1. **Identifying Information**

Name of Program:  Master of Fine Arts in Writing
Type of Program (Major, Minor, Graduate Program, Non-Degree Granting):  Graduate
College of Arts and Sciences Division (Arts, Humanities, Sciences, or Social Sciences):
Arts
Name/Title/Email Address of Submitter:  Bich (Beth) Minh Nguyen, Academic Director
and Associate Professor, bnguyen@usfca.edu

2. **Mission Statement:**

The mission of the MFA in Writing program is to nurture the artistic and intellectual development of writers, ground their work in an understanding of literary traditions and contemporary practice, and prepare them to participate fully in the literary community. Since its inception, the program has offered graduate study in three genres—fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. The program attracts students because of three distinguishing characteristics: a high degree of faculty-student interaction, a workshop ethos that emphasizes generosity and mutual responsibility over competition, and craft-oriented literature courses taught by writers and geared to the concerns of writers. The program's structure and the close individual attention students receive in small classes help a literary community to flourish within the program, and active engagement with the thriving literary community of San Francisco is fostered via the student-run online journal *Switchback,* internship opportunities, and the Lone Mountain Reading Series.

The program's mission, like that of the university itself, is to foster close student-teacher relationships that encompass a concern for the whole person. Like the University, the program welcomes and respects people of all faiths or of no religious belief and recognizes and values the uniqueness of the individual. In its character the program honors core values of the university, particularly the commitment to learning as a humanizing social activity rather than a competitive exercise, with a high value placed on a diversity of perspectives, experiences, and traditions. By fostering the critical, compassionate analysis of self and world that is essential to ethical writing, the program also serves the university's mission of educating hearts and minds. In keeping with the university's mission, the program was founded to serve promising candidates with little or no training in the field and to make it possible for working adults to pursue graduate studies. The program continues to be receptive to students who might not fit conventional criteria but demonstrate the talent and intelligence to succeed. While today the program provides rigorous instruction for a varied student population, ambitious to publish, it has

retained from its early days an idealistic sense of writing as a vocation, not just a career. The publications of graduates and faculty enrich civic life and contribute to the strategic vision for USF as a premier Jesuit institution.

Has this statement been revised in the last few years?  Yes

**3. (Optional) Program Goals:**

Have these goals been revised in the last few years?

**4. Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)**

1. Students will demonstrate a working knowledge of the fundamentals of artistic composition and craft. Students can apply craft principles to formal elements (e.g., plot, characterization, exposition, poetic line, imagery) to determine appropriate craft strategies as they compose and revise stories, chapters, essays, or poems that possess literal coherence and generate figurative (implicit) meaning.

2. Students will be able to read as writers, applying a critical craft vocabulary as they analyze the ways in which literary meaning is made in the works of published authors. Students can identify how craft strategies serve craft principles and analyze the relation between literary form and literary content (theme, subject) in the work of published writers.

3. Using a critical craft vocabulary, students will be able to evaluate and analyze the techniques and intentions of developmental drafts, including their own, and to participate in constructive critical discussion of works-in-progress.

4. Students are prepared for participation in the public life of literature, which includes locating their own work in the context of contemporary professional practice, preparing and submitting their work for publication according to professional standards, acquiring skills for writing-related professions (including teaching creative writing), and participating in diverse literary communities.

Have these PLOs been revised in the last few years?  Yes

**5. Brief Summary of Most Recent Assessment Plan**

Our most recent assessment plan focused on learning outcome 1: students will demonstrate a working knowledge of the fundamentals of artistic composition and craft. Students can apply craft principles to formal elements (e.g., plot, characterization, exposition, poetic line, imagery) to determine appropriate craft strategies as they compose and revise stories, chapters, essays, or poems that possess literal coherence and generate figurative (implicit) meaning. Toward this goal, faculty thesis readers completed a thesis rubric for all MFA theses read in a given academic year, in order to assess program-wide success in achieving learning outcomes. (A thesis rubric is included at the end of this document.)

