

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI MFA HANDBOOK

Table of Contents

- I. Entering the Program
 - a. Degree Requirements
 - b. Financial Information
 - c. Teaching Load
- II. Suggested Timeline
- III. Graduating from the Program
 - a. Forming a Committee
 - b. Creating a Book List
 - c. Comprehensive Written Exam
 - d. The MFA Thesis
 - e. Oral Defense
 - f. Final Steps
- IV. Organizations, Readings & Awards
 - a. EGSB Board
 - b. Broken English Reading Series
 - c. Third Year Reading
 - d. YR: Yalobusha Review
 - e. Bondurant Prize
 - f. Elvis Meets Einstein
- V. Faculty Contacts & Visiting Writers
 - a. Faculty Members
 - b. John & Renee Grisham Writer in Residence
 - c. SPiR: Summer Poet in Residence
 - d. Visiting Writers Series & Coordinators
- VI. Forms & Links

I. Entering the Program

Degree Requirements

The MFA program at the University of Mississippi consists of 42 total hours to be completed in three years. These hours are broken down as follows:

- ENGL 600 (Introduction to Graduate Study)
- ENGL 617 (Teaching College English)
- 12 hours in creative writing workshops
- 12 hours in literature seminars:
 - 6 hours of literature before 1800
 - 6 hours of literature after 1800 (3 of which may be ENGL 679/683 Form, Craft, & Influence)
- 6 hours of electives (including workshops, FCI, literature, classes in related disciplines and/or directed readings)

- At least 6 hours of thesis credit/directed readings

The College of Liberal Arts general requirements for our degree program can be found here: [MFA in Creative Writing | ENGLISH | LIBERAL ARTS | Spring 2019-20 | UM Catalog](#)

Financial Information

Upon acceptance to the program, students will be awarded either a **Teaching Fellowship**, consisting of \$11,500/academic year, or a **John and Renee Grisham Fellowship**, consisting of \$14,000/academic year. Both fellowships provide both in-state and out-of-state tuition coverage as well as health care coverage. For more information on the health care plan as well as how to waive this coverage, see the Graduate School website [here](#).

Additional financial aid can include:

Graduate School Excellence Fellowships of \$3,000/academic year awarded to qualified via the English department upon acceptance for outstanding GRE/GPA scores. This fellowship can, but does not necessarily, last during all three years of full time enrollment.

Underrepresented Minority Fellowships of \$7,000/academic year are awarded to qualifying students via the English department upon acceptance to the program.

Summer Graduate Research Assistantships of \$2,000/10 weeks of summer research can be applied for via the Graduate School for those remaining on campus in pursuit of a degree.

Graduate Dissertation Fellowships of \$6,000/academic semester can be applied for via the English department upon early completion of the comprehensive oral examination. This fellowship relieves the student of his or her teaching duties for one semester during their third year to focus on their thesis work.

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

Teaching Load

Teaching Assistants work with a professor in the English department who is teaching a 200-level course. TAs are required to attend 2 lectures a week headed by the professor and conduct 3 discussion sections of 20 students each led solely by the TA. On average, TAs are in charge of 60 students/semester. TAs are randomly assigned a 200-level course at the start of each semester. A list of 200-level courses can be found in the undergraduate course catalog.

Instructor of Record: students can be an instructor of record by teaching composition courses or creative courses. All students on the teaching fellowship are required to take ENGL 617, a pedagogical course designed in preparation for teaching composition. Positions as an instructor of record are most often awarded during the summer or in the second or third years in the program. More information on the Center for Writing and Rhetoric (CWR) can be found [here](#).

II. Suggested Timeline

Suggested MFA TIMELINE

| Year/Term | Coursework | Tasks | Paperwork |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1/Fall | ENGL 600 Literature Seminar, CW Workshop | | |
| 1/Spring | ENGL 617 Seminar 2 Workshop 2 | | |
| 1/Summer | 3-6 Summer Thesis Hours | | |
| 2/Fall | Seminars / Workshops 5- 7 | Contact prospective committee chair and 2 other members. Take comps if planning to apply for fall dissertation fellowship. | Submit GS2 |
| 2/Spring | Seminars / Workshops 8- 10 | | |
| 2/Summer | 3-6 Summer Thesis Hours | Begin researching and writing thesis | |
| 3/Fall | Workshops / Thesis Hours | Continue researching and writing thesis | |

| | | | |
|----------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3/Spring | Workshops / Thesis Hours | <p>Complete Reading List</p> <p>Complete Comprehensive Exam</p> <p>Complete Thesis</p> <p>File for Graduation (check GS deadlines; can be done ahead and rolled over to next semester)</p> <p>Schedule Thesis Defense (2weeks ahead)</p> <p>Defend Thesis, Graduate</p> | <p>Submit authorization for final exam GS7</p> <p>Apply for graduation GS8</p> <p>Sign Thesis Signature Page upon successful thesis defense</p> <p>Distribute Departmental Assessment Form to committee members (http://english.olemiss.edu/category/assessment/)</p> <p>Prepare Thesis MS; consult Graduate School's Thesis Manual</p> |
|----------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

