum of two tiered workshops in their chosen genre: introductory workshops, intermediate workshops, or advanced workshops
- at least one craft-of-a-genre course in their chosen genre (a “Seminar in Poetic Forms and Poetics” is a typical course required of student poets while a “Seminar in Narrative Strategies” fulfills the same requirement for the student fiction and nonfiction writers)
- a minimum of one workshop in a supplementary genre
- completion of a capstone course, which may include a creative portfolio, in the senior year

Students who complete a minor in creative writing should also meet these co-curricular requirements:

- at least two upper-division literature courses offered by the English Department (in addition to survey of literature courses offered in the first two years of their undergraduate experience)
- at least two sequenced courses in a foreign language

General recommendations for the minor or concentration are as follows:

1. Philosophy. The program has an overarching set of values, beliefs, and pedagogy that reflect: (a) the best practices of creative writing programs; (b) an awareness of the needs of its students; and (c) an understanding of the currents of contemporary literature and culture. The program's philosophy is appropriate to its institution's mission and the goals of its strategic plan. The curriculum requires studies that employ this philosophy effectively.

2. Extensive Study of Literature. Students take courses that provide a broad background in literature, the humanities, the sciences, and the fine arts; and they enjoy other extracurricular experiences essential to an undergraduate education. The institution offers courses in literary studies that are historically, intellectually, geographically, and culturally wide-ranging and varied. Students should take courses that explore a wide variety of literature, both past and present, as well as courses that emphasize close reading of literary works. Students should be proficient in a second modern or classical language.

3. A Tiered Course of Study. A tiered curriculum provides introductory, intermediate, and advanced courses. Undergraduate workshops are generally more structured than graduate workshops, since it is not assumed that students know the elements of prosody or storytelling. Especially at the introductory level, undergraduate workshops require students to work in various forms, styles, modes, and genres. Advanced courses may include an independent study, a senior thesis, or capstone course in creative writing. A system of prerequisites, which tracks courses taken and grades achieved, ensures that students take courses in an appropriate order.

4. Practice in More Than One Literary Genre. Because too much specialization too soon is generally not in a young writer's best interest, students in undergraduate writing programs typically are required to take writing workshops and seminars in more than one genre. The best undergraduate creative writing program offers advanced courses in at least three or more separate genres (fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, drama, screenwriting), and students also have the opportunity to take courses in the translation of literature.

5. A Capstone Project. A senior thesis, project, or capstone course completes the program, requiring both a longer creative manuscript and a critical paper. The length of the thesis should be appropriate to the genre: roughly 25 to 50 pages for fiction, nonfiction, and drama, and 20 to 30 pages for poetry. In the junior or senior year, a student completes an appropriate internship.

6. Consistent Course Offerings. Courses are listed in the school's catalogue and offered regularly so that students may complete the program in a timely manner consistent with other programs at the school.

7. Diversity in Literary Models. Creative writing courses, including workshops, require craft texts and literary works (anthologies, books by individual authors, literary periodicals) that offer appropriate models for student writing. Reading lists should incorporate texts by contemporary writers whose interests and backgrounds reflect a multicultural American society and an international community of writers.

8. An Emphasis on Revision. Creative writing courses are by definition writing-intensive, and they should emphasize revision of successive drafts in response to feedback from peers and extensive written comments by instructors.

9. Grading, Testing, and Evaluation. Criteria for grading in undergraduate courses should be based on the levels of each student's mastery of rhetoric, literary terminology, literary forms, critical approaches, and the writer's craft. Grades for the course should also weigh students' verbal and written feedback on each other's work.

10. An Introduction to Vocational Opportunities. Programs provide a practicum, such as an internship, and advising on job opportunities and graduate schools. The program may also provide credit for editorial and production work on a student magazine.

11. Study of New Media Technology. The institution provides instruction in new technology that is critically important for writers who would participate in the full spectrum of the writing world; this includes an understanding of writing on the web, website construction, integration of other media with writing, and desktop publishing.

Accomplished Faculty

1. Accomplished Writers Who Teach Well. The program has a faculty of published writers who have distinguished themselves as teachers and as artists. As teachers, they command the respect of their peers, and they generally receive good to excellent student evaluations. Each faculty member has published significant work in one or more of the following genres: fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, playwriting, writing for children and young adults, translation, or screenwriting. Each faculty member has published at least one book by a respected press, and that book is in the genre which the faculty member teaches. Each faculty member holds an MFA degree in creative writing or a level of literary book publication that serves as an equivalent for the degree.

2. Stability in Core Faculty. Permanent faculty members—full-time, tenure-track, tenured, and adjunct—teach a majority of the creative writing courses.

3. Diverse Faculty. A program's faculty provides depth and expertise in at least three genres and in various aesthetics and philosophies of the craft of writing. A diverse faculty provides a range of aesthetic points of view related to literary, ethnic, cultural, or other influences. For each genre offered in the program's curriculum (poetry, fiction, nonfiction, etc.), the core faculty includes one or

more individual members per genre, who each have publications primarily in that genre.

4. Community Service. Faculty members are publishing writers and committed teachers who routinely make themselves available to students outside of class. Faculty members are professionally active, not only publishing creative work, but also participating in national, regional, and local organizations and activities related to teaching, literature, and the arts.

5. Accomplished Visiting Writers. Distinguished visiting full-time or adjunct faculty include writers whose credentials equal or surpass the members of the program's core faculty. Lectures, readings, and workshops by visiting writers (especially those from outside an institution's state or region) extend the regular faculty's ability to present a variety of approaches to the art and craft of writing. Visiting writers teach primarily, if not exclusively, courses in creative writing; they are not used inappropriately to supplement other departmental staffing needs. Their published work merits national, if not international, attention.

