

MFA in Writing

ASSESSMENT REPORT ACADEMIC YEAR 2017 – 2018

Note: Dear Colleagues: In an effort to produce a more streamlined and less repetitive assessment report format, we are piloting this modified template for the present annual assessment cycle. We are requesting an assessment report that would not exceed eight pages of text. Supporting materials may be appended. We will be soliciting your feedback on the report as we attempt to make it more user-friendly.

Some useful contacts:

1. Prof. Alexandra Amati, FDCD, Arts – adamati@usfca.edu
2. Prof. John Lendvay, FDCD, Sciences – lendvay@usfca.edu
3. Prof. Mark Meritt, FDCD, Humanities – meritt@usfca.edu
4. Prof. Michael Jonas, FDCD, Social Sciences – mrjonas@usfca.edu
5. Prof. Suparna Chakraborty, AD Academic Effectiveness – schakraborty2@usfca.edu
6. Ms. Corie Schwabenland, Academic Data & Assessment Specialist- ceschwabenland@usfca.edu

Academic Effectiveness Annual Assessment Resource Page:

<https://myusf.usfca.edu/arts-sciences/faculty-resources/academic-effectiveness/assessment>

Email to submit the report: assessment_cas@usfca.edu

Important: Please write the name of your program or department in the subject line.

For example: FineArts_Major (if you decide to submit a separate report for major and minor); FineArts_Aggregate (when submitting an aggregate report)

I. LOGISTICS & PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Feedback should be sent to **Dave Madden, Academic Director (dmadden@usfca.edu)**
2. Yes, the faculty changed the mission statement of the Program since October 2017. Our revised mission statement reads: **“The mission of the MFA Program is to give writers at the beginnings of their careers the skills, compassion, and sense of justice to engage in dialogue with the ever-changing world.”**
3. **No changes were made to the program learning outcomes (PLOs)** since the last assessment cycle in October 2017.
4. **Which particular Program Learning Outcome(s) did you assess for the academic year 2017-2018?**
PLO #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.

II. METHODOLOGY

5. **Describe the methodology that you used to assess the PLO(s).**

The Program used 7 feedback letters from Prof. Beth Nguyen’s Spring 2018 fiction workshop. The letters were written by students in the course (with their identifying information removed) in response to a draft written by one of their peers. The function of the feedback letter is to help the peer get a sense of how their work has been read and what choices they might make in revision. For us faculty, the workshop letter is the primary way (after class discussion) that we can gauge whether a student is developing proficiency in PLO #3, specifically the task of evaluating the techniques and intentions of developmental drafts.

A group of the full-time faculty read and assessed the workshop letters according to a holistic rubric of our design. (See attached.) Each faculty member gave each letter a score from 1-4, and those scores were aggregated into a report.

III. RESULTS & MAJOR FINDINGS

6. What are the major takeaways from your assessment exercise?

While we acknowledged that there was room for improvement, the MFA faculty found that students in the sample showed mastery of the outcome. With 7 letters being independently scored by 4 faculty members, we generated 28 total scores. Here's how those were distributed:

Level	Total Number of Scores	Percentage of Scores
4 - Mastery of the outcome	9	32%
3 - Mastery of most parts of the outcome	10	36%
2 - Mastery of only some parts of the outcome	8	26%
1 - No mastery of the outcome	1	4%

Though 68 percent of the scores were favorable, the average scores per student show more work to be done.

Workshop Letter	Faculty A's Scores	Faculty B's Scores	Faculty C's Scores	Faculty D's Scores	Average Score per Letter
A	4	4	4	4	4
B	2	3	3	1	2.25
C	2	2	3	2	2.25
D	3	2	2	3	2.5
E	3	2	3	3	2.75
F	4	4	3	4	3.75
G	4	3	2	4	3.25
Average Score per Faculty	3.14	2.86	2.86	3	2.96

By looking at the average score given by faculty, you can see we were fairly consistent in our assessment despite working individually. Taking this into account, it's illuminating to see that the average scores given to each workshop letter demonstrate that over half of the letters failed to garner a satisfactory grade, showing mastery of most or all parts of the outcome.

IV. CLOSING THE LOOP

7. **Based on your results, what changes/modifications are you planning in order to achieve the desired level of mastery in the assessed learning outcome?**

One question this assessment exercises raises is how do we teach students the practice of, a la PLO #3, evaluating and analyzing the techniques and intentions of developmental drafts using a critical craft vocabulary? That workshops (usually) require letters written to peers about their drafts is something we cover in our First-Year Student Orientation. We include in the New Student Handbook some topics or guidelines students might follow in writing this letter, but we don't include a sample letter they might use as a model. Given that 1 letter in our sample scored a 4 from each faculty member, this letter itself might serve as such a model.

Going forward, we plan to have more conversations with our full- and part-time faculty about how we can devote time in workshop classes to teach students how to apply critical terms to their peers' drafts, and what methods we'd like to individually adopt to evaluate these letters early and later the semester, so as to better gauge student growth and learning.

8. **What were the most important suggestions/feedback from the FDCD on your last assessment report (for academic year 2016-2017, submitted in October 2017)? How did you incorporate or address the suggestion(s) in this report?**

Mark Meritt's suggestion that we condense our mission statement to around 75 words was useful in helping us think about what this mission statement is for and how we might use it to (a) embody the spirit and aims of the Program to better plan our future courses and programming, and (b) talk to new and outside audiences about what makes our Program distinct.

As for more direct suggestions about our assessment practices, we took Dr. Meritt's advice to use a rubric in evaluating student work that "indicate[d] possible levels of achievement (e. g., 'below expectations,' 'meets expectations,' 'beyond expectations')," which led to a more nuanced understanding of student learning.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Assessment Rubric: MFA in Writing Program

4	Letter demonstrates excellent use of formal and aesthetic terminology in talking about the draft's successes and challenges, and shows an expert mix of analytical and descriptive language. The overall response shows a thorough dedication to constructive criticism and provides concrete suggestions for revision that honor the draft's intentions.
3	Letter shows adequate understanding of formal and aesthetic terminology. The language used is mostly analytical and criticism is often constructive. While there are suggestions for revision, they don't always take into consideration the draft's intentions.
2	Letter demonstrates a poor understanding of form or aesthetics and uses a limited craft vocabulary to talk about the draft. The response is light on analysis, and revision suggestions are useful but could use a better awareness of the draft's intentions.
1	Letter demonstrates no clear understanding with form or aesthetics. Language focuses on personal response or reaction, with a dearth of criticism (or the criticism is arbitrary and unconstructive). Feedback shows little understanding of the draft's intentions, with poor, unhelpful suggestions for future revision.