Creative Writing and Writing For The Performing Arts

WASC Assessment Plan for MFA Program

The UCR MFA in Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts (CWPA) is a multi-genre program in which students major in one of the genres. The program will produce (and has produced) graduates who:

1. Have a comprehensive knowledge of and ability to apply both creative and critical techniques of writing in their chosen genre of major, as well as a good understanding of the techniques of at least one other genre. They will also have a solid understanding of the pragmatic aspects of their chosen genre, including the marketplace for their work and how and to whom to make professional submissions.

2. Have taken seminars in areas of critical research relevant to their creative work. They will graduate having acquired or demonstrated the ability to read, synthesize, communicate and incorporate critical literature appropriate to their creative and professional goals.

Each student specializes in one of five offered genres: Fiction, Creative Non-Fiction, Poetry, Playwriting, and Screenwriting. The number in each major area varies year to year, depending on the quality of applications, changes in major and other factors.

The curriculum is as follows: A minimum of 56 units (14 courses) is required for graduation and 8 units of manuscript or thesis units for a total of 64 units. The core curriculum is divided into a Creative Writing Track (fiction, nonfiction, poetry) and a Writing for the Performing Arts track (playwriting and screenwriting):

Creative Writing Track

- 6 workshops in chosen genre (24 units)
- Professional development course, CWPA 201 - The Writer’s Life (4 units)
- 2 graduate seminars from within Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts (8 units)
- 2 graduate seminars from any department(s) outside of Theatre, Film, and Digital Production and Creative Writing. Seminar subject matter should be relevant to student’s manuscript/thesis project. Requirement can be met with upper-division courses, with instructor and graduate advisor approval, as an appropriate 292 course (8 units)
- Manuscript or Thesis (8 units)
- 3 Electives (12 units) in workshop, graduate seminar or manuscript/thesis units, with the following limitations: Students may take a maximum of six workshops (24 units) within their chosen genre, and a maximum of 12 manuscript/thesis units within the normative to degree (six terms). All cross-genre workshops require prior instructor approval.
Manuscript or Thesis project: In the areas of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, the manuscript or thesis is a poetry collection, novel, short story collection, novella, memoir, essay collection or other book-length non-fiction project. Each student invites one or two faculty members to serve as the manuscript/thesis advisor(s). Two faculty readers, in addition to the advisor(s), evaluate the manuscript/thesis work. The length of the manuscript or thesis breaks down as follows: Poetry 40-65 pages, Fiction 100-150 pages, Creative Nonfiction 100-150 pages.

Writing for the Performing Arts Track

- 4 workshops in chosen genre (16 units)
- Professional development course, CWPA 201 - The Writer’s Life (4 units)
- 2 graduate seminars from Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts (8 units)
- 2 graduate seminars from any department(s) outside of Theatre, Film, and Digital Production and Creative Writing. Seminar subject matter should be relevant to student’s manuscript/thesis project. Requirement can be met with upper-division courses, with instructor and graduate advisor approval, as an appropriate 292 course (8 units)
- Manuscript or Thesis (8 units)
- 5 Electives (20 units) in workshop, graduate seminar or manuscript/thesis units, with the following limitations: Students may take a maximum of six workshops (24 units) within their chosen genre, and a maximum of 12 manuscript/thesis units within the normative to degree (six terms). All cross-genre workshops require prior instructor approval.

Manuscript or Thesis project: In writing for the performing arts, the manuscript or thesis project is a full-length play of two or three acts, or a screenplay or teleplay. Each student invites one or two faculty members to serve as the manuscript/thesis advisor(s). Two faculty readers, in addition to the advisor(s), evaluate the manuscript/thesis work. The length of the manuscript or thesis breaks down as follows: Screenplay, Teleplay or Play 90-130 pages.

Assessment Methods:

Over the course of the normative six terms, the students will in their first year take intensive workshops in creative writing, with the expected and assessed result of work that is ready to be revised for professional submission. After three quarters, students are expected to have identified and be prepared to begin, if they have not already done so, their final thesis projects and to have researched areas of critical study relevant to their theses in seminars or directed studies with appropriate faculty.

In their second year, in addition to further workshops, in addition to completing cross-genre and/or critical studies requirements, students will work one-on-one with their thesis advisors in preparing final manuscripts, which are each assessed by a three-person committee in time for the student to make further revisions.
In addition to representing the capstone of the student’s course of studies, the thesis will be evaluated by both the thesis committee and other professionals provided by the program as to its quality and the success and clarity with which both creative and critical studies work has been incorporated, as well as possible venues for professional submission. Students will meet with the committee and these professionals and provide a verbal defense of their work.