6. Well-Prepared Teaching Assistants. In universities, a graduate creative writing student's training may include teaching introductory or intermediate undergraduate courses in creative writing. Most undergraduate creative writing classes are taught by the core faculty, however; and the program's faculty members prepare and closely supervise the graduate teaching associates.

7. Accomplished Scholars and Critics. Since undergraduates with a minor, emphasis, or concentration in creative writing must also study a wide range of literature, the program, or the department in which the program operates, also has an excellent full-time faculty of scholars who teach a wide range of literature courses that cover many authors, eras, and cultures.

Excellent Support for Students

1. Small Classes. Introductory creative writing courses have class size restrictions equal to or less than an institution's restriction for composition classes (but no greater than 20 students). Intermediate and advanced courses

have class size restrictions of 12–18 students, with a maximum of 15 students in advanced workshop classes (optimum workshop class size: 12 students).

2. Excellence in Undergraduate Instruction. Students in the minor are not displaced or denied access to appropriate classes by majors. Undergraduate students participate in all facets of the program, both curricular and extracurricular, and are not marginalized by graduate students or faculty. Students serve on committees relevant to the undergraduate creative writing program.

3. Regular Evaluation of Faculty and Curriculum. The program is responsive to the needs of its undergraduate students, and students evaluate their instructors each semester. The program also periodically conducts exit surveys of students after they have completed the program.

4. Excellent Advising. Each student in the minor is assigned an advisor who is a core faculty member of the creative writing program. The advisor will require a meeting with the student at least once each semester. The program provides a student handbook that includes a clear explanation of course requirements and general advice on how to excel in the program.

5. A Student Literary Magazine. Students edit their own literary magazine (50% or more is devoted to literary works) with a faculty advisor who guides but does not censor their editorial process. The majority of published works are by undergraduate students. The editorial staff is not represented excessively among the magazine's contributors.

6. Student Readings. Students have regular opportunities to participate in public readings of their works, including solo readings for students completing a senior thesis or project.

7. Service Learning Opportunities. Students participate in programs that promote and celebrate literacy, literature, writing, and reading in their communities.

8. Vocational Opportunities. Internship opportunities are available for creative writing students in a variety of writing, editing, and publishing professions. A formal affiliation with a professional literary journal or press is especially desirable.

9. Selective Admissions. Creative writing minors are as academically qualified and as competitive as the minors in other disciplines.

10. Strong Recruitment of the Best Students. Financial aid for creative writing students is comparable to the support for students in other departments. Both the institution and the program work in concert to enroll qualified students of different backgrounds, social classes, and races.

11. A High Graduation Rate. A high percentage of matriculated students graduate from the program, and small number of students drop out or transfer to other programs.

12. Literary Accomplishments of Alumni. A significant number of students continue their studies in graduate programs and go on to publish their work.

13. Support for Student Travel to Literary Conferences. The program encourages juniors and seniors to travel to readings, workshops, festivals, conferences, and literary events. As much as possible, the program provides support for student travel and participation in such events; this support is especially important for students of colleges and universities in remote areas.

14. Student Literary Competitions. Students participate in literary competitions on campus and in national competitions, including the national Intro Awards competition and the AWP Program Directors' Prizes for Undergraduate Literary Magazines.

Administrative Support

The effective minor has these features in its administration:

1. Strong Leadership. The creative writing Program Director provides strong leadership in planning, in staffing, in devising curriculum, in training new faculty members, in recruiting the best students, and in advocating program needs to the host institution's administration. The Program Director is a tenured member of the creative writing faculty.

2. **Release Time for Program Director.** In a program of appropriate size, a Program Director will be awarded at least one course reduction annually to facilitate work in advising students, recruiting faculty, coordinating the reading series, and managing other responsibilities of the program.
3. **Sufficient Autonomy.** The institution's administration gives the program sufficient autonomy with regard to curriculum, admissions, budget, support, physical facilities, and personnel to ensure quality, stability, flexibility, and the capability to take advantage of opportunities quickly.
4. **Strong Financial Support.** The institution provides financial resources to facilitate excellence in the recruiting and retaining of faculty, in providing services to students, in providing administrative support for the Program Director, and in maintaining the facilities used by the program.
5. **Good Departmental Relations.** If the program is part of a department of literature or another larger entity, the program has a mutually supportive relationship with that department.
6. **Community Service.** The Program Director and the institution's administrators seek, whenever possible, to establish a strong, positive presence in the local community. Typically, events in the program's reading series are open to the public, and the Program Director actively publicizes the events.
7. **Diligent Quality Control.** The Program Director ensures that students have the opportunity to evaluate their faculty, and the Program Director facilitates regular internal and external evaluations of the program's effectiveness.
8. **Participation in Professional Networks.** A good program provides membership in AWP and other appropriate local, regional, and national associations to ensure that faculty members and students have access to timely information about contemporary letters and the teaching of creative writing.

