AY 20–21 Annual Assessment Report
MFA in Writing Graduate Program

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Mission Statement (unchanged)
In its commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusivity, 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.

MFA Program Learning Outcomes (unchanged)
1. Students will demonstrate a working knowledge of the fundamentals of literary composition and craft.
2. Students will be able to read as writers, applying a critical craft vocabulary as they analyze the ways in which literary meaning is developed in the works of published authors.
3. Using a critical craft vocabulary, students will be able to evaluate and analyze the techniques and intentions of developmental drafts, including their own, and to participate in constructive critical discussion of works in progress.
4. Students are prepared for participation in the public life of literature, which may include locating their own work in the context of contemporary professional practice, acquiring skills for writing-related professions, and participating in diverse literary communities.

MFA Curricular Map (unchanged)
(see attached)

Assessment Schedule since last APR (in 2015)
2016: PLO 1
2017: PLO 4
2018: PLO 3
2019: PLO 2
2020: Reflections Document on Remote Learning

2021: Year of Reflection
Now that we've assessed each of our four PLOs, we followed USF's guidelines for alternative assessment to conduct a year of reflection over our assessment practices, with the key aim being to look critically at our PLOs to see whether they (a) fit our mission statement, which has been overhauled since our last program review, and (b) fit with a recent a shift in the field of creative writing away from top-down competency demonstration regarding "craft" and toward a more equitable, student-centered approach to learning and community engagement.

Assessment Methods (indirect)
1. Student Entrance Surveys: To get a sense of what our students are coming to the Program to learn, we gathered data from 13 entrance surveys.

2. <u>Faculty Input</u>: We spent time in faculty meetings talking about PLOs and CLOs, to get a sense of (a) how faculty use these in their own assessments of student learning, and (b) whether they suit our needs give our changing curriculum and increasingly diverse student body.
3. <u>Student Exit Surveys</u> (pending): We will send exit surveys in December to our 33 graduating students to assess what they feel they learned in their time in the program—or didn't, as it may happen.

Results & Findings
1. <u>Student Entrance Surveys</u>:
    a. When asked about their primary goals for entering the Program, **almost as many students ranked "Develop my writing process" as Very Important (92%) as did "Improve my writing product (100%)**. However, nothing in the current PLOs talks about critical awareness and development of the writing process. The PLOs are product-centered, thus leaving out a crucial part of student learning.
    b. 77 percent of respondents said that forming connections to the Bay Area literary community was Very Important to them. (Just 1 respondent said this was Of Little Importance.) This result connects with our current PLO 4 (re "the public life of literature"), but more so this demonstrates that **students are looking to connect with the local community**, which is more interpersonal than what PLO 4 promises, and asks more ongoing engagement that students seem eager to be involved in.
    c. Only 2 respondents (15%) mentioned our mission among the reasons they chose to enroll in our program. Rather than indicate a need to revise our mission to better suit student expectations, we're reading this datum as a **need to be more active in promoting the message of our mission** (which distinguishes us among all other MFA programs in the Bay Area) in our marketing materials, and in **centering the mission more in our curriculum and PLOs**.
2. <u>Faculty Input</u>:
    a. Overall, **faculty felt confused and uninspired by the current PLOs** (which were drafted by faculty members who have long since left the Program). We all agreed the language was vague and institutional (unbefitting the artistic and communal spirit of our program). Three people mentioned in our meeting how much overlap there is among them—especially in the use of the outmoded term "critical craft vocabulary", and how PLO 3 seems the same as PLO 1, just applied to draft manuscripts.
    b. Similarly, faculty felt confused by the CLOs. Many felt a similar sense of overlap and redundancy among our 9 CLOs, and admitted to never being sure which CLOs applied to which courses. Overall, the sense was that **CLOs were seen as a syllabus requirement** more than a means for assessing our students' learning.
    c. One faculty member said that the PLOs read more like descriptions of the work our students do in classes, rather than their actual intended purpose—i.e., as demonstrable actions or abilities upon completion of the program. We resolved to **start thinking of PLOs from the viewpoint of "What do we hope our students will have learned by graduation?"** rather than "What do we plan to teach our

students?" The latter looks at our own (sometimes idiosyncratic) practices and values, whereas the former looks at student growth and development.

    d. Another faculty member pointed out that there is **nothing in the PLOs that talks about social justice, or preparing our students to take on the challenges of the global present** (i.e., injustice, inequality, climate crises, etc.). In other words, there was a disconnect between our mission statement and what we aim to teach our students.

3. <u>Student Exit Surveys</u>
    a. Pending, January 2022.

Closing the Loop

From the above findings and takeaways, which were shared in our most recent faculty meeting, we resolved to begin revising our PLOs in FY 21–22. That process will involve a collaborative Google doc where full- and part-time faculty can share their thoughts and practices when it comes to learning outcomes. The MFA Faculty Committee will take these data, as well as the pending data from Student Exit Surveys, and use them write 3 or 4 new PLOs, which will then be shared with faculty for discussion in our Spring faculty meeting.

Given the confusions around CLOs, we also plan to adopt the practice of encouraging faculty to design their own CLOs conducive to their personal aims as teachers. To ensure consistency of learning, the Program will write CLOs for each course, as we undergo a curriculum overhaul (we're moving from 3-unit to 4-unit courses), while leaving room for instructors to design CLOs that suit their individual sections. To aid in this, we plan to hold a learning outcomes workshop for faculty over summer 2022.