

**MFA in Writing Program**  
**Self-Study for 2014-15 Academic Program Review**  
**March 2-4, 2015**

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## **I. Mission and History**

### *Mission*

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.

### *History*

The program originally offered the MA degree in Writing, as part of the adult education curriculum offered in the College of Professional Studies (CPS), which serves a nontraditional student population of working adults. The program, staffed entirely by part-time faculty, offered evening courses and a year-round schedule that enabled students to complete the degree within two years and three months. In June 1988 the program was moved from the College of Professional Studies to the College of Arts and Sciences, operating as an independent program. After the retirement of founding director Anne Barrows, Deborah Lichtman and poet Aaron Shurin served as full-time faculty co-directors, beginning in 2000. The program converted from an MA to MFA program in

summer 2000, retaining the year-round schedule. Students complete 33 units (11 courses) for the degree, and the student body typically ranges from 60 to 67 students.

At the time of the 2007 program review, the program was struggling to retain the best of its past—dedicated faculty, nurturing environment, students from a wide range of backgrounds—while making the changes necessary for a rigorous MFA program. The directors had a reduced teaching load, and the program had one additional full-time faculty member, Kate Brady, and a relatively stable part-time faculty. A substantial number of the part-time faculty had been accepted to the university's Preferred Hiring Pool (PHP), which provides a higher rate of pay for part-time faculty who have demonstrated teaching excellence, and many members of the PHP continue to teach in the program (Steven Beachy, Lewis Buzbee, Lowell Cohn, Nina Schuyler, and Karl Soehnlein). Students began the program with an introductory autobiography course in the summer semester, completed Thesis I (planning and drafting the thesis) in the second summer, and completed Thesis II (finishing and revising the thesis) in the final summer. Because one-on-one thesis instruction took place during the summers, full-time faculty were not available as thesis instructors, and while the program had a stable core of continuing part-time faculty teaching in the summer, it was necessary to hire additional part-time instructors, many of whom had no other contact with the program. In 2007 the MFA program operated separately from the undergraduate creative writing program in the English Department; the two undergraduate creative writing faculty members did not teach in the MFA program, and the English Department sponsored a reading series entirely separate from the MFA Lone Mountain Reading Series.

The key recommendations of the 2007 program review addressed how the program could “incorporate some of the practices of a more rigorous MFA program.” The co-directors and sole full-time faculty member in the program were term faculty, whose course load was heavier on the assumption that publication was a criterion for hire only for tenure-track faculty. Reviewers recommended that qualified full-time faculty in the MFA program be converted to tenure-track and that an additional tenure-track hire be made in nonfiction. Noting that “the faculty must be actively publishing writers,” reviewers stated that both full-time and part-time faculty members should meet a minimum publication requirement of at least one published book in the genre in which they teach. They further recommended that the program have one full-time faculty member in each genre who would oversee curriculum in his or her genre, a task previously left largely to the co-directors. Reviewers recommended that full-time faculty participate in thesis instruction and that PHP adjunct faculty be paid more for this work, thus minimizing reliance on additional instructors. Reviewers also suggested revisions to the curriculum so that it would be “consistently geared to students working at the graduate level,” particularly in nonfiction. They recommended that the program institute a genre-specific admissions policy and abandon the requirement for all entering students to take an introductory autobiography class, indicating that students would be better served by focusing on the genre in which they intended to write. Greater collaboration between undergraduate and graduate programs was also encouraged.

Noting problems with the efficiency of program administration, reviewers proposed that the administrative structure of the program be changed, providing for a faculty member to

serve as academic director and creating a staff position for an administrative director who would oversee the day-to day operation of the program. Reviewers observed that while the MFA program had not fully succeeded in “achieving the diversity among its faculty and students that it would like, it continues to work on this issue.”

Since 2007 the MFA program has changed substantially in response to the program review. After Deborah Lichtman resigned in summer 2007, the position of administrative director was filled by Micah Ballard, who continues in this role, and Aaron Shurin remained as academic director. Micah Ballard works closely with the academic director to streamline and organize administration and to develop marketing strategies for the program; he takes primary responsibility for responding to queries from applicants and plays a crucial role in recruiting accepted applicants. This new split directorship system has served the program well.

Both Aaron Shurin and Kate Brady became tenure-track faculty in 2008, and in fall 2009 David Vann was hired as a full-time tenure-track faculty in nonfiction, giving the program one full-time coordinator for each genre: Vann (nonfiction), Shurin (poetry), and Brady (fiction). Between 2007 and 2011, a number of new courses, more closely focused on acquiring skill, were added (Research for Writers; Point of View and Characterization); the introductory course was revamped as a multi-genre course; and course descriptions were revised to create clearer distinctions among craft topics. Because all students continued to take thesis instruction during the summer semester, full-time faculty did not participate, and ensuring the quality of instruction remained difficult.

Kate Brady served as academic director from fall 2011 until May 2013; Aaron Shurin retired in 2012. D. A. Powell became the poetry coordinator in fall 2012, at which time the poetry curriculum was revised. During the academic year 2011-12, the program obtained approval from the dean’s office to alter its structure substantially, beginning with the class of 2015. This new model eliminates the summer introductory course, so that students now complete Thesis I in the summer between the first and second academic years and complete Thesis II and an additional seminar in fall semester of the third year. This model also provides students with more time to complete a developed thesis and allows for the participation of both full-time and PHP faculty in Thesis II instruction. In addition, the minimum requirement for teaching in the program is now at least one published or forthcoming book in the genre and the MFA degree or the equivalent. Beginning in fall 2011, the English Department and the MFA program made the Lone Mountain Reading Series a coordinated collaboration, and the following year, a system of rotation was introduced, whereby full-time faculty in the MFA program and in the undergraduate creative writing program each taught one course per year in the other program. A Steering Committee composed of full-time graduate and undergraduate creative writing faculty meets several times a year to collaborate on shared projects and discuss program goals. The undergraduate faculty members are Susan Steinberg, Ryan Van Meter, and Bruce Snider.

After David Vann left the university in spring 2011, a search for a replacement resulted in

the hire of two full-time tenure-track faculty members, Beth Nguyen (fiction and nonfiction) and Dave Madden (nonfiction), who started in fall 2013. Having four full-time faculty members and increased participation by undergraduate creative writing faculty addressed a problem that recurred between 2007 and 2013: the program was often short of full-time faculty. With the addition of Nguyen and Madden, the goal of having full-time faculty members take on all of the tasks associated with admissions, assessment, and student advising has been met. At the same time, this has resulted in fewer available courses for PHP and part-time faculty, as well as a loss of administrative duties (paid separately as Non-Teaching Assignments (NTA)) for PHP faculty. In summer 2013 Brady stepped down as Academic Director. The program went into receivership within the Office of the Dean, and Associate Dean Eileen Fung served as Interim Academic Director. In fall 2014 Nguyen was appointed Academic Director of the program.

The curriculum has also been refined since the last program review. Curriculum committees in each genre revised course descriptions that more clearly defined the objectives for individual courses. To complement workshops devoted solely to long fiction or short fiction, a mixed fiction workshop (in which students can work on either short or long fiction) was also added in fall 2014; this enabled the program to provide instruction more efficiently and effectively, since the strict division of long and short form workshops sometimes resulted in enrollments as low as 6 or 7 students in each section. In fall 2013 Dave Madden as nonfiction coordinator oversaw a thorough overhaul of the nonfiction curriculum, creating new courses that more specifically addressed the primary concerns of the genre. In fall 2014 Beth Nguyen proposed the addition of a special topics seminar on Professional Development, to begin fall 2015.

At this time the program has made substantial revisions to improve academic rigor, professionalize the program offerings, and work with the undergraduate creative writing program in ways that benefit both programs. The program offers well-designed courses taught by accomplished faculty in each genre. Program graduates publish their work in all three genres; graduates with recently published books include Craig Santos Perez, Courtney Moreno, Joshua Mohr, Jen Larson, George Dohrman, Lauren Saft, and Thomas Peele. In the last two years, current students received the AWP Intro Journals Award (sponsored by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs to honor the best writing by MFA students in programs across the country): Aaron Francis for fiction in 2013 and Shanley Jacobs for nonfiction in 2014.

The program has also improved the ways in which it prepares students for professions. This includes increasing the number of teaching assistantships and creating a post-graduate teaching fellowship. In 2009, typically 6 teaching assistantships were available each semester; in fall semester 2014, 15 students served as teaching assistants. In academic year 2013-14 a post-graduate teaching fellowship was created. Kate Brady and Susan Steinberg coordinate both the teaching assistantship and the teaching fellowship program. The program also increased funding and support for *Switchback*, which provides students with editorial experience. Beth Nguyen and Dave Madden have reorganized and revitalized two events, Life After MFA I and II, aimed at providing professional development for students.

The key challenge facing the program stems from the difficulty of wooing the most qualified applicants when only limited funding is available and most students must pay full tuition. When D. A. Powell joined the MFA faculty, he obtained funding from the Dean's Office for the Lawrence Ferlinghetti Fellowship, which every other year awards full tuition to a highly ranked poetry applicant whose work in some way addresses social concerns. As academic director, Kate Brady launched an alumni fundraising campaign; thanks to the generosity of an alumna, the program now offers an additional fellowship, the Jan Zivic Fellowship for a Prose Writer, inaugurated in spring 2014. This \$5,000 fellowship is awarded to a promising first-year student in the program who has demonstrated financial need; thus far, the fellowship is funded for five years. Since the program is tuition-driven, it is crucial to promote the program more effectively in order to attract and admit qualified applicants.