Other Complementary Assets and Infrastructure

An effective minor also has the assets and infrastructure that comprise any good college or university:

1. **Good Infrastructure.** Classrooms, offices, and other spaces are adequate to conduct workshops, conferences, readings, and informal student and faculty gatherings. Spaces assigned to the program promote an atmosphere conducive to concentration, listening, social exchanges, and focused work.
2. **A Computer Lab.** The lab is open at least 12 hours a day for students to work on manuscripts, conduct research on the Internet, and practice using new media technologies.
3. **An Excellent Library.** Faculty and students have access to a library with extensive holdings in canonical and contemporary literature.
4. **A Unique Educational Feature.** The program or its institution provides a special focus, initiative, resource, archive, project, or other opportunity for students that distinguishes the program from other comparable programs. Such a feature might be an emphasis on translation, a literary conference, a small press, special internships, or the archives of a literary author.
5. **A Bookstore.** The program has a bookstore that supports the curriculum, special events with visiting writers, and faculty and student authors.
6. **An Affiliated Literary Publication.** The program is affiliated with a journal, press, or another literary publishing venue that can provide editorial and publishing experience.

—The AWP Board of Directors

The AWP Hallmarks of An Effective Undergraduate Program in Creative Writing at a Two-year College

Many community colleges now offer their students concentrations in creative writing, including certificate programs, Associate of Arts Degrees with an emphasis in Creative Writing, and Associate Degrees in Fine Arts. The Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) recognizes that two-year colleges have different strengths and missions, and AWP encourages variety in pedagogy. Among its member programs, however, AWP recognizes common elements of successful community college creative writing programs and classes.

These hallmarks represent a superior two-year program offering a concentration or a degree in creative writing. Many of the hallmarks resemble those of a strong four-year program, but with significant differences. Most two-year colleges have an open-admissions policy and serve a population that is more diverse—economically, socially, racially—and that includes more non-traditional students than average four-year programs. In addition, community colleges attract students planning to transfer to four-year colleges, students pursuing a terminal Associates Degree, students wishing to take a discrete creative writing course, students taking creative writing for personal enrichment, and MFA applicants editing their portfolios. This diversity requires that individual community colleges have the flexibility to shift their goals as needed for their population.

Because some students may wish to transfer after earning their degrees, the articulation of programs with those of four-year institutions requires a core of general studies and a concentrated focus on literature courses. A wide range of study in literature is particularly crucial in a two-year program, which lays the foundation for further study at the undergraduate and graduate level by teaching reading skills that will enable students to benefit from literary models. In addition, two-year colleges serve many students who require remediation before they are ready for the rigors of literature and creative writing courses. An exemplary two-year program, therefore,

should offer extracurricular workshops, clubs, or activities open to developmental students and should emphasize teaching the conventions of written English. Finally, two-year institutions, whether they are based in cities or rural areas, have the potential to become powerful cultural centers. A successful two-year program achieves all of this through various means: through instruction from accomplished writers who are gifted teachers; through a rigorous and diverse curriculum; and through the institution's extracurricular activities, general assets, and infrastructure.

To help community colleges structure and focus their self-evaluations, long-range plans, or independent assessments of their programs, the AWP Board of Directors has established the following hallmarks.

Rigorous and Diverse Curriculum

1. Philosophy. The program has an overarching set of values, beliefs, and pedagogy that reflect: (a) the best practices of creative writing programs; (b) an awareness of the needs of its students; and (c) an understanding of the currents of contemporary literature and culture. The program's philosophy is appropriate to its institution's mission and the goals of its strategic plan. The curriculum requires studies that employ this philosophy effectively.

2. Broad Academic Preparation. Students take courses that provide a broad background in literature, the arts and sciences, and the fine arts. Literature courses expose students to literary classics from various cultures. Writing classes provide instruction in conventional usage and grammar.

3. A Tiered Course of Study. A system of prerequisites assures that degree-seeking students take courses in an appropriate order. Introductory creative writing courses clarify critical vocabulary and allow students to understand the elements of prosody or story-telling and develop a common language for discussing texts. These initial courses are also more likely to require students to work in a variety of forms, styles, modes, and genres. Intermediate courses are more likely to concentrate on a specific genre and to take the form of a writing workshop.

4. Practice in More Than One Genre. Because too much specialization too soon is generally not in a beginning writer's best interest, students in two-year writing programs typically are required to take courses in more than one genre. The best community college programs offer beginning and intermediate courses in at least two separate genres (fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, drama, or screenwriting).

5. Small Classes. Introductory creative writing courses have class size restrictions of no greater than 20 students. Intermediate courses have class size restrictions of 12 – 15 students. (Optimum workshop class size: 12 students.)

6. Consistent Course Offerings. Courses are listed in the school's catalogue and offered regularly so that students may complete the program in a timely manner consistent with other programs at the school.

7. Literary Models. Creative writing courses, including workshops, require craft texts and literary texts (anthologies, books by individual authors, literary periodicals) that offer appropriate models for student writing. Courses also include anthologies or other primary works and critical texts.

Accomplished Faculty

1. Accomplished Writers Who Teach Well. The core faculty is composed of writers who have MFA or Master's Degrees with a concentration in creative writing and whose work has been published by nationally known, professional journals and presses that are respected by other writers, editors, and publishers.

2. Stability in Core Faculty. Permanent faculty members—full-time, tenure-track, or tenured—teach a majority of the creative writing courses.

3. Diverse Faculty. Faculty members provide depth and expertise in at least two genres as well as a range of aesthetic points of view related to literary, ethnic, cultural, or other influences. The core faculty includes one or more

individual members per genre with expertise and a publication history primarily in that genre.

4. College and Community Service. Faculty members are committed teachers who can teach to a diverse student population, including first-generation college students with little or no exposure to the arts. Faculty members routinely make themselves available to students outside of class and are active in extracurricular activities at the college: bringing local and/or nationally known writers onto campus, serving as advisors to student literary magazines, and taking part in the curricular development of new creative writing courses. They also participate in national, regional, and local organizations and activities related to teaching, literature, and the arts. The criteria for promotion, assignment of classes, and tenure of creative writing faculty focuses on publication of creative work, contributions to the college and greater literary community, and/or demonstrated ability as teachers of creative writing.