### 6. Academic Program Review

Date of most recent Academic Program Review's External Reviewer Visit: March 2-4, 2015
Date of most recent Action Plan Meeting: March 3, 2016
Brief Summary of the most recent Action Plan: create a proposal to start a summer literary conference / workshop at USF; continue active recruitment of students; more clearly outline roles of faculty on steering committee; more clearly outline roles of academic director and administrative director; increased fellowship funding is a top priority

### 7. Methods

What did you do with regard to assessment of your program/department in 2015-2016?

Faculty thesis readers completed a thesis rubric for all MFA theses read in a given academic year, in order to assess program-wide success in achieving learning outcomes. (A thesis rubric is included at the end of this document.)

What were your questions?

Are students' MFA theses demonstrating an understanding of the fundamentals of creative writing craft principles? Is this level of understanding average? Exceptional?

Do the theses convey an understanding of literal coherence as well as figurative meaning?

How are these questions related to your most recent Academic Program Review and/or Action Plan?

These questions are related to our most recent Academic Program Review in terms of student recruitment. As program reviewers noted, the MFA program ought to offer more and larger fellowships in order to recruit, retain, and motivate the strongest, or stronger, level of students. Our questions help shed light on this issue.

What PLOs are these questions related to?

Students will demonstrate a working knowledge of the fundamentals of artistic composition and craft. Students can apply craft principles to formal elements (e.g., plot, characterization, exposition, poetic line, imagery) to determine appropriate craft strategies as they compose and revise stories, chapters, essays, or poems that possess literal coherence and generate figurative (implicit) meaning.

What direct (most important) and/or indirect methods did you employ?

Some Possible Direct Methods (pick > 1 and *briefly describe*):

a. Published (Standardized) Test (e.g., Major Field Test)
b. Class Tests & Quizzes with Embedded Questions
c. Class Presentations
d. Off-Campus Presentations (NGOs, clients, agencies, etc.)
e. Research Projects Reports
f. Case Studies
g. Term Papers
h. Portfolio
i. Artistic Performances, Recitals & Products
j. Capstone Projects
k. Poster Presentations
l. Comprehensive Exams
m. **Thesis, Dissertation:  We read final MFA theses and assessed them according to our rubric.**
n. Pass Rates on Certification or Licensure Exams
o. Group Projects
p. In/Out-of Class Presentations
q. Competency Interviews (e.g., oral exams)
r. Simulations
s. Juried Presentations
t. Other

Some Possible Indirect Methods (*briefly describe*):

a. Student Survey
b. Student Interview
c. Focus Groups
d. Reflection Sessions
e. Reflection Essays
f. Faculty Survey
g. Exit (end of program) Survey
h. Exit (end of program) Interview
i. Alumni Survey

j.    Employer Survey
k.    Diaries or Journals
l.    Data from Institutional Surveys (e.g., NSSE, SSI, GSS)
m.  Curriculum/Syllabus Analysis
n.    Other

8. **Results**

What were the direct data results?

Student work was observed to be in the top one or two areas of accomplishment within each rubric.

What were the indirect results?

What surprised you?

Because MFA students go through two separate Thesis courses to prepare them, along with workshops and seminars, there are rarely any unhappy surprises. For the most part we anticipate and receive strong work.

What aligned with your expectations?

As stated above, our expectations are quite set due to a curriculum that involves a lot of students receiving a great deal of guidance from faculty.

What do you understand these results to mean?

That the MFA program has a solid foundational curriculum that involves student support and provides students with consistent guidance.

What are the implications of the data?

They help us consider how we might help all students reach the top areas of accomplishment as outlined in the rubric.

9. **Closing the Loop**

   What might you do as a result of these assessment results? What curricular or programmatic changes might you implement?

These assessment results allow us to consider ways to change or strengthen our approach to reading MFA theses.