The faculty members and Administrative Director Micah Ballard have a strong sense of collegiality, and their interaction with students extends beyond the boundaries of the classroom. The program structure also fosters a close-knit community. Because classes are offered on the same evenings in the same location, students and faculty have more opportunities for informal contact that enriches instruction, including the Lone Mountain Reading Series (held on class nights). However, the morale of PHP faculty has been affected by changes that have reduced their teaching and administrative duties in the program.

### *Learning Goals and Outcomes*

Learning to write well requires not only a mastery of technique but also a commitment to a more ambitious vision for one's work, one that demands a developed sense of the self in relation to others. The publishing record of program graduates is a crucial measure of success, and this record has continued to improve for the last ten years. No writing program can guarantee publishing success. But we can assure motivated students that we will help them to become better writers and readers.

The program has identified four essential learning goals with clearly identified outcomes, which are provided in the Assessment section of this self-study. The learning goals are briefly outlined here. The thesis represents the final evidence that a student has become competent in shaping and revising a creative work that functions as a coherent whole. In literature seminars, students learn to read as writers, with direct implications for their ability to employ craft strategies in their own work. In workshops, students develop skills as editors of their own developmental drafts and the drafts of others, which is reflected in their ability to revise effectively in response to feedback. Finally, students in the MFA program are expected to become active participants in literary community, which includes the ability to submit their work for publication according to professional standards, competence at written communication that is applicable in any profession, and training as teachers for those interested in this career.

The program actively recruits a diverse student body, but among the challenges it faces in doing so is the lack of funding with which to recruit desired applicants. Since 2007, the program's student body has grown more diverse, and so has the faculty. Our faculty's diversity was enhanced when we were given the opportunity to bring visiting writers to campus (Daniel Alarcón in spring 2013 and Thomas Sayers Ellis in academic year 2014-15).

## **II. Curriculum**

### *General Overview*

The MFA program at USF is an intimate and intensive one in which students work closely with their peers and instructors. The program admits from 30 to 37 students per year. Students are required to apply in a specific genre—fiction, nonfiction, or poetry—but are allowed to explore other genres once in the program and may request to change tracks. Courses are held on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings from 6:30 to 9:15 pm; all are tailored to graduate-level work in writing. Enrollment in writing workshops is capped at 11; in reading-based courses, referred to here as seminars, enrollment is limited to 16. (Please see Appendix A: 2 ½ Year Class Schedule and Appendix B: Curriculum Map.)

The program runs for two and a half years. The program timeline is as follows:

#### Year 1

Fall: literature seminar and workshop

Spring: literature seminar and workshop

Summer: thesis I

#### Year 2

Fall: literature seminar and workshop

Spring: literature seminar and workshop

#### Year 3

Fall: literature seminar and thesis II

The curriculum is founded on a number of principles: writers develop their craft through the close study of literature as well as through the practice of their own writing; they learn from communal exchange in the classroom and from independent work with a mentor; and they benefit from a working knowledge of more than one genre.

A distinctive feature of the curriculum is its pairing of reading-based seminars with workshops in the same genre. On Tuesday evenings, workshops in each genre bring student work to the foreground in a peer setting of supportive critique. On Wednesday evenings, reading-based seminars focus on traditions, styles, craft elements and developments, and literary models. Workshops and reading-based seminars combine theory with practice, and writing with reading literature. The program emphasizes issues



in craft not only in workshops, where student work is the focus, but also in seminars, where the focus is on how to learn about the art of writing from literature. In the fiction track, the program offers workshops that focus on short fiction, workshops that focus on long fiction, and workshops that mix the two; though fiction students may take any of these workshops, they must choose to focus on either short or long fiction for their theses. For nonfiction theses, students choose between writing individual essays or a book-length memoir or work of nonfiction.

The schedule and balance of the MFA curriculum are cited by applicants as among the program's chief attractions. Students and applicants are enthusiastic about the evening schedule, its combination of classroom instruction and one-on-one study, its craft-based reading seminars, and its flexible approach to genre.

The curriculum offers a coherent sequence of courses in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry so that students can develop their craft in each successive course. At the same time, students have the opportunity to change genres or experiment by taking classes in another genre. In 2013-2014 the program transitioned into a two and a half year program, which includes four workshops (12 units), five seminars (15 units), Thesis I (3 units), and Thesis II (3 units), for a total of 33 units/credits. In the fall, seminars are meant to be taken with a workshop in the same genre. In the spring, seminars are designed to complement a range of genres, and cross-genre courses are offered in this semester. The Teaching Creative Writing seminar, offered each spring, is also open to alumni enrollment. As of fall 2013 all incoming students follow the new timeline.

In 2013, a new literature course, *Strategies in Contemporary International Fiction*, was added to the fiction curriculum for the purpose of exposing students to a broader range of diverse literary traditions. In 2013-2014 nonfiction coordinator Dave Madden oversaw the revision or replacement of the nonfiction courses. The new offerings are: *The History of Nonfiction*; *Nonfiction Theory & Technique*; *Truth, Ethics & Memory*; *Contemporary Experiments in Nonfiction*; and *Special Topics in Nonfiction*. In 2014 Beth Nguyen proposed a new *Special Topics* course in *Professional Development*, to start in fall 2015, aimed at graduating students and devoted to helping students learn about the non-academic and academic job markets, fellowships, publishing, and more.

The thesis is the manuscript that students complete over the course of their time in the MFA program. While students often cultivate this project in workshops, their independent work in Thesis I and Thesis II is entirely focused on it. Thesis I and II are the independent studies designated for planning, writing, and revising the thesis manuscript. Thesis I occurs during the summer between the first and second year and typically includes planning the scope and structure of the work and appraising its purpose. Students generally produce a substantial amount of writing in this course. Thesis II takes place during the final semester. Here, students complete and revise their manuscripts and format it, with a preface and abstract, for formal presentation to the program. Currently, prose works range in length from 130 to 320 pages for short story collections and essay collections, and from 160 to 380 pages for novels, memoirs, and nonfiction manuscripts.

Collections of poetry must be at least 50 pages. Mixed genre projects (which are rare) must be at least 100 pages and involve approval and guidance from faculty members first.

Prior to assigning thesis instructors, the program holds a mixer in the spring in which instructors and students meet. Then, students list their instructor preferences. Instructors and students are matched based on a negotiation of students' instructor preferences, faculty schedules, and suitability. Students may work with two different instructors during Thesis I and Thesis II, or they may work with the same instructor. There is a high rate of return among Thesis I and II faculty, and their level of experience in supervising theses has consequently grown over time. In shifting Thesis II to the final fall semester, the program can ensure that many students work with full-time faculty members. A full-time faculty member serves as the second reader for each completed thesis, and writes the letter of approval or denial. Second readers are currently expected to check a completed thesis for proofreading and grammatical errors, and may return the thesis to the student for copyediting revisions before final approval.

Because each student in the program takes Thesis I and Thesis II, the program must hire an additional 10 to 15 part-time instructors each year. The program values the fresh perspectives that these instructors can offer students. Many of the instructors are recruited in response to faculty referrals and student requests. They are prepared through interviews with the program co-directors and program materials detailing the expectations involved in Thesis I and II. The instructors are invited to teach again on the basis of student evaluations and the nature of the work their students produce. Though students are sometimes reluctant, at first, to work with instructors they do not know, their evaluations reflect a high level of satisfaction with the majority of their thesis instructors. There is a high rate of return among Thesis I and II faculty, and their level of experience in supervising theses has consequently grown over time. Several core faculty members first taught in the program as thesis instructors. The increasing rigor of the program's curriculum has raised the quality of students' theses, which students are invited to share and celebrate during an annual Thesis Reading event.

The overall curriculum of the MFA program is enhanced through events and gatherings built into and sponsored by the program, including orientation, readings, and events. All students begin the program with an all-day orientation in August. Led by full-time faculty, the orientation introduces students to each other and to all aspects of the program. It includes talks on workshop and craft analysis and breakout sessions in which students meet in groups with faculty members. The program's Lone Mountain Reading Series, co-sponsored with the English Department, brings three visiting writers to campus each year. Because these events are incorporated into class times, all students attend these events. Each year's series includes writers of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Additionally, the English Department and the MFA Program collaborate to organize and co-sponsor the two-day Emerging Writers Festival in the spring. Students are also encouraged to read their own work at WordNight, a student-run series.

Professional development within the program is encouraged in several ways. Students can become teaching assistants for undergraduate courses in the English Department, and

students are encouraged to apply for these positions; students and alumni can also take the Teaching Creative Writing seminar. Each year, members of the previous year's graduating class also are invited to apply for a teaching fellowship (one per semester). *Switchback*, the program's online student-run literary journal, offers students a chance to gain experience with editing and production; in 2014, as the start of what the program hopes will be an annual tradition, two of the editors were funded by the program to attend AWP's conference and promote the journal and the program at the book fair. Each semester, faculty members lead "Life after the MFA" information sessions devoted to issues including post-MFA fellowships, non-academic and academic job markets, and publishing; panels featuring editors, agents, and writers also provide insight. In the program office, students may check out books from the MFA library, a collection of literary journals and books by faculty, students, alumni, and visiting writers. The overall structure of the MFA program allows for a great deal of contact among students because all of them attend classes on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. Students are also encouraged to join in or organize their own readings in local venues.

### *Course Descriptions*

Several seminar and workshop courses are offered in each genre. In the spring semester, cross-genre courses are also offered. Special Topics courses in the program vary by year. Several courses initially offered as special topics proved highly successful, clearly fulfilling an existing need in the program. These were subsequently approved by the University curriculum committee for inclusion in the program's regular course offerings.