5. Accomplished Visiting Writers. Distinguished visiting writers or adjunct faculty include writers whose credentials equal or surpass the members of the program's core faculty. Visiting writers will offer public readings as well as workshops in a wide variety of styles, genres, and backgrounds. Readings by visiting authors, faculty, and students should supplement and enrich the creative writing courses offered at the college/university.

Support for Students

1. Extracurricular Activities. Two-year college students are encouraged to develop their own extracurricular activities, such as clubs, reading series, and magazines. These projects are funded through the college. Many community colleges also form partnerships with area schools and arts organizations to help fund extracurricular activities and to promote existing literary activities in the community to their students.

2. A Student Literary Magazine. Where resources allow, students should have the opportunity to edit their own literary magazine with a faculty advisor who guides but does not censor their editorial process.

3. Remedial Student Involvement. Serving students who lack appropriate academic skills is part of the mission of most community colleges. A creative writing program, therefore, should support students who are interested in creative writing but who are still completing pre-college level English courses by encouraging them to participate in extracurricular activities and to submit work to contests and literary magazines; students enrolled in the creative writing program may serve as their peer mentors.

4. Service Learning and Vocational Opportunities. Students participate in programs that promote and celebrate literature, writing, and reading in their communities. When possible, internship and service learning opportunities are available for creative writing students in a variety of writing, editing, and publishing professions.

5. Strong Recruitment of the Best Students. Financial aid for creative writing students is comparable to the support for students in other departments. Both the institution and the program work in consort to enroll qualified students of different backgrounds, social classes, and races.

6. A High Student Success Rate. A significant number of students continue their studies in four-year and graduate programs or become active in literary communities and organizations. When appropriate, faculty members help students learn about publishing options.

Administrative Support

1. Strong Leadership. The AFA Program Director (tenured or tenure – track) provides strong leadership in planning, budgeting, and staffing, advocating the needs of the program to the administration. The director maintains a productive relationship not only with the department that sponsors the

program but also with the institution and local community in general. The Program Director will be given course release time for this work.

2. Community Connections. The program creates an open atmosphere that invites discussion, collaboration, and diverse cultural and ethnic contributions. Recruitment of students and faculty establishes a strong connection to and reflection of community.

3. Strong Administrative Support. The administration demonstrates a strong commitment to the program, including but not limited to support for financial resources, salaries, clerical and administrative assistance to the director, and release time for faculty to pursue creative projects. Hiring committees and administrators acknowledge the MFA as an appropriate degree for teaching creative writing, rhetoric, and composition courses.

4. Participation in Professional Networks. The program maintains membership in AWP and other appropriate local, regional, and national associations to ensure that its faculty and students have access to timely information relevant to contemporary letters and opportunities in creative writing.

5. Diligent Quality Control. The Program Director makes sure that students have the opportunity to evaluate their faculty, and the Program Director facilitates regular internal and external evaluations of the program's effectiveness.

Other Complementary Assets and Infrastructure

1. Good Infrastructure. Classrooms, offices, and other spaces are adequate to conduct workshops, conferences and readings.

2. Accessible to All Students. The program provides access to students who might otherwise be unable to pursue their creative writing in a supportive academic environment.

3. Community Partnerships. The program fosters relationships with its surrounding community, providing students and faculty opportunities to

participate in festivals and workshops, forming partnerships with local arts organizations, and doing outreach to other area schools, including secondary schools.

4. A Good College Library. Faculty and students have access to a good library with extensive holdings in contemporary literature and an adequate budget for adding new titles to those holdings, including new periodicals.

5. A Computer Lab. Internet access and computer labs contribute to research and training in computer skills, desktop publishing, and Web page design. Computer labs are open at least 12 hours a day.

6. Literary Competitions. Students participate in literary competitions, including the national Intro Awards competitions and the AWP Program Director's Prizes for Undergraduate Literary Magazines.

—The AWP Board of Directors

AWP's Recommendations Regarding Non-Tenure Stream Faculty

These recommendations embody AWP's concerns about the exploitation of non-tenure-stream faculty. The term "non-tenure stream," or NTS, includes faculty otherwise known as adjunct faculty, lecturers, or instructors who teach either full or part-time in higher education. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the proportion of appointments in higher education held by part-time or adjunct faculty has increased from 22% in 1970 to 43% in 1998. At many institutions, especially at community colleges, more than half the appointments are NTS faculty.

While increases in the price of tuition have out-paced inflation, colleges and universities have assigned more of their classes to poorly paid and poorly treated teachers. Although the popular assumption may be that professors are comfortable members of the middle class with genteel jobs that afford time for research, the reality has become that most college and university teachers have challenging work loads, no job security, low pay, no health benefits, and little time off to conduct research or complete creative work. Many NTS faculty members have no offices, no secretarial support, no financial support for travel or research, and limited access to basic office supplies and photocopying. Many NTS faculty members are appointed to classes only a few days before the start of the semester. Many NTS instructors are paid \$1,200 to \$3,000 for conducting a class with a duration of 14 weeks; this level of pay is a small fraction of what tenured faculty earn per class. At these low levels of pay, if NTS faculty do a good and conscientious job with each class, they will be earning less per hour than workers in the fast-food industry. AWP believes that these poor working conditions and poor compensation thwart every institution's efforts to establish excellence in higher education.