   Possible Closing(s) of the Loop(s) (pick $\geq$ 1 and *briefly describe*):

   a. Revision of PLOs
   b. Changes in pedagogical practices
   c. Revision of program course sequence

d. Revision of course(s) content
e. Curriculum Changes (e.g., addition and/or deletion of courses)
f. **Modified program policies or procedures: We will consider ways to strengthen the MFA final thesis reading protocol. We do not have enough full-time faculty to permit thesis defenses, but we can discuss, and have discussed, other ways to enhance the way we currently read and approve theses.**
g. Designed measurement tools more aptly suited for the task
h. Improved within and across school/college collaboration
i. Improved within and across school/college communication
j. Revised student learning outcomes in one or more courses
k. Modified rubric
l. Developed new rubric
m. Developed more stringent measures (key assessments)
n. Modified course offering schedules
o. Changes to faculty and/or staff
p. Changes in program modality of delivery
q. Other

Have you or will you submit any course or program change proposals as a result of these results?  No

*Student's genre (poetry, nonfiction essays, nonfiction book-length work, short stories, long fiction)* _____

*For each learning outcome (A and B) please check the level of achievement that best describes this manuscript.*

**Learning Goal 1 A**
Students will apply craft principles to craft elements (e.g., plot development, characterization, exposition, poetic line, imagery) as they compose and revise stories, chapters, essays, or poems that possess literal coherence and generate figurative or implicit meaning.

Language and Style

___Very few errors in grammar, syntax, or use of literary conventions. The student's decisions about word choice and sentence structure give evidence of a distinctive, developed style.

___Occasional errors in grammar and syntax that interfere with meaning, and/or only minor  lapses in use of literary conventions. Student makes effective decisions about word choice and sentence structure that have some stylistic consistency.

____Errors in grammar and syntax consistently, but less frequently, interfere with clarity, and student doesn't always competently execute conventions of the form. Word choice and sentence structure are adequate to convey literal intention.

____ The student was sent a letter asking for corrections (denial letter)  based on frequent or serious errors in grammar, syntax, or literary conventions (e.g., formatting dialogue). Word choice and sentence structure are clumsily handled.

Coherence

___ The student determines craft strategies that best serve intention when applying principles of craft. Student conceives and executes a work of literal coherence and exploits the interplay of formal elements in complex ways to generate multi-layered figurative meaning.

___The student demonstrates an active application of craft principles (e.g., strong characterization, complex imagery) in creating a work of literal coherence that demonstrates rather than declares its meaning. Student understands the interplay of formal elements of the genre in generating figurative meaning (e.g., line breaks, stanza form, and rhyme in a poem; perspective, characterization and plot structure in fiction; the

capacity to integrate lyrical, narrative, and reportorial strategies in nonfiction), but cannot always exploit these to build subtext.

___The student can usually convey intention clearly by making appropriate craft choices. (For example, a poem can achieve some effects from line breaks or sound; fictional or nonfictional narratives sustain a coherent story; relevant facts are incorporated in expository nonfiction.) Student demonstrates a rudimentary understanding of figurative meaning but cannot accurately suggest it via craft choices or generate more than weak implications in the material.

__Students cannot consistently apply craft to convey their intentions. They struggle to conceive of a work that has literal coherence (e.g., a plausible plot); there's unintended ambiguity and/or significant gaps in the execution of fundamental craft strategies.


**Learning Goal 1. B.**

By completing a book-length work (creative thesis), students will demonstrate their ability to organize material, shape it into a whole, and sustain creative choices about content, style, and form.

____The thesis demonstrates purposeful structural design and organization, and the student makes sustained, innovative choices about content, form, and style.

____The thesis shows clear and developmental organization, in which parts relate to the whole, and students consistently make effective choices about content, style, and form.

___ The thesis is organized in a way that suggests unity as a whole as well as in parts, with uneven achievement in individual parts, and student can sometimes make effective choices about content, style, and form.

___As a whole the thesis is disorganized, and one or more pieces lack coherent development. Student makes uninformed choices about content, style, and form.