#### *Fiction Courses: Seminars (3 credits each)*

##### *The Architecture of Prose*

The metaphor of architecture is employed to examine how works of fiction are "built." Emphasizing works of long fiction, the course considers the intricate relationship of plot, structure, and patterns of imagery. Readings stress a variety of approaches by authors from different eras and locales, representing a range of fictional traditions.

##### *Contemporary Experiments in Fiction*

This course on experimental and radical approaches to fictional prose emphasizes writers who work against the conventions of realism and how they make meaning out of their departures. Readings drawn from around the world make use of such strategies as discontinuous narratives, metafictional techniques, and non-narrative forms and serve as models to encourage students to take risks in their own writing.

##### *The Craft of Short Fiction*

With an emphasis on contemporary short stories, this course engages students in close readings of short fiction, examining ways in which different authors can serve as models for crafting the formal elements of fiction, including structure, characterization, point of

view, imagery, and style. Craft analysis integrates craft theory and emphasizes how students may apply these techniques in their own stories.

#### *Developments in the Novel*

Beginning with novels in the mid-nineteenth century and advancing to the mid-twentieth century, this course addresses major literary movements, such as psychological realism, modernism, and postmodernism, and considers literature in English and in translation. Novels are analyzed in relation to historical context and aesthetic tradition.

#### *Evolution of the Short Story*

This course concentrates on the masters of the short story from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Addressing major literary movements, such as psychological realism, modernism, and postmodernism, the course considers literature in English and in translation. Stories are analyzed in relation to historical context and aesthetic tradition.

#### *Finding Form: Novellas & Story Cycles*

This course examines the relationship between form and content in works of fiction of varying lengths, with a primary focus on two “in between” forms, the story cycle and the novella. Other works, such as a novel with multiple plotlines or a series of stories by a single writer written over time about the same characters, may be studied as well. The reading list includes both classics and contemporary works from the U.S. and around the world.

#### *Point of View & Characterization*

This course offers a close study of how writers construct complex points of view and how these points of view shape characters and the reader's deepening understanding of them. Technical considerations may include the choice of person, single or multiple narrators, voice, degree of access to characters, and the question of reliability. Readings will be in both short and long fiction.

#### *Style in Fiction*

To deepen a student's understanding of style and its relation to content, this course examines fiction at the level of language, emphasizing short stories as a convenient means to analyze a broader range of styles. Elements of style studied include sentence structure, tone, rhythm, voice, and imagery. There may also be a focus on different schools of style, such as stream of consciousness, minimalism, magical realism, or surrealism.

#### *Strategies in Contemporary International Fiction*

This course emphasizes the literary techniques employed by contemporary international fiction writers and may also reference classic works of the late twentieth century. Studying both long and short fiction, students will examine the strategies writers use to render a social world, whether in the form of realism, magical or fantastic realism, or metafiction, and consider how literary influence traverses cultural borders and is shaped

and re-shaped in the process. Students will apply what they learn to their own creative work.

### *Techniques of Long Fiction*

With an emphasis on contemporary novels, this course engages students in close readings of long fiction, examining ways in which different authors use formal elements, including characterization, structure, point of view, chapter structure, and figurative language. Craft analysis integrates craft theory and emphasizes how students may apply these techniques in their own novels-in-progress.

### *Fiction Workshops (3 credits each)*

#### *Short Fiction Workshop I, II, III, IV*

Students explore theory and practice in writing short fiction.

#### *Long Fiction Workshop I, II, III, IV*

Students explore theory and practice in writing long fiction.

#### *Fiction Workshop I, II, III, IV*

Students explore theory and practice in writing either short or long fiction.

### *Nonfiction Courses: Seminars (3 credits each)*

#### *Contemporary Experiments in Nonfiction*

This course on innovative approaches to nonfiction emphasizes present-day writers who work against conventional understandings of the genre. Readings will investigate the lyric essay, segmented essay, the uses of fabrication and falsification, hypertext and digital experiments, formal innovations, and more. Students will learn how contemporary authors are continuing to push the boundaries of the genre, and practice using such techniques to expand the possibilities of their own nonfiction.

#### *The History of Nonfiction*

This course looks at the history and development of nonfiction from the classical to the contemporary era. Readings—in both long and short forms—investigate a variety of modes and subgenres: essay, memoir, history, critique, manifesto, portrait, lyric, reportage, and others. Students learn how popular subjects and approaches to the genre have shifted over time, and use this knowledge not only to apply structure and technique to their own work, but also to see their work as part of a greater tradition.

#### *Nonfiction Theory & Technique*

An in-depth study of nonfiction craft elements and how writers use them to produce a variety of effects. Students read contemporary work with a close eye on such elements as scene, setting, characterization, argument, voice, narrative authority, use of facts, finding a form, and others. The course will also investigate the genre as a whole—what it is, what

makes it distinct, and how an understanding of technique can help us form aesthetic judgments toward any piece of nonfiction.

### *Truth, Ethics & Memory*

Some writers provide extensive footnotes and back matter detailing their sources and research, while others don't provide any information at all. This course looks at the variety of methods available to nonfiction writers to find the truth, assemble facts, and piece it all together into a gripping story. How do we establish authority to get readers to trust us? How do we write about family, friends, and strangers without exploiting them? How do we work with the unreliability of memory, and when is it okay to fudge the truth? Reading a variety of memoirs, essays, and works of reportage, students will examine the different ways authors seek truth in nonfiction and learn practical techniques for successfully navigating these issues in their own work.

### *Special Topics in Nonfiction*

A customized course focusing on a specific element, subgenre, or form of nonfiction, with representative readings of primary works and theory. Topic changes according to the instructor.

### *Nonfiction Workshops (3 credits each)*

#### *Nonfiction Workshop I, II, III, IV*

Students explore theory and practice in writing nonfiction.

### *Poetry Courses: Seminars (3 credits each)*

#### *Contemporary American Poetry*

Students explore topics in contemporary American poetry, ranging from the Language poets of the early 1980s to the Dark Room Collective of today. The course follows shifting ideologies and social contexts and examines the way literary schools and counter-influences create a new American poetry for the contemporary. Students read both the poetry and poetics of selected authors and write creative responses.

#### *Poetics*

The articulation of ideas of aesthetic judgment in poetry has a long history from Aristotle and Longinus to Stephen Burt and Marjorie Perloff. Students will read essays and poems that give shape to aesthetic judgments and will be encouraged to respond in their own writing to the history of poetic ideas.

#### *Poetry International*

This course examines major developments in modern world poetry by looking at a range of literary traditions and historical contexts of non-English-speaking poets. Though most work is read in translation, reference to original languages is encouraged. Students work

on translating from chosen languages, and the class examines both the problems and the excitement of reading beyond one's borders.

*Prosody: The Meaning of Poetic Form*

An in-depth study of poetic elements, with an eye to the history and evolution of poetic forms. Students look at the organizing principles of syllable, stanza, and line; of stress, meter, rhyme, and a variety of countings, as well as contemporary explorations of fragmentation, interruption, chance, and silence. Readings are drawn from the ancients as well as from postmodern contemporaries to demonstrate a range of structural elements, radical and classic.

*Poetry Workshops (3 credits each)*

*Poetry Workshop I, II, III, IV*

Students explore theory and practice in writing poetry.

*Cross-Genre Courses (3 credits each, with one exception)*

*Blurred Boundaries: Writing Beyond Genre*

This course focuses on modern literary works that cross or combine genres and therefore stand outside the conventions of any single genre. By studying such works, students learn to draw from a variety of models and modes in order to increase their stylistic and structural range. Readings are drawn from genre theory and works such as "short short," the "lyric essay," the "illustrated novel," the "prose poem," and the "novel in verse."

*Intention and Design in Prose*

This course examines how a writer's plans for prose narratives develop from idea to sketch to final draft. Close examinations of literary works in fiction and nonfiction are augmented by the writer's letters, essays, notebooks, preliminary drafts, and other aesthetic statements. Students investigate how sensibility is expressed by craft, with an emphasis on the process of composition and revision.

*Internship in Writing (may be taken for 1-3 units of credit)*

This course enables students to complete a writing-based internship in the Bay Area. The main mission of the course is to facilitate work in a writing-related field, ranging from internships at literary journals and publishing houses to work at literacy organizations and in the field of public relations. The course also features guest speakers who address both professional opportunities and the value of participating in a writing community.

*Research for Writers*

This course covers a range of research techniques useful for writers of long and short form nonfiction, from finding the necessary background information and interviewing experts to lending authority to a first-person account of events and issues in literary nonfiction. The course covers the use of print and electronic media and databases and

basic reporting techniques. Some fiction reading may be included, and the course may be open to fiction writers.

### *Teaching Creative Writing*

A study of the methods, theory, and practice of teaching creative writing. Students read extensively about pedagogy, develop model lessons, and put them into practice. Topics include the philosophy of teaching, course design, principles for teaching craft, and effective ways to respond to student writing.

### *Word for Word: The Texture of Language*

Examines the creative use of diction, syntax, punctuation, and cadence by writers in all genres. Students study the impact of language and grammar as functions of literary style and agents of literary meaning, and apply new linguistic strategies to their own writing.

### *Thesis Courses (3 credits each)*

#### *Thesis I*

Students work with individual thesis instructors to formulate, plan, and begin to execute the thesis. Offered in the first summer semester.

#### *Thesis II*

Students work with individual thesis instructors to complete the thesis. Offered in the final fall semester.