Although AWP recognizes that many public institutions have budgets subject to the caprice of state legislatures that often fail to address the needs of a growing population of college-bound students, AWP urges faculty members, department chairs, and university leaders to provide better education for their students while their institutions provide fair compensation and professional working conditions for NTS faculty. Today's universities require investments that are colossal compared to the needs of universities in the 1950s and earlier. Modern universities need more complex equipment and infrastructure, research laboratories, and computer networks, and our colleges and universities have done an excellent job in meeting these needs. Academe must focus the same care and investment on its most precious resource: its teachers.

Toward that end, AWP has provided these recommendations for the employment of NTS faculty:

1. Institutions should create and periodically revise NTS policy statements consistent with their mission statements. Institutions should devise strategic plans that include two objectives towards the goal of establishing excellence in education: (a) reducing the percentage of NTS faculty; and (b) providing adequate pay, good working conditions, health benefits, and professional support for NTS faculty.
2. In political advocacy among state legislators, university leaders should make investment in faculty a priority. University leaders should advocate investment in professional pay and working conditions for NTS faculty; they should also advocate increased investment to increase the percentage of full-time, tenure-track faculty.
3. Colleges and universities should develop comprehensive hiring plans that eliminate excessive NTS faculty appointments. Each department should set limits on its number of NTS faculty members in relation to the number of tenured or tenure-track faculty members. NTS faculty should be used only to meet short-term or special needs (such as unanticipated enrollment surges,

grants, experimental courses, sabbatical replacements), rather than to routinely staff regularly-offered courses. At four-year colleges and graduate schools, NTS appointments should constitute no more than 10% of a department's total faculty; at community colleges, NTS faculty members should comprise no more than 30% of the faculty.

4. Departments should establish an equitable compensation scale for NTS employees. Salary schedules for NTS faculty should be based on a scale comparable to that of a tenure-track assistant professor, and pay should be proportionate to work assignments. Salaries should reflect qualifications, experience, years of service, and workload (including hours of instruction and related work outside the classroom, as well as any required service or research).

5. Departments should develop clear job descriptions and criteria for evaluation of NTS faculty. Departments should provide NTS faculty with these accurate job descriptions, specifying expectations for teaching, service, and/or research. Processes for hiring, evaluating, and assigning NTS faculty should be comparable to those for tenure-earning faculty while taking into account the particular demands of NTS work. The evaluation mechanism should help assess which part-time faculty are eligible for conversion to full-time employment.

6. Part-time NTS faculty should not be required to serve on committees, advise theses, or to coordinate community service projects unless they are given additional compensation above and beyond the typical wage for teaching each class. Full-time NTS faculty should not be expected to serve on committees unless their pay (per class) is commensurate with the level of pay (per class) of tenure-track assistant professors.

7. Departments should provide new NTS faculty with systematic orientation to their jobs and departments. Handbooks on departmental policies regarding

NTS employees should be provided. Departments should provide mentorship and advisors to those NTS members who have fewer than three years of teaching experience at the college level.

8. Benefits for NTS faculty should include health insurance, as well as access to other forms of insurance and retirement planning available to tenure-track faculty.

9. Teaching load for all faculty assigned to writing workshops or writing-intensive courses should not exceed 15 students per class for graduate seminars. At the undergraduate level, writing-intensive courses should not exceed 22 students for introductory classes while advanced writing workshops should not exceed 18 students. AWP maintains that the optimum level of enrollment, for both graduate and undergraduate writing courses, is 12 students.

10. Working conditions for full-time NTS faculty should be comparable to those for tenure-earning faculty and should include assigned office space, phones, clerical support, photocopying privileges, computers (including email accounts and Internet access), parking assignments, and other ancillary privileges.

11. Professional development funding, including incentives, grants, merit raises, and travel money, should be available to NTS faculty.

12. NTS faculty should have a voice in setting departmental or institutional policies that affect them, and they should have academic freedom to express their professional judgments.

13. NTS faculty who wish to bargain collectively should do so.

14. Academic associations, conferences, and publications should provide forums, analyses, and news coverage on the treatment of NTS faculty to help persuade political leaders and academic administrators to improve the compensation and working conditions of NTS faculty.

15. Please see AWP's other documents: "AWP Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing," "Hallmarks of a Successful Graduate Program in Creative Writing," and "Hallmarks of an Effective BFA Program or BA Major in Creative Writing," and "AWP Recommendation on the Teaching of Creative Writing to Undergraduates."

AWP is committed to helping its member institutions develop programs that ensure fair and professional support for all faculty including NTS faculty.

—AWP Board of Directors

AWP Policy on Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Creative writers must have control over the dissemination of their works. For example, it is critical that writers retain first serial, book, and other rights for the purpose of their works first seeing print in literary venues. Therefore, colleges and universities should not mandate as a condition for graduation that creative theses or dissertations be published or broadly disseminated in ways that preclude any student from offering all or any portion of publication rights, including electronic rights, to publishers. This is absolutely critical to the success of creative writers and creative writing programs. If a college or university implements Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs), students should have an option to file a traditional paper thesis. If creative writing students are required to file ETDs, then such ETDs should not be made available on the World Wide Web, but instead available only to the same communities that paper theses and dissertations have been made available to in the past, for instance by password protecting access to the creative thesis or dissertation.

AWP Assessments

Introduction: Hallmarks of a Successful Program

The Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) is an association of 500 colleges and universities in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. AWP has established criteria for the evaluation of programs in order to promote excellence in the teaching of writing. These hallmarks, one set for graduate programs and another set for undergraduate programs, may be found at AWP's Web site, www.awpwriter.org. The hallmarks also appear in *The AWP Program Director's Handbook*, a PDF publication. AWP recommends that a creative writing program use these hallmarks periodically to conduct internal reviews.