III. Graduating from the Program

Forming a Committee

The thesis committee must consist of two MFA faculty and one non-MFA; these faculty members cannot be adjunct professors. The student must ask one of his or her MFA professors to serve as committee chair. Have professors sign off on the [GS2 Form: Update Advisor/Advisory Committee](#) in advance of submitting the book list, and well in advance of thesis work.

Note: for the below requirements, all committee members must receive exam dates at least a month in advance. The book list must be submitted at least two weeks before the written comprehensive exam.

Creating a Book List

The thirty-book list, composed by the MFA degree candidate, will be used by his or her committee members to form the written comprehensive exam. This list should demonstrate both breadth and depth as defined by the [Reading List Rubric](#). These thirty books should focus on your genre of interest, but should also include books from other genres, books in translation, or theory/critical writings. The reading list rubric should be made available to each of the student's committee members but does not need to be officially submitted to the department.

Comprehensive Written Exam

The student schedules an exam time in consultation with the committee that is at least two weeks (but preferably four weeks) in advance of the thesis defense. When the date of the comprehensive exam is set, the [GS7 Form: Authorization of the Final Oral/Written Examination](#) must be turned in.

This open-book exam takes place over a period of four hours in a location chosen by the student (usually at his or her home computer). Because the exam is made up in advance by the

committee, the members of the committee need not be present/in town during the taking of the exam.

The structure of the exam is as follows: there are three sets of questions. One question from each set must be answered. The questions are grouped in pairs so the student will not be able to answer all three test questions drawing from the same books. There will be three questions answered, total, during the four hours.

On the date of the exam, the committee chair will email the exam, which is based on the thirty-book list. Typical questions focus on comparisons between texts, questions regarding historical or theoretical contexts for these works, close readings of individual poems, and pedagogical questions. Students will not be asked specifically about books that are not on their 30 book list. It is often helpful to brainstorm questions with fellow students prior to the exam. Upon completion of the exam, the student emails the document back to the committee members who will evaluate the answers. The thesis director will reply with the committee's assessment, typically within one week. Both the student and the committee members must complete an on-line assessment of the written exam (found under Forms).

The MFA Thesis

The thesis is designed to be a book-length document; i.e. at least 48 pages for poetry or 120 pages for fiction of publishable quality. Most MFA candidates work closely with their committee chair on drafts of this manuscript over the course of the third year. Upon completion of the thesis, and after passing the oral defense (see below), the manuscript will be submitted to ProQuest with the option of a two-year embargo. A rubric for the thesis is [here](#).

Oral Defense

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

Final Steps

After completion of the written comprehensive exam, thesis, and oral defense, all students must submit self-evaluations of the [book list](#), [written exam](#), and [thesis](#) and must complete the [exit interview](#).

IV. Organizations, Readings & Awards

EGSB Board

The EGSB Board serves as the representative student-run group for all English students (MFA, MA & PhD). All questions and concerns regarding the MFA program should be directed to the current MFA Liaison, he or she may apply for any position—MFA Liaison, President, Vice President, Secretary, or Treasurer—on the EGSB Board.

Most importantly, this board sponsors Professional Development panels throughout the academic year that focus on concerns of the English and MFA Department student bodies. All panels consist of both literature and creative faculty and are designed to aid MAs, MFAs, and PhDs equally. Recent panels have included: Creating a CV, The Teaching Application Process, and The Job Market: Fellowships, Teaching, and Other Options. All students are encouraged, though not required, to attend.

Broken English Reading Series

Broken English is the public MFA graduate student reading series coordinated by two second-year MFA students, most often one poet and one fiction writer. First year students are encouraged to read in the fall to present their work to the program. In spring of their third year, students return to Broken English to demonstrate the growth of their work during their time in the program. For more information, contact the current Broken English hosts, Ellie Black (ekblack@go.olemiss.edu), Noel Quinones (nquinone@go.olemiss.edu), or Kacie Reilly (kreilly1@go.olemiss.edu).