### *Admission Policies, Enrollment, and Retention*

The admissions deadline for the MFA program is January 15 of each year. Students are drawn to the program via its online presence, advertisements in print and online publications (including *The Writer's Chronicle*, *Poets & Writers*, AWP's online guide, Gradschools.com), blogs, word of mouth, emails sent from the academic director to directors of undergraduate creative writing programs, email inquiries, phone calls made to the program office, the program's presence at the annual AWP conference, and two public information meetings at the university. In fall 2014 the program established a public Facebook page to connect current students and alumni, provide a space for posting publications, news, events, fellowships, and opportunities, and to assist in recruitment.

Students are admitted to the program on the basis of writing talent and a basic knowledge of literary craft. Required admissions materials include a writing sample, a statement of purpose, two letters of reference, a resume, and undergraduate transcripts. Applications are scored by a committee of six or seven faculty members and ranked by score. The final composition of the cohort is also influenced by issues of genre representation and diversity. The quality of the writing sample is weighted most heavily in the scoring of applications, followed by the statement of purpose and the letters of recommendation. Since 2004, the program has received more than 200 applications annually. Faculty



members call all accepted applicants, send follow-up emails, and talk to them extensively about the program.

To improve our ability to order to attract and retain strong applicants, the program has increased teaching assistantships, offered post-graduate fellowships, and enhanced our focus on professional development. Our focus on advising, which involves one-on-one meetings with a faculty member every semester, also plays a role in retention. Starting in fall 2014, the program will sponsor a Saturday writing retreat every semester; fifteen students and a faculty member will gather to write all day in a large classroom space, with breakfast and lunch being provided.

### *Graduation Rates*

The graduation rate is approximately 90%, which exceeds the institutional rate of approximately 78% as averaged between 2007-2010.

Over the course of the MFA program, approximately three students within each class withdraw before reaching the point of graduation. The reasons are almost always personal and/or financial.

### *Advising*

Each semester, students meet with their assigned advisor, a full-time MFA faculty member, to discuss course options for the following semester. Advising sessions may also include a general assessment of each student's academic progress. Students list their course preferences, though they are ultimately assigned workshop instructors based on the program's commitment to providing a variety of instruction. MFA faculty members and co-directors also hold informal meetings with students throughout the year, thereby contributing to the advising process.

Student satisfaction with courses is measured in the numerical (SUMMA) and narrative evaluations they complete at the end of each course. It is also made evident in advising sessions where students report on the progress of their work in the program and their level of satisfaction with their courses.

### *Academic Quality*

Academic quality is measured and tracked through the program's assessment tools to ensure that learning outcomes are being achieved and to ensure that student work is improving. We have made curricular changes in response to the findings of these assessment measures, as noted in Student Learning Assessment. The program's emphasis on craft and workshop, and its shift to a two-and-a-half year program, have increased academic rigor.

Our course evaluations show student satisfaction with courses and instructors. The following chart, using figures from SUMMA unit summaries, provides a sample of evaluation questions and shows how the MFA program unit mean (MFA) compares against the institutional mean (IM) in recent semesters; in each case, our program scores are higher or equal, with 5.0 being the highest score.

	MFA Spring 2014	IM Spring 2014	MFA Fall 2013	IM Fall 2013
The instructor is teaching the course material or skills clearly.	4.88	4.46	4.83	4.45
The instructor seems to be well prepared.	4.88	4.56	4.79	4.56
Course objectives are being achieved.	4.85	4.49	4.71	4.48
In this course, I am learning much.	4.86	4.42	4.77	4.41
Overall, I rate this instructor a good teacher.	4.91	4.52	4.80	4.52

	MFA Spring 2013	IM Spring 2013	MFA Fall 2012	IM Fall 2012
The instructor is teaching the course material or skills clearly.	4.64	4.45	4.72	4.42
The instructor seems to be well prepared.	4.56	4.56	4.64	4.55
Course objectives are being achieved.	4.61	4.48	4.59	4.46
In this course, I am learning much.	4.59	4.41	4.59	4.37
Overall, I rate this instructor a good teacher.	4.62	4.52	4.65	4.49

### *Credit Hour Policy Compliance*

The program complies with the university's credit hour policy, where one unit equals one hour of direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of student work, outside of class, per week throughout the 15-week semester. Course syllabi include the amount of work expected from students as well as a sense of scope, purpose, and expected learning outcomes.

### **III. Student Learning Assurance**

#### *Assessment*

Student Learning Goals and Outcomes are provided here; rubrics for each outcome are included in Appendix C, Learning Goals, Outcomes, and Rubrics.

#### *Student Learning Goals and Outcomes*

### Learning Goal 1

Students will demonstrate a working knowledge of the fundamentals of artistic composition and craft.

#### Learning Outcomes:

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

### Learning Goal 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.

#### Learning outcomes:

- a. 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.
- b. Students can evaluate aesthetic choices in literary works across diverse historical and cultural traditions.

### Learning Goal 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.

#### Learning Outcomes:

- a. In responding to a draft manuscript, students can evaluate whether the writer's craft choices serve the intentions of the work and can compare the draft to works with similar themes, form, or style. Students can synthesize specific observations made in close reading of a manuscript to evaluate how it works as a whole and to make suggestions for revision.
- b. Students can integrate written and verbal critiques from peers and instructors when revising their own manuscripts, making selective decisions about how to improve the writing.

### Learning Goal 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.

Learning Outcomes:

- a. Students appraise their own work in relation to contemporary professional practice and understand how to submit work to journals and publishers in accordance with standards in the field.
- b. Students demonstrate competence in written communication that has application for professional writing and editing.
- c. Students who wish to pursue a teaching career acquire a comprehensive knowledge of craft principles and pedagogy from teaching assistantships and core courses.

In 2007, MFA program reviewers recommended “the implementation of a more thorough assessment system of course assessment and evaluation.” While relevant assessment measures are built into the program’s structure and purpose, the most important being the thesis itself, which is reviewed and approved by a second faculty reader, the MFA program had yet to develop additional methods for program-wide assessment carried out collectively by the faculty.

In academic year 2008-09, the university provided additional training to enable faculty to produce more effective assessment plans. Assessment measures specific to learning goal 4 now include annual feedback surveys for Life After MFA I and II and exit surveys completed by recent graduates, which were implemented and tallied beginning in 2011. In the same year we began annually tracking student participation in the online journal *Switchback* as well as the number of visitors to the site; our assessment also involves tracking the publications and achievements of students and alumni. We designed and implemented new assessment methods specifically designed to measure program-wide progress on all learning goals and outcomes, for which we also evaluate student performance by genre, allowing us to gauge the relative strengths of each genre. Each method, except where indicated, usually samples a portion of the entire student body, typically 3 to 4 students in each genre, for a total of 12 to 16. The assessment methods are summarized below in relation to the learning outcomes they are intended to measure:

- (1) In 2008-09 genre-specific curriculum committees assessed course offerings within each genre in relation to all learning goals and outcomes and where necessary revised course descriptions and launched new courses.
- (2) To track progress on learning goal 1, we implemented two methods: (a) compared the writing sample provided in the student’s application to the program with the completed thesis by the same student, in order to measure a student’s progress against his/her own past performance, 2009-10 and 2013-14; (b) completed a thesis rubric for all theses read in a given academic year, in order to assess program-wide success in achieving learning outcomes, 2011-12 and 2014-15.
- (3) In fall 2009, using a detailed rubric, we gauged a student’s progress on learning goal 2 by comparing a critical paper written early in the semester with the final paper for the same literature course. (We then decided that a longitudinal study to assess progress over a longer period of time would provide more useful information.)

- (4) In spring 2010 we gauged a students' progress on learning goal 3 by comparing critiques of peer manuscripts written early in the semester and at the end of the semester by a representative sample of students in each genre. A part-time poetry instructor failed to submit the required materials, but we determined that fiction and nonfiction made adequate progress over the course of the semester.
- (5) Using a more detailed, revised rubric, we gauged student progress on learning goal 2 by conducting a two-year study of critical papers written by the same student in the "foundational" literature seminars in each genre in fall 2011 and fall 2012. (One course in the historical development of the genre, the other on contemporary practice.)

Rubrics for individual assessment methods can be found in Appendix D, Rubrics for Specific Assessment Methods. Tabulated results for each of the six assessment methods detailed above are summarized in the annual student learning assurance reports, provided in Appendix E.

For learning goal 1, we can document that the majority of students in each genre improve their writing over the course of their time in the program and that most of these students perform at good or excellent levels of achievement. To some extent these results also suggest student progress with respect to learning goal 3, outcome b: the ability to revise effectively in response to feedback. We also engaged in qualitative discussions of the evidence of student learning and recommended that workshop instructors collect and comment on students' workshop critiques. Taking into account student evaluations of thesis instructors (read by the academic director) and the review process of the second thesis reader, we concluded that students whose instructors were full-time or PHP faculty performed more successfully on learning outcomes. Ultimately, we made a major change to program structure to ensure that all, or nearly all, of our students will work with experienced MFA faculty members for Thesis I and II.

For learning goal 2, on both occasions when we examined critical papers in select literature seminars, most student work fell within the range of good to excellent achievement. For the longitudinal comparison completed in 2012-13, with one exception, every fiction and nonfiction student improved, but of the three poetry students sampled, two declined in achievement level and one increased by just one point. After discussion, the faculty decided to recommend that all literature courses require a substantial amount of critical writing. We also analyzed the kinds of critical writing assignments most relevant to the program's desired outcomes. Since we observed that even students who performed well tended to score lower in the category of "contextualizing" (considering how the work under discussion related to contemporary practice or literary tradition), curriculum committees recommended specific changes to course descriptions and assignments for courses focused on these topics. In advance of the semester start date, all syllabi were reviewed by genre coordinators to ensure that they specifically addressed relevant student outcomes in genre-specific language and that required critical writing was a component of literature courses. The MFA program student handbook provides a

list of learning goals and outcomes, and each syllabus communicates these expectations to students in the specific terms of the goals for that course.