AWP also conducts assessments of creative writing programs with the following objectives in mind:

- to provide a program with an unbiased, objective, and comprehensive external review;
- to catalog strengths and weaknesses in teaching and administration;
- to verify whether or not the institution has adequate resources to offer a degree in creative writing;
- to make recommendations on how to improve each major component of the program;
- to help administrators do their jobs more effectively.

AWP is aware that each institution has limited resources. An AWP assessment is designed to enable the university's leadership to decide whether or not a program merits additional investment and to determine what prerequisites must be met for each new allocation of support. AWP assessments are designed to enable a department chair or Program Director to catalog the successes and needs of their program, so that he or she may develop a timeline for what the program must achieve to earn additional support from its dean, provost, or president.

The goal of an AWP assessment is to help a program provide its students with the best possible education in the art of writing. The welfare of the students is at the heart of the assessment team's concerns.

AWP has conducted assessments of the programs at Northern Michigan University, the University of Georgia, Miami University, and the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. The provost of the University of Georgia wrote to the director of the program there that, "This is one of the most comprehensive, thorough and valuable reports I have seen developed by an outside organization. I am impressed by their effort, valuable comments and specific recommendations."

Methods & Procedures

An AWP assessment evaluates every aspect of your program.

The Professional Standards Committee (five members of AWP's board) and two to four additional academic professionals comprise the assessment team. The committee selects two to four people (depending on the size of the program) to serve as the on-site evaluators of your program.

The committee selects on-site evaluators who have a keen understanding of creative writing curriculum, program development, pedagogy, and issues related to the hiring, promotion, and retention of faculty. AWP board members, experienced Program Directors, and the Executive Director of AWP are among those who typically serve on such a team.

If AWP were engaged to assess your program, the team would examine CVs of the literature and creative writing faculty, department policies and handbooks, university catalogs, other publications of the program, and your program's written responses to

the team's initial inquiries. After the examination of all this information, the team would visit the campus for three days to do the following:

- a) interview faculty members of the program;
- b) interview students;
- c) meet with the chair, directors, and other departmental officers;
- d) visit and speak with the committees that attend to the writing program;
- e) attend classes;
- f) speak with the dean who oversees your college or division;
- g) tour the facilities, including the library;
- h) evaluate sample theses.

Below are some of the initial requests for information that the team typically makes of the program before its visit:

1. Please set up the appropriate appointments and meetings to make the interviews possible.
2. Please send a list, by title, genre, and author, of all theses conferred in the past three years, so we may randomly pick a few for review.
3. Provide that part of your department's mission statement that deals with graduate education and research. Supplement your statement with specific goals and strategies as they pertain to the topic at hand, as suggested by the outline below.

Mission:

Degrees Offered:

Narrative on Program's Philosophy or Pedagogy:

Specific Goals and Strategies:

- a. Admission (requirements & procedures)
- b. Completion requirements

- c. Graduate curriculum (append both listing of course offerings and narrative descriptions as they appear in the catalog)
 - d. Graduate instruction (all matters relating to the academic relationship between students and faculty).
4. Provide, in tabular form, the number of students (a) enrolled for the fall semester only and (b) graduating for each year the program has been authorized. Note: for graduation data, total all students receiving degrees in Summer, Fall, and Spring graduations. Also, please give your best estimate for projected enrollments for the next five years.
 5. Characterize the graduate students in your department (i.e., percentage who earned undergraduate degrees at your institution, percentage from other in-state institutions, percentage from out-of-state institutions, and percentage of foreign students). Include statistics for GPA and, if relevant, GRE or another national exam.
 6. Describe the ways you recruit students and indicate how successful those methods have been.
 7. Describe the process and criteria by which you select students for admission.
 8. Provide, in tabular form, the number of applicants and the numbers of students admitted to your program for the past three years.
 9. Describe the strengths of your graduate program. What are you doing to maintain and improve these?
 10. Excluding facilities, describe the weaknesses of your graduate program. What are you doing to remedy these?
 11. In realistic terms, discuss those facilities, at hand or needed, that are crucial to the success of your program. Does the physical plant adequately support your academic program?

12. Describe the adequacy or needs of your library holdings in terms of graduate education in your discipline.
13. Describe the climate for research and/or creative work on your campus and in your department. How is this reflected by concrete actions, programs, policies, etc.?
14. Rate the morale among (a) faculty, (b) graduate students, and (c) undergraduate minors and majors.
15. Do you use Teaching Assistants? If so, please indicate:
 - (a) what ratio of graduate students are TAs,
 - (b) the dollar amount of a nine-month TA,
 - (c) the duties assigned to TAs,
 - (d) the training your department provides TAs, and
 - (e) your comparative assessment of how competitive your TA package is with those of comparable institutions in your region.
16. Does your department use Research Assistants? If so, please answer (a) through (e) above for RAs.
17. Do you foresee important changes in enrollments, faculty, employment, etc., in the next ten years that will influence graduate education in your department? If so, please explain how you are planning to accommodate such changes.
18. Please comment on any topic you wish to address in relation to graduate education in your department.
19. Indicate the number of faculty in your department in each of the following categories, again in tabular form, for the fall semester of each year your program has been authorized: full-time faculty; all faculty holding terminal degrees; all faculty directing graduate students.
20. Does the range of specialty fields represented by your current faculty adequately meet your needs in terms of graduate education? Explain.