Third Year Reading

This reading is separate from the Broken English Reading Series and takes place at Off Square Books in May. This reading is open to family members and the public and represents the culmination of the MFA candidates' time in the program. Traditionally, the 3rd year students are asked to select someone special to introduce them (parent, sibling, friend, etc.). A second-year student is responsible for handling the event, which includes: securing the date with Off-Square, securing funding from the department for refreshments, organizing and publicizing the reading ahead of time (e.g. making a poster for the event, coordinating with the readers, organizing the line-up, and making sure the introducers know what to do), and hosting the event itself (i.e. to make the introductory and/or closing remarks, as well as to provide general guidance through the event). Additionally, the host should print the event poster on cardstock and have the graduating students sign it as a final gift to the department.

YR: Yalobusha Review

Yalobusha Review is our online, student-run literary journal that "seeks to showcase work that alters or subverts mainstream forms of expression." Founded in 1995, YR publishes two issues (fall and spring) each year via their website, and recent issues have featured the likes of Cole Swensen, Dan Beachy-Quick, D.A. Powell, Jesmyn Ward, and John Brandon, among others. The magazine is run by two co-editors (a 3rd year and a 2nd year), who are assisted by a managing editor, fiction editor, and poetry editor (2nd or 3rd years), as well as staff members who read submissions in a designated genre. First-year students are invited to serve as such readers, with interested students invited to apply for editorships after completing one year of service.

Yalobusha Review also attends the national AWP conference each year and occasionally hosts an off-site reading with other magazines. Students involved with the journal may request travel funding to attend the conference and assist with YR's activities.

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

Bondurant Prize

This prize is awarded each spring to one poet and one fiction writer within the MFA department. Each student is awarded \$150 for one manuscript (3 poems or 1 short story). For more information, contact Blair Hobbs at vhobbs@olemiss.edu.

Elvis Meets Einstein

This \$1,000 award is given to one poet and one fiction writer within the MFA program each spring. Creative work submitted must be no longer than a single page and must be both “funny” and “smart.” For more information, see the Scholarships & Awards page [here](#).

V. Faculty Contacts & Visiting Writers

Carolyn Wigginton
Department Chair & Associate Professor
cwiggint@olemiss.edu

Matt Bondurant
Director of the MFA Program & Associate Professor
mrbondur@olemiss.edu

Ian Whittington
Director of Graduate Studies & Associate Professor
iwhittin@olemiss.edu

Poetry Faculty

[Ann Fisher Wirth](#), Professor
Beth Ann Fennelly, www.bethannfennelly.com Professor
Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Professor
[Derrick Harriell](#), Assistant Professor
Melissa Ginsberg, Assistant Professor

Fiction Faculty

[Tom Franklin](#), Associate Professor
Kiese Laymon, Professor
[Chris Offutt](#), Associate Professor
Melissa Ginsberg, Assistant Professor

Matt Bondurant, Associate Professor

Note: At present, the UM MFA program only offers a degree/thesis option in Poetry & Fiction. However we do still offer workshops and classes related to other genres, and we encourage students to pursue those options concurrent to or outside of their normal degree program. To that end the below listing details extra genre specialization provided by our faculty.

Creative Non-Fiction Faculty

Chris Offut, Associate Professor

Kiese Laymon, Professor

Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Professor

Beth Ann Fennelly, Professor

Ann Fisher-Wirth, Professor

Screenwriting Faculty

Chris Offutt, Associate Professor

Matt Bondurant, Associate Professor

Nature Writing Faculty

Ann Fisher-Wirth, Professor

Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Professor

John & Renee Grisham Writer in Residence

John and Renée Grisham Writers in Residence are emerging writers selected every other academic year on the strength of their writing. They teach one class each semester are closely involved in the MFA community. The 2020-2021 Grisham Writer is Maurice Carlos Ruffin. For more information on Maurice and the Grisham Writers in Residence please see [here](#).

Visiting Writers Series

The MFA program at Ole Miss has a thriving Visiting Writers Series coordinated by the MFA Director and the MFA faculty. Readings are held at various on campus locations, typically on Wednesday evenings. For more information on upcoming readers, see [here](#). Students may apply

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

VI. Forms & Links

Ole Miss English Department: <http://english.olemiss.edu>

Ole Miss Creative Writing Department: <http://mfaenglish.olemiss.edu>

Ole Miss Graduate School: <http://www.olemiss.edu/gradschool/>

Ole Miss Center for Writing & Rhetoric: <http://cwr.olemiss.edu>

Graduate School Forms: http://www.olemiss.edu/gradschool/forms_library.html

MFA Forms: <http://mfaenglish.olemiss.edu/forms/>

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