For learning goal 4, we have relied primarily on the evidence of student participation in events, our efforts to track their success in publishing their work, and their responses to feedback surveys (Life after MFA I and Life after MFA II) and an exit survey. Feedback surveys have improved for both Life after MFA events and are generally positive. We also tabulated graduates' responses to item 13 on the exit survey, "The program helped me learn how to prepare a manuscript and submit work for publication." Among the graduating class of 2011, 37 % strongly agreed; 37 % agreed, and 26 % disagreed. Among the graduating class of 2012, 37 % strongly agreed, 53 % agreed, and 10% disagreed. With the aim of continuing to improve in this area, we again revised these events in 2013-14 and also recommended that every workshop instructor devote at least a portion of one class to discussing professional standards for submitting work. The program also plans a course in professional development for fall 2015.

The exit surveys, revised in 2012-13 to better capture relevant information, ask students to report how well they feel they have achieved the student outcomes for learning goals 1, 2, and 3; tallies are summarized in the annual student learning assurance reports. These responses also suggest improvement in the program's ability to deliver intended learning outcomes in most areas. Most graduates of the program strongly agree that it helped them to further their understanding of craft (84% in 2011, 95% in 2012); helped them to improve their skills as an editor of their own work and that of others (90% in 2011, 79% in 2012); and helped them to develop the skill to read as a writer (74% in 2011, 90% in 2012). Among the class of 2011, 94% of graduates would recommend the program to another writer; among the class of 2012, 100% would do so. Asked to rank their satisfaction with thesis instruction on a scale of 1 to 5, graduates in both years average a score of 5. Students also reported high levels of satisfaction with small class size and courses taught on the same evenings. However, response to the exit survey is voluntary. In 2012, 19 of 39 graduates responded, and in 2013, despite repeated requests for a response, only 8 members of the graduating class completed exit surveys. We are now considering additional methods for increasing the number of student responses.

The program's ability to achieve its learning outcomes has been facilitated by small class size and by the structure of the thesis work. Because students can conceive and draft the thesis with intensive mentoring at the mid-point of the program, they are better positioned to complete the thesis successfully in the final semester.

The data on retention and persistence to graduation demonstrates that the vast majority of students successfully complete the program. For the last few years, roughly 3 to 4 students have dropped out of the program just before or early in the first semester, with a number of them citing financial reasons as a factor in this decision (discussed further under "recruitment of students").

#### **IV. Faculty**

### *Full-time Faculty*

Four full-time MFA faculty provide the core of instruction in the MFA program: Bich (Beth) Nguyen, Academic Director and Associate Professor; Catherine Brady, Professor; Dave Madden, Assistant Professor; and D. A. Powell, Professor. The Academic Director receives one course release per semester to allow for the significant administrative components involved in directing; otherwise, full-time faculty members teach two courses per year. Service duties for full-time MFA faculty include working on admissions; advising students; reading and approving final theses; developing the curriculum; planning the reading series; planning events such as Life after the MFA; representing the program at graduate open houses; and attending faculty and steering committee meetings.

The Academic Director's duties include overseeing the curriculum and assessment; finding and recommending faculty for hire; recruiting and admitting new students; working on program documents (including the program's information materials, catalog copy, student handbook, student and faculty guidelines); meeting with part-time faculty; meeting with deans of the College of Arts and Sciences to clarify program and University issues; representing the program at the College Council; working with the Administrative Director to manage the daily operations of the program; and managing any issues that might arise with enrollment, students, and faculty.

Along with the four MFA faculty, there are three full-time professors attached to the English Department who also teach in the MFA program: Ryan Van Meter, co-chair of the English Department and Assistant Professor; Bruce Snider, Assistant Professor; and Susan Steinberg, Professor. These faculty teach in the MFA program on a rotation that also allows MFA faculty to teach in the undergraduate English degree program. As a result, both programs are strengthened. The undergraduate creative writing faculty each receive a half course release per year to account for their administrative duties within the MFA program. These service duties include working on admissions; reading and approving final theses; planning the reading series; and attending faculty and steering committee meetings.

### *Full-Time MFA Faculty*

Bich (Beth) Minh Nguyen. MFA in Creative Writing, University of Michigan. Author of the novel *Pioneer Girl* (2014); the novel *Short Girls* (2009), which received an American Book Award; and the memoir *Stealing Buddha's Dinner* (2007) which received the PEN/Jerard Award and has been selected for numerous college and community read programs. Co-editor of three textbooks: *30/30: Thirty American Stories from the Last Thirty Years*; *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*; and *The Contemporary American Short Story*. Her work has been included in numerous anthologies, *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and other publications. Courses taught: Long Fiction Workshop; Nonfiction Workshop; Thesis I; Thesis II; Architecture of Prose (Spring 2015);

Introduction to Creative Writing for Non-majors (English Department); Special Topics in Writing: Immigrant Literature (English Department).

Catherine Brady. MFA in Creative Writing, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The Brenda Ueland Prose Prize and the *Zoetrope: All Story* Short Fiction Prize. Author of the story collections *The End of the Class War* (1999); *Curled in the Bed of Love* (2003), winner of the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction; and *The Mechanics of Falling* (2010), winner of the 2010 Northern California Book Award, as well as *Story Logic and the Craft of Fiction*, a book on the craft of writing; and *Elizabeth Blackburn and the Story of Telomeres: Deciphering the Ends of DNA*, a biography. Published in *Best American Short Stories 2004*, *Zyzzyyva*, *Missouri Review*, *Kenyon Review*. Former President of AWP, serving on the board from 2005-2008. Courses Taught include: Tradition and Innovation in Short Fiction; Contemporary Experiments in Fiction; Autobiographical Writing; Style in Fiction; The First Person; Point of View and Characterization; Craft of Short Fiction; Teaching Writing; Techniques of Long Fiction; Thesis I; Thesis II; Short Fiction Workshop; Long Fiction Workshop; Nonfiction Workshop.

Dave Madden. Ph.D. in English, University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Sherwood Anderson Award in Fiction, AWP Intro Journals Award in Nonfiction, Tennessee Williams Scholarship from Sewanee Writers' Conference and a Bernard de Voto Fellowship at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Author of *The Authentic Animal: Inside the Odd and Obsessive World of Taxidermy* (2011). Fiction and nonfiction published in *Prairie Schooner*, *DIAGRAM*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Indiana Review*. Courses Taught: Narrating Nonfiction; History of Nonfiction; Research for Writers; Nonfiction Workshop.

D. A. Powell. MFA in Creative Writing, University of Iowa. Kingsley Tufts Award, two Pushcart Prizes and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation. Author of poetry books *Tea* (1998); *Lunch* (2000); *Cocktails* (2004); *Chronic* (2009), winner of the Northern California Book Award and the California Book Award; and *Useless Landscape; or, A Guide for Boys*, winner of the National Book Critics' Circle Award in Poetry. Published in *Best American Poetry* 2008, 2011, and 2014. Courses Taught: Poetry Workshop; Prosody.

#### *Full-time English Faculty*

Ryan Van Meter. MFA in Nonfiction Writing, University of Iowa. Fellowships from MacDowell Colony and Virginia Center for the Creative Arts; artist's grant from Vermont Studio Center; Four Notable Essay citations in *Best American Essays* (2008, 2010, 2011 and 2012). Author of nonfiction book *If You Knew Then What I Know Now* (2011), finalist for the Lambda Literary Foundation Award in Gay Memoir. Published in *Best American Essays 2009*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Iowa Review* and *Quarterly West*. Courses Taught: Nonfiction Workshop.

Bruce Snider. MFA in Poetry and Playwriting, University of Texas, Austin. Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize; fellowships from Amy Clampitt House, James Merrill



House and Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Author of *The Year We Studied Women* (2003), winner of the Felix Pollak Prize in Poetry; and *Paradise, Indiana* (2012), winner of the Lena-Miles Wever Todd Poetry Prize. Published in Best American Poetry 2012, *Meridian*, *Gettysburg Review* and *Ploughshares*. Courses Taught: Poetry Workshop.

Susan Steinberg. MFA in English, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Pushcart Prize; United States Artists Ziporyn Fellow in Literature. Author of *The End of Free Love* (2003); *Hydroplane* (2006); and *Spectacle*, (2012), finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award. Published in *Conjunctions*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Boulevard*, and *Massachusetts Review*. Courses Taught: Architecture of Prose; Major Project I; Short Fiction Workshop.

### *Preferred Hiring Pool (PHP) Faculty*

In addition to the four full-time MFA professors and the three full-time English professors, the program includes five Preferred Hiring Pool (PHP) part-time faculty, who teach a substantial number of the program's courses: Stephen Beachy, Lewis Buzbee, Lowell Cohn, Nina Schuyler, and Karl Soehnlein. PHP faculty have published significantly, and each has demonstrated a long-standing and deep commitment to the program. PHP instructors previously had temporary involvement in admissions, advising, and thesis reading (compensated separately as non-teaching assignments). Currently, PHP instructors currently are invited to attend faculty meetings and contribute, if they wish, to faculty readings and panels.

Courses are assigned to faculty by the academic director according to instructor preference, PHP seniority, and the need to rotate instructors between workshops and literary seminars and among the three genres. The faculty is characterized by the ability to teach both kinds of program courses, and by the ability of many instructors to teach in more than one genre.