Students will be expected to demonstrate, as assessed in both course work and thesis work:

A. A strong knowledge of writers in their genre, both present and past
B. A strong knowledge of the critical, philosophical and theoretical aspects of their chosen genre.
C. A familiarity with the current venues for their work (journals, magazines, theatres, etc.), and know how to productively engage with these venues.
D. A good breadth of knowledge of other genres in creative writing.

Written annual progress reports will be made by the graduate advisors in conjunction with faculty with whom the students have worked; public readings and productions of work will happen each term, with a final 2nd year Reading at which faculty are expected to attend; and thesis defense.

While six terms is the normative time to graduation, the program encourages a third year for those who wish to have more time to work intensively on their theses. Students are expected to advance to candidacy within one year of normative time.

Advancement to candidacy is contingent upon the student having satisfied the requirements of their faculty and advisors and demonstrated professional capability.

Assessment methods include, as applicable to each student’s genre:

Publication of work, production of work, attendance at conferences and writers’ retreats, fellowships, grants and job placement, including on-campus opportunities such as Gluck fellowships and teaching assistantships, each of which are also supervised and assessed by faculty, as well as editorial work on either of the main campus literary journal publications, Mosaic and Crate.

Furthermore, in line with the Palm Desert assessment protocol, we now have each student fill out an extensive “exit evaluation” form.
WASC Assessment Plan for Palm Desert Low Residency MFA Program

The Low Residency MFA in Creative Writing & Writing for the Performing Arts (CWLR) is based out of the Palm Desert Center and like our sister program in Riverside proper is a multi-genre program in which students major in one of several fields. There are a few distinguishing characteristics between the two programs that should be noted: the Low Residency program does not offer playwriting as major genre, cross-genre study is required each quarter and the normative time to degree is seven quarters. The goal of the program, however, is directly in line with our colleagues in the traditional program, namely that our graduates will possess certain skills, as noted above:

1. Have a comprehensive knowledge of and ability to apply both creative and critical techniques of writing in their chosen genre of major, as well as a good understanding of the techniques of at least one other genre. They will also have a solid understanding of the pragmatic aspects of their chosen genre, including the marketplace for their work and how and to whom to make professional submissions.

2. Students will also have taken seminars in areas of critical research relevant to their creative work. They will graduate having acquired or demonstrated the ability to read, synthesize, communicate and incorporate critical literature appropriate to their creative and professional goals.

Assessment Methods:

As our students are directed more towards publishing and production – as they are not on campus, for instance, so there is no teaching practicum – our assessment methods vary somewhat from our sister program, as we put an essential premium on professional activity.

Over the course of seven quarters of online study and five intensive ten day residencies, our students take six workshops in their chosen genre, six literature seminars in their chosen genre and six cross-genre workshops (the cross-genre workshops are not fixed; the students may choose a different course of cross-genre study each quarter) and then take part in a series of seminars and lectures geared toward their particular interest, which include meetings each residency with professionals in respective fields to discuss works-in-progress, in addition to the normal course of meeting and assessments from their professors.

After three quarters, students are expected to have identified (and be well into) their final thesis project and have developed an area of critical study based on their literature coursework for which they will write a series of lengthy papers, culminating in a graduate lecture to the student body at their final residency. At the conclusion of their sixth quarter, students will have a nearly complete thesis project and will have completed their critical studies, including a final twenty-page study on a particular aspect of their field. Over the course of their seventh quarter, students thesis will be advised by a three-person committee and each cohort will be invested in an intensive integration into the professional world, both with a course dedicated entirely to
professional development, and their final residency, which will include a submission of their thesis to creative professionals (i.e. agents, editors, producers, development executives et al). At the conclusion of their seventh quarter, students will submit their final thesis for advancement.

As with the traditional program, our students will be expected to demonstrate, as assessed in both course work and thesis work:

A. A strong knowledge of writers in their genre, both present and past
B. A strong knowledge of the critical, philosophical and theoretical aspects of their chosen genre.
C. A familiarity with the current venues for their work (journals, magazines, theatres, etc.), and know how to productively engage with these venues.
D. A good breadth of knowledge of other genres in creative writing.

Assessment Methods: Written annual progress reports will be made by the graduate advisors in conjunction with faculty with whom the students have worked; students will lecture before student body and faculty and will be expected to defend their critical findings; student readings, productions and table reads happen regularly at each residency; and thesis defense.

Students are expected to advance to degree within seven quarters.

Advancement to candidacy is contingent upon the student having satisfied the requirements of their faculty and advisors and demonstrated professional capability.

Assessment methods include, as applicable to each student’s genre: publication of work, production of work, sale and/or option of work (for screenwriters), attendance at conferences and writers' retreats, fellowships, grants, internships, job placement, work on the The Coachella Review (the program-based magazine) and regular attendance both online and during the intensive residencies.