

Assessment Report AY 2022-2023

MFA in Writing Program

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MFA Mission Statement:

In its commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion, the MFA in Writing Program seeks to give writers from any background the skills, compassion, and sense of justice to engage in dialogue with the ever-changing world.

PLOs:

Students will:

- Articulate how linguistic, formal, and aesthetic choices create literary effects on the page
- Demonstrate an understanding of the range of literary aesthetics, trends, and sensibilities-nationally and globally, past and present-as well as the political ramifications of craft choices
- Practice critical analysis of their own writing as a process, implementing drafting and revision plans for their creative projects
- Cultivate professional practices that engage in the greater literary community and form a sustained writing life

Curricular Map: (See attached.)

Assessment Schedule since APR:

2016: PLO 1

2017: PLO 4

2018: PLO 3

2019: PLO 2

2020: Reflections Document on Remote Learning

2021: Year of Reflection, Part 1

2022: Year of Reflection, Part 2

2023: PLO 1 (revised)

2024: PLO 4 (revised)

2025: PLO 3 (revised)

2026: PLO 2 (revised)

Assessment Methodology

To assess student learning of PLO 1, we looked for student work products where they specifically wrote about how formal and aesthetic choices created literary effects, and we found a useful sample in the final papers from the Style in Fiction seminar taught in Fall 2022. The instructor forwarded these 14 papers to our program assistant, who anonymized them by converting all names to letters (e.g. Student H). These papers then got sent to the full-time faculty, who were also sent an assessment rubric (attached) on how to score the papers, looking for how well they demonstrated that students had achieved PLO 1.

Results of the Assessment:

With 14 papers assessed by 3 faculty, we generated 42 total scores. Here's how those were distributed:

Score	Total No. of Scores	Percentage of Total
4 - Excellent	13	31%
3 - Adequate	16	38%
2 - Fair	9	21%
1 - Poor	4	10%

Though **69 percent of the scores were favorable**, the individual and average scores show a more nuanced picture:

STUDENT	FACULTY 1 SCORE	FACULTY 2 SCORE	FACULTY 3 SCORE	AVERAGES
A	3	1	3	2.33
B	3	2	2	2.33
C	4	4	4	4.00
D	3	3	3	3.00
E	4	4	3	3.67
F	2	1	3	2.00
G	4	2	3	3.00
H	3	1	2	2.00
I	3	3	2	2.67
J	2	2	3	2.33
K	1	4	4	3.00
L	4	3	3	3.33
M	4	4	4	4.00
N	4	2	3	3.00
overall avg				2.90

From these results, 8 out of 14 students averaged satisfactory scores (i.e., ≤ 3.0), which means that **57 percent of students** were able to 'articulate how linguistic, formal, and aesthetic choices create literary effects on the page.' However, the overall average score of 2.9 indicates that students collectively are coming up a little short in this learning outcome.

Findings & Takeaways:

There are some issues around the student work products that are worth noting. One is that this was one paper in one course in one genre, taught by a visiting professor, so while it does capture developed student learning in that course (this was the 3rd and final craft paper they were assigned), it doesn't necessarily illustrate student learning across the MFA program. However,

there are few if any work products that are consistent across all students in all courses in all genres, and with Fiction comprising just over 50 percent of every cohort, we felt this was as good a sample source as we could find.

And it's worth restating that, from this sample source, we found that a majority of students were able to demonstrate they'd learned outcome 1.

Questions arose during our assessment regarding the purpose and audience for craft papers. For one, as much as we teach the practice of close reading, it's unclear when and how we teach our incoming students how to write about writing. Other programs might have Research Methods or Writing for the Discipline courses, but any instruction MFA students get on this kind of writing happens scattershot in individual seminars (if at all).

The other question was to what end we assign craft papers in graduate creative writing courses. We take our job in the MFA in Writing program to be the training of future writers, not future academics. While professional writers do write analytically about craft, this takes the form of craft essays in magazines and trade journals, which always carry some aspect of the pedagogical for their readers—i.e., writers and people looking to learn how to improve their writing. The other form that analytical writing about writing takes in our field is the professional book review, seen in places as varied as the *New York Times Book Review* and *New York Review of Books* to online forums like the *LA Review of Books* and *Lithub*.