The PHP instructors have shown devotion to the program in spite of the traditional lack of security associated with part-time status.

Stephen Beachy. MFA in Creative Writing, University of Iowa. Michener Award in fiction. Author of *The Whistling Song* (1991), *Distortion* (2000) and *Some Phantom/No Time Flat* (2006). Published in *High Risk 2*, *New York Times Magazine*, *Bomb*, *Best Gay American Fiction 1996*. Courses Taught: Contemporary Experiments in Fiction; Major Project I and II; Short Fiction, Long Fiction, and Nonfiction Workshops.

Lewis Buzbee. MFA in Fiction, Warren Wilson College. Author of the novels *Fliegelman's Desire* (1990); *Steinbeck's Ghost* (2008); *The Haunting of Charles Dickens*; and *Bridge of Time* (2012); the short story collection *After the Gold Rush* (2006); and the nonfiction collections *The Yellow-Lighted Bookshop* (2006) and *Blackboard: The Life of the Classroom* (2014). Published in *Harper's*, *Paris Review*, *Gentleman's Quarterly*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Best American Poetry 1995*.

Courses Taught: Evolution of the Short Story; Narrative and the Making of Meaning; Intention and Design; Constructing the World; Teaching Creative Writing; Composing and Revising; Style in Fiction; Special Topic: Point of View; Narrating Nonfiction; Major Project II; Short Fiction and Long Fiction Workshops.

Lowell Cohn. Ph.D. in Literature, Stanford University. Leverhulme Fellowship for study in England. Sports Columnist for the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*. Sports columnist of the year in the San Francisco Bay Area 1996, 2002, 2005. Author of nonfiction *Rough Magic: Bill Walsh's Return to Stanford Football* (1994). Courses Taught: Major Project I and II; Nonfiction Workshop.

Nina Schuyler. MFA in Creative Writing, San Francisco State University. Mark Linenthal Award for Poetry. Author of novels *The Painting* (2004), finalist for the Northern California Book Award; and *The Translator* (2014), winner of the 2014 Next Generation Indie Book Award. Published in *Zyzyva*, *Oxygen*, *Transfer*, and *Newsday*. Courses Taught: Style in Fiction; Long Fiction Workshop.

Karl Soehnlein. MFA in Creative Writing, San Francisco State University. Henfield/Transatlantic Review Prize for Short Fiction; multiple fellowships from Djerassi Resident Artists Program. Author of novels *The World of Normal Boys* (2000), Lambda Literary Award for Gay Men's Fiction; *You Can Say You Knew Me When* (2005) and *Robin and Ruby* (2010). Published in *7x7 Magazine*, *San Francisco Magazine*, *Village Voice* and *Salon.com*. Courses Taught: The First Person; Design of the Modern Novel; Architecture of Prose; Major Project I and II; Short Fiction and Long Fiction Workshops.

#### *Emeritus Faculty*

Aaron Shurin. MA in Poetics, New College of California. Gerbode Poetry Award; two Gertrude Stein Awards; fellowships from California Arts Council and National Endowment for the Arts; two San Francisco Arts Commission grants in creative nonfiction. Author of poetry books *A's Dream* (1989), *Into Distances* (1993), *The Paradise of Forms: Selected Poems* (1999), *A Door* (2000), *Involuntary Lyrics* (2005), and *Citizen* (2012) and the nonfiction collections *Unbound: A Book of AIDS* (1997) and *King of Shadows* (2008). Published in *The Norton Anthology of Postmodern American Poetry*, *Best Gay Stories* 2008 and 2009, *New American Writing* and *Zyzyva*. Courses Taught: Prosody: The Meaning of Form; American Poetry and Poetics; Poetry International; Creative Elements of Nonfiction; Major Project I and II; Poetry, Nonfiction, and Fiction Workshops

#### *Recent Part-Time Faculty*

In general, the directors have tried to establish and sustain a core faculty of full-time and part-time (PHP) instructors, to build a sense of program unity, to offer students a sense of continuity, and to utilize the faculty as an ongoing creative resource. We would not be

able to offer the diversity of courses to our students without their contribution. Our part-time faculty enrich the conversation at the core of this program by bringing a wealth of professional and artistic experience to their teaching of workshops and seminars. They are all published writers with strong teaching backgrounds. Recent part-time faculty include:

Norma Cole. MA in French Language and Literature, University of Toronto. Gerbode Poetry Prize, Fund for Poetry grant, Gertrude Stein Award. Author of the poetry collections *Mars* (1994), *Contrafact* (1996), *Moira* (1996), *Spinoza in Her Youth* (2002), the CD *Scout* (2005), and numerous translations from the French.

Jasmin Darznik. MFA in Fiction, Bennington College. PhD in Literature, Princeton University. Author of the memoir *The Good Daughter* (2011). Published in *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Washington Post*, *San Francisco Chronicle*.

John Isles. MFA in Poetry, University of Iowa. Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Author of poetry collections *Ark* (2003) and *Inverse Sky* (2008), finalist for the California Book Award. Published in *American Letters & Commentary*, *Boston Review*, *Denver Quarterly* and *Los Angeles Review*.

Joshua Mohr. MFA in Fiction, San Francisco State University. Author of the novels *Some Things that Meant the World to Me* (2009), *Termite Parade* (2010), *Damascus* (2011) and *Fight Song* (2013). Published in *Gulf Coast*, *Zyzzyva*, *Cimarron Review*, and *Canteen*.

Porter Shreve. MFA in Fiction, University of Michigan. Author of the novels *The Obituary Writer* (2000), *Drives Like a Dream* (2006), *When the White House Was Ours* (2008) and *The End of the Book* (2014). Published in *Witness*, *Salon*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Boston Globe*.

Eleni Stecopoulos. MFA in Poetry, University of Virginia. PhD in English, SUNY-Buffalo. Author of *Armies of Compassion* (2010), *Daphnephoria* (2012), and *Visceral Poetics* (forthcoming, 2015). Also published in *Harriet* (The Poetry Foundation), *ecopoetics*, *XCP: Cross-Cultural Poetics*, and *Harvard Review*.

### *Thesis I and II Instructors*

The program draws on part-time instructors to teach some of the Thesis I courses and, previously, Thesis II in the summer (Thesis II is now taught only in the fall and mostly taught by full-time and PHP faculty). These thesis instructors are all published writers who work one-on-one with students. Recent instructors include the following writers:

Stephen Beachy (PHP faculty), David Booth, Kate Brady (full-time faculty), Lewis Buzbee (PHP faculty), Lowell Cohn (PHP faculty), Norma Cole (part-time faculty), Michael Cross, Cheryl Dumesnil, CJ Evans, Lisa Harper, Maria Hummel, John Isles

(part-time faculty), Kathryn Ma, Joshua Mohr (part-time faculty), Laura Moriarty, Kate Moses, Beth Nguyen (full-time faculty), Lori Ostlund, Thomas Peele, Brittany Perham, Dean Rader, Elizabeth Rosner, Nina Schuyler (PHP faculty), Shanti Sekaran, Porter Shreve (part-time faculty), Bruce Snider (full-time faculty), Karl Soehnlein (PHP faculty), Jane Anne Staw, Shimon Tanaka, Brian Teare, Kirstin Valdez-Quade.

## **V. Departmental Governance**

The academic director and the other full-time MFA faculty members are responsible for departmental governance. The Administrative Director is not involved in governance. There is a faculty coordinator for each genre track, currently Kate Brady in fiction and Dave Madden in nonfiction; at present, D. A. Powell is unable to serve as poetry coordinator, although he continues to be involved in course advising and admissions. The role of the genre coordinators is to consult with the academic director on staffing and recruiting faculty in their respective genres, chair curriculum committees in their genres, and be responsible for evaluating curriculum in the genre and making any recommendations for change.

The full-time MFA faculty members are the voting members of the program and only they can change program policies. The full-time MFA faculty members meet several times a year to discuss curriculum, admissions, advising, assessment, and related matters.

Because the program also includes instructors from the English Department, a Steering Committee, consisting of MFA and English creative writing professors, was formed to foster collaboration and collegiality between the two programs. This group meets at least once a semester to discuss matters such as the Lone Mountain reading series, teaching assistantships, and student issues.

Additionally, a general faculty meeting, to which all PHP and part-time instructors are also invited, is held each semester. Curricular and departmental issues are covered in these meetings, which are a way to gather input from all instructors. While the number of formal faculty meetings is limited because of the part-time status of many faculty, the Academic Director meets informally with part-timers to confer about such matters as syllabi, course development, student behavior, events, and program vision. Part-time instructors have been encouraged to develop new ideas for courses and events, and many have.

The program's bylaws are included in Appendix F.

## **VI. Students**

The program seeks applicants who show promise as writers and also demonstrate readiness to be active participants in an arts program housed within and conversant with an academic community. Our goal is to provide training in the craft of writing as well as

broadening students' understanding of the role and history of contemporary literature. Our mission is to work with students of demonstrated purpose of vision, whether they are advanced in their writing skills or at an early stage in defining their voice. We stay receptive in our admissions to students whose writing may need more attention because their mechanical skills lack the kind of polish one develops in traditional literary studies, but who nonetheless bring with them a combination of life experience, urgency of subject and/or a feeling of newness—a spark—in their use of language.

In the admissions process, we give primary weight to the writing sample, but we also factor in the students' statements of purpose, because those documents reveal seriousness of purpose, receptivity to feedback, and capacity to work both individually and collectively within a structured academic environment, all of which are the prerequisites to a successful encounter with the art of writing, culminating in the production of a meaningful creative thesis. In response to the last review, we have worked to streamline the application process so that we can grow our applicant pool and identify strong candidates for the MFA degree.

