AY 21–22 Annual Assessment Report
MFA in Writing Graduate Program

Coordinator
Dave Madden, Academic Director, dmadden@usfca.edu

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

Students will...
1. articulate how linguistic, formal, and aesthetic choices create literary effects on the page.
2. 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.
3. practice critical analysis of their own writing as a process, implementing drafting and revision plans for their creative projects.
4. cultivate professional practices that engage in the greater literary community and form a sustained writing life.

MFA Curricular Map
(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, Part 1

2022: Year of Reflection (& Planning), Part 2
After 2021's year of reflection, the MFA faculty voted on revised PLOs in May of 2022. These were originally rejected by the College Curriculum Committee, and the PLOs were revised based on CCC feedback to be as listed above, which were approved by

Dean Fung on Monday 31 October. Upon approval of the new PLOs, the MFA program plans to assess each according to the following schedule:

2023: PLO 1
2024: PLO 4
2025: PLO 3
2026: PLO 2

This order was decided owing to a bit of feedback from the CCC: when it comes to teaching students the professional practices of 'a life of the writer' and in getting them engaged with the greater literary community beyond the campus, very few of our courses actually address that learning outcome. (See Results & Findings below.) As this aspect of MFA student learning features greatly in our marketing materials, we felt it would be good to assess it before our next Academic Program Review in 2025.

Assessment Methods (indirect)
1. <u>Faculty Input</u>:
    a. Our Spring 2021 MFA Faculty Meeting included a 30-minute discussion on revising the PLOs. We asked one another the following three questions to generate ideas:
        i. What's <u>*one*</u> thing every MFA student (regardless of genre) should be able to demonstrate, in terms of what they've learned, upon graduation?
        ii. How would you finish this sentence?: 'To be effective or successful in 2022, an MFA program should teach every student _____.'
        iii. When you think about your dream course to teach, how would that class prepare any student in it for a life/career as a writer? What would its 'takeaway' be?
2. <u>College Curriculum Committee Feedback</u>:
    a. A first draft of the PLOs were submitted to the CCC through Curriculog for qualitative feedback.

Results & Findings
1. <u>Faculty Input</u>:
    a. The discussion generated a lot of points about teaching students how to recognize their own aesthetics, obsessions, and processes. In other words, we wanted students to come out as well-versed in understanding their own work as they are in understanding the work of published authors. This led to PLO 3.

b. We also stressed the importance of students learning the social and political ramifications of their artistic choices—a sharp divergence from the spirit of our previous PLOs, which implied that craft choices are universal, a body of knowledge (like math or physics) that students needed to learn.

2. <u>CCC Feedback</u>
    a. The College Curriculum Committee had some concerns with our PLOs:
        i. It wasn't easy with our original PLOs to distinguish between outcomes (what students are expected to have learned) and offerings (what students do in the program).
        ii. The original PLO 4 (i.e., 'Locating themselves and their art within the contemporary global literary community, students will understand the cultural and political ramifications of aesthetic choices, as well as the professional practices that form a sustained writing life.') was confusing; the committee wondered whether and how this PLO, as written, would be assessed.
        iii. Likewise, it appeared from the curriculum map that a student could complete the program without touching this outcome at all, given that none of the original courses that advanced it were required.
        iv. Furthermore, PLO 4 seemed to include multiple learning outcomes (locating self and art within global literary community; understanding political and cultural ramifications of aesthetic choices; understand professional practices), and the committee suggested disaggregating these to create more clarity.
        v. The original PLO 3 (i.e., 'Students will practice critical analysis of their own writing as a process, implementing drafting and revision plans for individual pieces and a book-length project in the form of the thesis.') included references to specific types of works (individual pieces and book-length thesis project), which didn't seem like learning outcomes so much as pathways towards the learning outcomes.

Closing the Loop

The new PLOs, as well as the CCC feedback, was shared with the MFA Faculty at our fall meeting on Tue 25 Oct 2022. Faculty response was positive. Now that we're a 4-unit program, with every class comprising an extra 4th hour of asynchronous learning, we discussed working program-wide to make this 4th-hour work in our workshop classes directly engage in PLO 4, so that—per the CCC's feedback—every student can achieve this outcome regardless of whether or not they take the seminar courses that focus on it.

Finally, I shared the assessment schedule (above) with the faculty and solicited ideas for what student work products to gather to assess PLO 1. One faculty member has their students pick one element of style and do a written analysis of how that style is being implemented in the text, and what its specific effects are. With a class of 18 students, this seems like a perfect assessment sample. We'll undergo that student work assessment in the 2023 Intersession.

	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			