21. Please list and attach a CV for each member of your graduate faculty; clearly indicate: (a) which are tenure-track and (b) which are visitors.

Each CV should indicate relevant publications with complete bibliographic data and all other relevant professional credentials. Either on the c.v.s or as a separate addendum, please indicate the number of student theses directed by each member of the graduate faculty.

22. Please enclose four copies of two recent departmental or program newsletters.

23. Describe any fundraising that has been done for the program.

Once the assessment team has finished a draft of the report, it is presented to the Program Director so that he or she may correct errors in fact-finding or in the interpretation of information.

While the Program Director is reviewing the draft, it is also reviewed by the AWP Board of Directors for fairness and thoroughness. After the board's approval of the report, AWP will send your program ten bound copies, one loose-leaf copy, and a PDF file of the report. As a courtesy, we will send copies directly to the university officials who meet with members of the team. As long as your program provides the team with all the necessary information in a timely fashion, you can expect the final report six weeks after the team's visit to your campus.

Fees & Expenses

AWP's fee for assessments ranges from \$4,000 to \$5,500, depending on the size of the program, requested focus of the report (undergraduate study, graduate study, or both), and the number of genres which the program teaches and accepts for thesis work.

Your institution will pay for the team's travel, accommodations, and meals at which you or members of your faculty or administration are present. AWP pays for the team's incidental expenses, the team's honoraria, and the office expenses for the production of the final report.

When to Schedule an AWP Assessment

Because an AWP assessment would require a significant investment of time, effort, and money from your institution, you should not schedule an AWP assessment unless your program is truly eager for advancement and wishes to find the best possible evaluations and recommendations to facilitate that advancement. If you and your institution's leadership are content with your program's current operations, if you merely wish to fulfill the periodic reporting requirements of your university, or if you merely need a perfunctory report to provide information to your regional agency for accreditation, it may be better for your program to hire its own evaluators as per the guidelines established by your institution.

AWP's assessments are most useful when you and your program are ready to implement changes and develop a four-year plan to improve your program.

If your program meets two or more of the conditions below, it is likely that an AWP Assessment would benefit your program. We recommend that you schedule an AWP assessment

- when your program has stability in leadership. (AWP's assessments will provide a roadmap for a program's progress, so it is crucial that the program have a talented director who is eager to act upon the assessment and provide the continuity to execute a three or four-year plan.)
- when your program has conducted at least one internal review. (Often a program is content when it should be trying harder; an internal review often helps to form an awareness of how a program compares to its peers; an internal review helps to develop a receptiveness to the need for change.)
- when a majority of your colleagues are eager for changes and improvements in your program but you and your colleagues remain uncertain about the exact needs, strategies, and priorities.

- when the department wishes to change its Masters of Arts (MA) degree program to a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree program.
- when the college or university has begun strategic planning—targeting the creative writing program for development towards national eminence.
- when a program has been in operation for three or more years.
- when the program has the support of its department chair, dean, or other university leaders and they need to verify the components of your program that merit additional support.

Please contact the Executive Director of AWP if you would like to schedule an assessment of your program, or if you would like help in determining whether or not your program is ready for an assessment. (703) 993-4301.

Sample Exit Survey

[Note: AWP recommends that programs conduct annual surveys of outgoing students. AWP supplies this form only as an example to help a program devise its own exit survey of graduates. Each program should improve upon this survey as its faculty members and administrators see fit. To provide the best comparative data, the form must remain the same, year after year, to chart the program's progress clearly. In other words, the program should make sure that its first exit survey form contains all the areas that will help the Program Director, department chair, and deans administer to the program over the next five years. The program should give special attention to the general areas targeted for improvement by the university's strategic plan, and develop survey questions that address those areas of special interest to the university's leadership. The surveys should be sent to graduated students with a return envelope including postage.]

Please help us better serve our current and future students. Please take the time to answer these questions and to speak your mind.

1. What type of student were you? (Please check one.)

- a. *full-time student* b. *part-time student*

2. Please rank numerically the importance of each reason why you chose the MFA program. (Circle the appropriate number.)

a. *the general reputation of the university*

(0) not important (1) somewhat important (2) important (3) extremely important

b. *financial support*

(0) not important (1) somewhat important (2) important (3) extremely important

c. *the quality of the program's faculty*

(0) not important (1) somewhat important (2) important (3) extremely important

d. the quality of the Department of English

(0) not important (1) somewhat important (2) important (3) extremely important

e. curriculum

(0) not important (1) somewhat important (2) important (3) extremely important

f. the location

(0) not important (1) somewhat important (2) important (3) extremely important

g. the recommendation of a friend

(0) not important (1) somewhat important (2) important (3) extremely important

h. the recommendation of a former teacher

(0) not important (1) somewhat important (2) important (3) extremely important

i. the recommendation of a graduate of the program

(0) not important (1) somewhat important (2) important (3) extremely important

j. other—please describe:

(0) not important (1) somewhat important (2) important (3) extremely important

3. What is your *most* important career goal? (Please check only one.) To become?—

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a professional freelance writer | <input type="checkbox"/> | a journalist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a published author | <input type="checkbox"/> | a business manager |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a professor | <input type="checkbox"/> | an arts administrator |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a teacher in grades K-12 | <input type="checkbox"/> | an editor |

other (please name here):

4. What is your *secondary* career goal? (Please choose only one.) To become?—

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a professional freelance writer | <input type="checkbox"/> a journalist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> a published author | <input type="checkbox"/> a business manager |
| <input type="checkbox"/> a professor | <input type="checkbox"/> an arts administrator |
| <input type="checkbox"/> a teacher in grades K-12 | <input type="checkbox"/> an editor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other (please name here): | |
-

5. How do you feel about the length of time it took you to earn your degree?

- too long too brief appropriate length

Please comment:

6. Did you ever have difficulty enrolling in your preferred classes?

- often sometimes never

If so, which courses were difficult to get into?