The majority of our students are on the fiction track, averaging 18 students per year (2007-present). The average number of nonfiction students is 8. The average number of poetry students is 5.

The program's core student population has traditionally been working adults with daytime jobs rather than younger students with night jobs, but that has shifted in the past few years. The program is increasingly drawing more recent college graduates, who are often juggling one or more sources of income in order to pay tuition and to afford housing in the Bay Area.

Because of the relatively expensive cost of living in San Francisco and the vicinity, graduate students often live far from campus and commute, while holding down jobs and other responsibilities (home, family, etc.) The MFA program's courses are offered only on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, to concentrate the amount of time that the students have to spend on campus and to allow them the flexibility of a free daytime schedule. This limits other pedagogical opportunities—panels, readings, author visits, etc must be scheduled in ways that are conducive to evening study, and this eats into classroom time. Some students prefer the concentrated programming; others welcome additional events during the daytime or on other evenings besides the Tuesdays and Wednesdays. But of course we also must factor in the part-time faculty, many of whom are also working other jobs. Many of the faculty in the MFA program continue to feel that our scheduling provides the best opportunity for working students to succeed; others have been open to the possibility of afternoon courses or courses offered on Thursdays or other days of the week. Practically speaking, the TAships offered by the English Department provide a modicum of financial relief for working students but also require students to come to campus much more often than the two evenings a week during which they attend class.

The program has also historically suited candidates who prefer a writing community that is committed to nurturing and support and that discourages competitiveness. At the same

time, the program tries to instill in students the necessary rigor of writing and revising toward a finished thesis. Our students have gone on to publish books and many works in journals and magazines. A list of some of these student accomplishments is included in Appendix G.

A great strength of the program is its welcoming intellectual and social climate. Students seem to feel comfortable with their peers and instructors, and they do flourish in this respectful environment. Since the last review, the program has moved from Lone Mountain to lower campus, and the new facilities have allowed for students and faculty to feel more connected to the rest of the institution. The social atmosphere is friendly; students typically congregate in the atrium of Kalmanovitz Hall after classes end and often leave campus together for additional conversation. The Lone Mountain Reading Series takes place on class nights so that the entire program can participate. There have been faculty who expressed a desire to have the reading series on a different night, so that it doesn't come with a mandate of attendance, but for the present we have not arrived at any alternative that meets everyone's needs.

Fall semester begins with a reception for new and returning students, and the workshops jointly celebrate the end of every semester at a nearby location, usually a bar. Graduating students give a well-attended annual reading at which we celebrate their completion of their coursework and theses. Additionally, an annual faculty reading presents work by faculty members, an important way to convey to students that we also struggle and take risks in sharing our work. In a twice-monthly event entitled WordNight, organized by the English Department, graduate and undergraduate creative writing students read from their work together at a local coffeehouse, and these events have been extremely popular in recent years.

In addition to publishing an online journal, *Switchback*, students generate many of their own social opportunities and rituals, organizing group readings and having social gatherings, by tradition, after every Wednesday evening class. Although students have ample opportunities to offer informal feedback to the faculty and directors, they are not represented on any program committees. In the past, this has partially been due to the demands of work and classes, but it would be good to check in with students and hear how they might wish to see the program grow and change.

The need for scholarships is ongoing in all parts of the program. Since the last review, our admissions process has changed significantly: students are now admitted into a genre—poetry, fiction, or nonfiction—whereas previously they were admitted into any and all genres without specialization. Poetry students are traditionally impacted the most by economic hardships, and we saw a noticeable boost in applications when we began to offer the Lawrence Ferlinghetti Fellowship in Poetry. Sadly, many of the other highly-ranked students, once accepted, decline the offer of admission after learning they haven't been offered the fellowship. The possibility of financial assistance via TAships, fellowships and scholarships is crucial to many of our students, and an increase in funding would allow us to admit more of our highest ranked applicants. The better the quality of the students, the better the possibility of attracting students of quality.

In addition to the Ferlinghetti Fellowship for a poet, nearly half of the admitted students are offered partial merit fellowships to offset the cost of tuition. Once in the program, students may apply for teaching assistantships, mostly within the English Department; eight to fourteen are typically available each semester. As of 2014 and continuing for five years, one Zivic Fellowship in the amount of \$5,000 is awarded annually to a first-year prose writer who demonstrates financial need. Students in their final semester may apply for a Post-Graduate Fellowship, offered once each semester of the following year; the recipient teaches his/her their own section of Introduction to Creative Writing for Non-English Majors in the English Department.

Recruitment, enrollment, and retention have become an increasing challenge, given the cost of tuition and the high cost of living in the San Francisco area. Though the total tuition cost of the MFA program (as of 2014 it is \$39,897) is less than or equivalent to other non-state school MFA programs in the area (Mills College; St. Mary's; California College of the Arts), we have not been able to increase the amount of fellowship money available, and we have seen housing and cost of living prices climb steeply. Typically, of the 30 to 40 students per year who accept a place in the program, three or four withdraw or decide not to matriculate before the start of the fall semester. Over the course of the program, two or three more students might withdraw from the program for a variety of reasons, usually a combination of personal and financial factors. We foresee enrollment and retention numbers becoming a more significant concern, mostly due to the limited fellowships we are currently able to offer, the high cost of housing in the San Francisco area, and the difficulty students experience in securing a place to live. Ideally, we would like to be able to increase our fellowship funding and provide some on-campus student housing.

The student population has also shifted over the years. While the program continues to draw applicants who are already living and/or working full-time in the Bay Area, in recent years more students are applying directly or recently from undergraduate schools from around the country. For these students, housing and cost of living become even greater factors. In 2014, almost every applicant who turned down a fellowship offer cited financial concerns as the main reason, and almost all chose a different MFA program that offered better funding.

## **VII. Staff**

The program is overseen by both an Academic Director, who is a full-time faculty member, and an Administrative Director, who is a staff member. The duties of the Administrative Director include overseeing admissions processes, recruitment, and student registration; managing the marketing plan and program budget; updating the website, program guidelines and publications, and outreach materials; organizing program events and course scheduling; supervising support staff and all office operations; directing and facilitating relations with students, faculty, and internal university

constituencies; and working in collaboration with the academic director to provide assistance to faculty.

Since 2008, Micah Ballard has been the Administrative Director. He has been vital to the program and also has a major role in recruiting students and talking with applicants during admission season. The balance of the Administrative and Academic Directorships, recommended in our last program review, has served the program well.

The program has one assistant, Elizabeth Iversen, who reports to the Administrative and Academic Directors. The tasks of the program assistant include managing paperwork, including student forms and evaluations; managing all correspondence with students and alumni; maintaining the program's Facebook and Twitter pages; assisting the directors and faculty; and being the receptionist and first point of contact for students, faculty, and visitors. Liz also oversees the undergraduate student assistant who works part-time in the office.

Ballard and Iversen (and the previous program assistant Lynn Eastman, who retired in June 2014) have been exceptionally organized, and their work has been key in ensuring that the program runs smoothly.

### **VIII. Diversity and Internationalization**

Of the 29 students who matriculated to the program this year, 3 percent are African-American, 7 percent are Asian American, 10 percent are Hispanic or Latino, and 62 percent are white (18 percent opted not to disclose race or ethnicity). Underrepresented groups, then, make up 38 percent of this year's cohort, which is an increase from last year's ratio of 30 percent underrepresented. Over the last six years, we've averaged about 40 percent.

Racial/ethnic breakdowns of the faculty show less diversity than in our student body: our 2 full professors are white; our 3 associate professors are Asian American, white, and undisclosed; and our 3 assistant professors are white. Of 17 current active members of the part-time faculty, 1 is Native American, 13 are white, and 4 did not disclose. Underrepresented groups, then, make up just 10 percent of the full- and part-time faculty. Our staff of 3 is 33 percent white and 66 percent mixed/other ethnicity.

It would be desirable to have a faculty that is more diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality. Counting full-time MFA and English faculty, along with PHP and our professor emeritus, we have 4 female and 9 male faculty teaching the bulk of our courses. That distribution should be balanced with more female faculty. No member of the faculty identifies as trans or genderqueer; it would be desirable to attract such faculty given the diverse culture of the University and the city of San Francisco.

Aesthetic variety is extremely rich and a significant program highlight, balancing traditional and experimental styles and modes of writing and teaching. Care is taken in



selecting texts that offer a diverse array of voices, and workshop instructors are encouraged not to privilege one culture's perspective over another's when it comes to discussing student work.

That said, racial diversity in the program could be stronger. The program's ethnic composition is not reflective of society, the university as a whole, or the student body. Our preferred-hiring-pool (PHP) faculty is exclusively white. PHP faculty must be offered the opportunity to teach one course a semester, which limits our ability to offer a diversity of instruction. However, even if we could open up more courses to culturally diverse part-time instructors, it might be difficult to attract them when only an occasional course, paid at a part-time rate, is available.

We'd like to receive direct help from the administration in combating this imbalance by creating lines for visiting faculty, specifically more female faculty, transgender faculty and faculty of color. Last year while one of our full-time faculty was on unpaid leave, we were able to use that line for a visitor, and we brought noted African-American poet Thomas Sayers Ellis for a one-year appointment. The previous year we were able to bring Daniel Alarcón for one semester. These kinds of visits could greatly enrich our program. Some redress is offered currently by the Lone Mountain Reading series, which gives us an opportunity to bring socially and culturally diverse writers into the Program, albeit temporarily; at the same time, the small budget for the reading series is limiting. We need a strong commitment from the university to help us reach out and bring a diverse faculty to campus.