Whether it's in these craft essays or book reviews, the main work of the writer is to show the effects created by a book's author, which fits right in line with our PLO 1. But a scan over the reading lists of our seminars from the last couple of years indicates that few if any of our students are reading or studying these kinds of professional texts.

In short, while we are modeling the kinds of creative works we hope our students produce, we are not modeling the kinds of analytical works we're requiring them to produce to demonstrate their learning.

Next Steps / Closing the Loop:

These results and findings will be shared with the full MFA faculty at our next meeting in Spring 2024, to prompt a discussion about how we can (a) better address PLO 1 in our course design and teaching, and (b) find assignments or projects that might better assess the PLO on our end, while also providing students with the kinds of work products that better suit our field, per the questions on reviews and craft essays above.

From that discussion, we'll update the MFA Faculty Handbook so that returning and new faculty get a sense of how best to assess student learning within their own courses.

	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3	PLO4
MFA in Writing Curricular map, to start Fall 2022	articulate how linguistic, formal, and aesthetic choices create literary effects on the page.	demonstrate an understanding of the range of literary aesthetics, trends, and sensibilities—nationally and globally, past and present—as well as the political ramifications of craft choices.	practice critical analysis of their own writing as a process, implementing drafting and revision plans for their creative projects.	cultivate professional practices that engage in the greater literary community and form a sustained writing life.
Courses or Program Requirement				
602: Fiction Workshop	M		D	D
605: Foundations of Writing	I	I		I
612: Short Fiction Workshop	M		D	D
622: Long Fiction Workshop	M		D	D
632: Nonfiction Workshop	M		D	D
642: Poetry Workshop	M		D	D
645: Developments in Writing	M	M		
650: Word for Word	M	M		
651: Developments in the Novel	M	M		M
653: Research for Writers	M	M	D	
654 Contemporary American Poetry	M	M		
655: Forms of Writing	M	M		
661: Evolution of the Short Story	M	M		
662: Contemporary Experiments in Fiction	M	M		
664: Poetry International	M	M		M
665: Topics in Writing	M	M		M
670: Intention & Design in Prose	M	M		
671: Techniques in Long Fiction	M	M		
672: The Craft of Short Fiction	M	M		
673: Truth, Ethics & Memory	M	M		M
674: Prosody	M	M		
675: Teaching Creative Writing			D	M
680: Style in Fiction	M	M		
681: Blurred Boundaries	M	M		
682: Nonfiction Theory & Technique	M	M		
683: The History of Nonfiction	M	M		
684: Contemporary Experiments in Nonfiction	M	M		
685: Professional Development				M
686: Poetics	M	M		
688: Finding Form	M	M		
689: Thesis I	D		D	
690: Special Topics	M	M		M
692: Contemporary Global Fiction	M	M		M
699: Thesis II	M		M	
	Key:			
	I = Introductory			
	D = Developing			
	M = Mastery			

2023 Assessment Rubric
MFA in Writing Program

Student Work Samples: Craft Papers from Style in Fiction seminar, Fall 2022

PLO #1: Students will articulate how linguistic, formal, and aesthetic choices create literary effects on the page.

4	Paper demonstrates excellent use of formal and aesthetic terminology to connect textual choices to literary effects. Specific and ample citing of the text at hand is present. Student draws broader insights from their textual analysis that shows applicability to their own writing.
3	Paper shows adequate use of terminology, with some understanding of how form and language create literary effects. The text being analyzed is referred to or paraphrased. Student is connecting textual choice to literary effects but not drawing broader, applicable insights.
2	Paper demonstrates a loose but unclear understanding of literary terms and does not confidently connect textual choices to their artistic effects. Few if any broader insights are found.
1	Paper shows no or even incorrect understanding of how textual choices create literary effects. Student draws no insights from their analysis.