7. Please comment on what you think is the most appropriate size for graduate classes. How many students? Why?

8. How could the department have helped you better to achieve your educational objectives?

9. The amount or quality of which of the following would have improved your experience at the university? (please check all that apply):

- Library books
- Journal subscriptions for the library
- Film/video equipment
- Computer equipment
- Other; please specify:

10. What was the most valuable part of your overall academic experience in the MFA program? Explain.

11. What was the least valuable? Explain.

12. List any courses or subject areas you think should be added to the program and explain why.

13. List any courses or subject areas that you think should be dropped and explain why.

14. Which course did you find most valuable? Why?

15. Which course did you find the least valuable? Why?

16. Please rate the quality of instruction within the Creative Writing Department. (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) completely inadequate (1) somewhat inadequate (2) sufficient (3) good (4) excellent

17. Please rate the quality of instruction within the English Department. (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) completely inadequate (1) somewhat inadequate (2) sufficient (3) good (4) excellent

18. Did you find instructors to be accessible and helpful? (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) no, not at all (1) sometimes (2) most of the time (3) yes, consistently

19. Did you find grading standards to be fair and consistent? (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) no, not at all (1) sometimes (2) most of the time (3) yes

20. In what ways was the program different from what you expected it to be?

21. Would you recommend the MFA program to others? Please rate how highly you would recommend it overall. (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) terrible, not at all (1) poorly (2) average (3) good (4) excellent

22. What do you consider to be the major strengths and weaknesses of the MFA program?

23. Upon entering the program, how did you view your own background as a reader and critic of literature? (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) completely inadequate (1) somewhat inadequate (2) sufficient (3) good (4) excellent

24. Now that you are leaving the program, has your background in literature improved?

(0) no, not at all (1) slight improvement (2) significant improvement (3) tremendous improvement

25. Now that you are leaving the program, how do you view your own background as a reader and critic of literature? (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) completely inadequate (1) somewhat inadequate (2) average (3) good (4) excellent

26. Upon entering the program, how did you view your own skills as a writer? (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) completely inadequate (1) somewhat inadequate (2) average (3) good (4) excellent

27. Now that you are leaving the program, have your own skills as a writer improved? (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) no, not at all (1) slight improvement (2) significant improvement (3) tremendous improvement

28. Now that you are leaving the program, how do you view your own skills as a writer? (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) completely inadequate (1) somewhat inadequate (2) average (3) good (4) excellent

29. Please rate the quality of your own educational experience in the MFA program. (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) completely inadequate (1) somewhat inadequate (2) sufficient (3) good (4) excellent

30. If you served as a teaching assistant, please rate your experience. How would you rank the training the program provided? (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) completely inadequate (1) somewhat inadequate (2) sufficient (3) good (4) excellent

31. How would you rank the advising you received from the faculty on your thesis work? (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) completely inadequate (1) somewhat inadequate (2) sufficient (3) good (4) excellent

32. How would you rank the advising you received from the faculty to help you prepare for a life-long career as a writer? (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) completely inadequate (1) somewhat inadequate (2) sufficient (3) good (4) excellent

33. Will you be seeking an academic job? yes no

If you answered yes, how would you rank the advising you received from the faculty to help you prepare to compete in the academic job market? (Circle the appropriate number.)

(0) completely inadequate (1) somewhat inadequate (2) sufficient (3) good (4) excellent

Please feel free to write additional comments in the space provided below, and use the reverse side of this page, if necessary. Thank you for your help.

Numbers of Degree-Conferring Programs in Creative Writing 1975-2010

YEAR	AA	BA/BS MINOR	BA/BFA MAJOR	MA	MFA	PHD	TOTAL
2010	12	347	157	116	184	36	852
2009	11	326	161	146	169	37	850
2008	11	326	161	143	156	37	834
2007	11	302	137	147	131	42	770
2004	10	318	86	154	109	42	719
1994	6	287	10	139	64	29	535
1984	4	155	10	99	31	20	319
1975	0	24	3	32	15	5	79

AWP's institutional membership has increased seven-fold since 1975. AWP's institutional membership includes 500 colleges and universities as well as 100 writers' conferences and centers. The numbers of degree-conferring creative writing programs are compiled from successive editions of *The AWP Official Guide to Writing Programs*, which became a free Web publication in 2007.

The table above includes member as well as non-member institutions. Most institutions offer two or more degree-conferring programs in creative writing.

The vast majority of the 2,400 departments of English in North America offer classes in creative writing; the departments and programs accounted for above are only those that have shaped creative writing electives into creative writing programs with, at least, minor tracks of study in creative writing and literature. Among undergraduate students, classes in creative writing are among the most popular elective classes.

*The Association of Writers & Writing Programs
is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization of
34,000 writers, teachers, and students,
500 creative writing programs
in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K.,
and 100 writers' conferences and centers.*

*AWP's Professional Standards Committee
serves as an advocate for
standards of excellence in the teaching of creative writing;
it supports fair treatment of writers in the academy,
provides writers with advice,
and conducts inquiries into disputes
over the hiring and promotion of faculty.*

*AWP also conducts
professional, independent assessments of
creative writing programs
and provides many other services
for writers and creative writing programs.*

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