Thesis instruction also offers us a chance at greater ethnic diversity, though not diversity that's visible to applicants and the greater community. We are able to include visiting writers on our Web site and in other promotional materials—thus facilitating our efforts to recruit members of underrepresented groups—but it certainly doesn't equal having diverse instructors on the permanent roster.

From 2007-2010, Kate Brady served as a program liaison for the VONA (Voices of Our Nation) workshops for writers of color, with the MFA program co-sponsoring VONA events for two weeks every summer and VONA workshops at the university. When construction began on the university's new science building in 2010-11, space was no longer provided for non-USF programs during the summer, ending a relationship that was attracting VONA students as MFA applicants and bringing stellar writer-teachers to campus for widely attended public readings. San Francisco offers a richly diverse literary community, and we can strengthen the program by active participation in this larger community.

The need to increase diversity is ongoing and may require additional financial resources, primarily in the form of scholarship funding, from the University in order to achieve these goals. While diversity can be achieved not only through direct recruitment efforts but through continued and genuine participation in the Bay Area's culturally rich literary community, one clear thing that the University can do to enhance the diversity of our program would be to find fellowship money for students of color. [DiverseEducation.com](http://DiverseEducation.com)

ranked the University as number one on its 2013 list of non-historically black colleges and universities that have excellent programs for minority students, as we proudly advertise on our Web site, but that's not a diversity you'll find in our program. If the University is committed to diversity and social justice, finding specific funding for admitted students from underrepresented groups is one clear way to increase diversity.

## **IX. Technology and Informational Resources**

Students and faculty in the program use available campus technology to gain access to email, general University information (on the USF web site), and Canvas—a site that houses MFA course syllabi, information about registration and enrollment, and the documents needed for thesis advising, preparation, and completion. Communication with students also happens through emails from the program assistant and the directors, and the program's Facebook page, though many students and faculty members aren't on Facebook and so this isn't a communication channel we can rely on.

The classrooms in Kalmanovitz and Cowell are equipped with computers and projectors, making it easy to incorporate digital and video technologies into workshops and seminars. However, none of the classes on campus have document cameras, which are the most useful way to share in-class writing, allowing the instructor to project the work on the screen for everyone to read along with the student and refer to in discussion. One current option is to borrow a HoverCam—a portable, desktop digital projector—from our Center for Instruction and Technology, but as there are a limited number of such cameras for the entire University community to share, two or three cameras housed here in the Program office for our instructors would be useful.

When it comes to photocopying and scanning, the program shares machines with other resident departments in Kalmanovitz—as per University policy to cut down on paper and power usage. We do have an in-house 3-in-1 copy/fax/scanner, though this machine can't easily handle larger projects, such as scanning a story or essay. There's also a color printer for in-house design projects, fliers, etc., but it has recurring compatibility issues with our program assistant's and student assistant's computers.

Finally, the student assistant's computer is an older, now-outdated iMac that should be replaced. And because so many of our fliers and other announcements are designed in-house by the student assistant, updated software (such as Adobe's Design Suite) would be extremely useful.

## **X. Facilities**

Currently the program is housed in a suite of five linked offices in Kalmanovitz Hall: a main area for the program assistant that also serves as general program office, mailroom, and library—as well as a desk that serves as the student assistant's work space; one

private office for the administrative director; and three private offices for full-time faculty. The offices provide just enough adequate space. Since MFA students are only on campus Tuesday and Wednesday evening, the need for an open, public area is important: we try to make the main office a place where students can gather and interact with the program assistant on matters of advising, registration, etc.

There is no dedicated office space for the part-time faculty, leaving them to hold office hours or meetings with students in public places like the coffee shop in University Center—a busy, noisy place not conducive to the confidential and focused nature of one-on-one meetings. In the move to Kalmanovitz in 2008, plans were put in place to have a dedicated office in the MFA suite for part-time faculty (who in Fall 2014 teach 70% of all MFA classes), but office space quickly became such a premium university-wide for full-time faculty and staff that this plan didn't come to fruition. For now, part-time faculty who want to meet with students in a quiet space can ask the MFA program assistant to reserve one of the open conference rooms in Kalmanovitz, but only on a case-by-case basis.

Kalmanovitz Hall has a central location on campus. The facility is shared by other academic departments (mostly in the Humanities), with communal kitchenettes and photocopiers scattered around each floor of the building. Given our interests in creating a sense of community among our students—as well as the importance of their remaining in contact with the program office—it's vital for the program to have classes in Kalmanovitz. However, we compete for classroom space with another evening program, Sports Management, which enrolls more students than we do and thus can better fill the building's rather large classrooms. This often leaves a number of our classes to be scheduled in adjacent Cowell Hall.

The creative writing workshop, as it's traditionally taught, calls for an egalitarian, communal space. Many instructors prefer to hold class around a single table. For now, the furniture in Kalmanovitz and Cowell can be arranged in such a fashion, though there have been discussions about converting the loose tables in these halls into individual desks, which would prevent instructors from creating the kinds of spaces our students need. Indeed, each term a few instructors ask to move their classes out of the oversized rooms of Kalmanovitz and into one of its few conference rooms, which provide a much more intimate space for workshops. Classes can't be scheduled in these rooms, however. Reserving them requires an after-the-fact request filed with the director of Events Scheduling, which causes some additional juggling and paperwork for the administrative director and program assistant. It would both save time and be more pedagogically useful if faculty members could be assigned a classroom space most fitting to their needs.

## **XI. Conclusions**

Following the last review in 2007, significant changes were made to enhance and strengthen the program. All the key recommendations of the program reviewers were implemented. Two full-time, tenure-track faculty members were hired in the MFA

program, and full-time creative writing faculty in the English Department began teaching in the MFA program on a rotating basis.

Other strengths of the program include:

- small classes and personal attention
- a highly qualified and dedicated core faculty who emphasize teaching as a central value
- increased rigor in the curriculum
- a curriculum that allows students to work in more than one genre
- a curriculum that includes attention to professional development
- a structure that allows working adults to successfully complete the program
- an increase in diversity among students
- the balance between the Academic Directorship and the Administrative Directorship
- an extremely appealing physical location and convenient and centralized environment

Weaknesses of the program include:

- too few full-time faculty
- cost of tuition, cost of living, lack of student housing, and insufficient fellowship money
- lack of ethnic diversity among faculty
- while the number of nonfiction students has increased, the number of poetry students and applicants has decreased
- while students have a good sense of community, it could be stronger

## **XII. Comprehensive Plan for the Future**

The program is at an ideal size, large enough to offer a varied curriculum and still small enough to feel like a real community. It functions well as an independent program, with the particular strength that all courses are taught by writers, and students take all their classes with fellow MFA students. With its curriculum of workshop courses paired with literature seminars, it occupies a distinctive niche in an increasingly competitive environment.

To continue to be a competitive program and to enhance our ability to attract the best students, we need some specific additional resources from the university. The most significant way is through increased fellowship funds to offer students. Additionally, the University's Office of Giving could launch a project to raise funds specifically for the MFA program for scholarships and fellowships. The amount of fellowship funds we have been able to offer has been fairly static for the past seven years; the program would benefit significantly from an increase in this amount. In order for us to recruit strong applicants, we need to be able to offer more merit fellowships and substantial teaching assistantships.

Given the cost of living in the Bay Area, and the increasing difficulty students have experienced in finding places to live, it would be ideal if we could secure some on-

campus student housing. While graduate students are able to apply for a limited number of available rooms in student housing, most of the housing is reserved for undergraduates. MFA applicants and accepted students often ask about this issue, and it would be wonderful if we could guarantee even five housing spots for MFA students.

Because the program serves from 60 to 67 students, it would be ideal to have more full-time faculty members. This would redistribute the administrative workload among a larger number of full-time faculty, help enhance the program's reputation, and ideally also help us diversify our faculty. A position might also be designed for a visiting writer for a set period of time.

In terms of governance, the program needs to consider the role of the Steering Committee and to what degree English creative writing faculty are involved in the MFA program. In terms of curriculum, the full-time faculty has been reconsidering the protocol for thesis approval. After students complete Thesis I and Thesis II, each final thesis is read and approved by a final reader, a full-time MFA or English creative writing faculty member. There has been some debate over the need to provide a second reader for each thesis.

The program also needs to consider additional ways to enhance a sense of community within the program. Because MFA students tend to gather around program events and readings, the program would benefit significantly by having a larger budget for the Lone Mountain Reading Series. At present, the limited budget allows us to offer only a small honorarium to no more than three writers per academic year; for many writers who are invited, the cost of travel and lodging render the honorarium insufficient. An increased budget for the reading series would allow us to bring to campus prominent writers who can also engage the rest of the university and community. It would also ensure the program's ability to host receptions after each event, which are key to community-building and morale.

In fall 2014, the program launched an all-day writing retreat for MFA students. The retreat takes place in a classroom and provides breakfast and lunch to fifteen students who commit to staying and writing from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. We would like to provide at least one retreat per semester, plus another retreat for second-year students in the summer as they work on their theses. We need additional funds from the university in order to offer these valuable spaces for writing, community, and support to our students.

With its unique structure, dedicated core faculty, growing reputation, and ever-increasing student achievements, the Program is poised to continue into the future with renewed enthusiasm.

## **Appendices**

A. 2 ½ Year Class Schedule

B. Curriculum Map

- C. Learning Goals, Outcomes, and Rubrics
- D. Rubrics for Specific Assessment Methods
- E. Student Learning Assurance Plan
- F. MFA Program Bylaws
- G. Student Achievements