

Department of
CREATIVE WRITING

MFA Handbook
Residential Bilingual MFA Program



UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, EL PASO
500 W. University Ave. EDUCATION BUILDING 900
El Paso, TX 79968

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Introduction

Welcome to the Bilingual MFA in Creative Writing. This handbook is intended to provide you with information that will make it easier to navigate your way through the following three years of study at UTEP. Consult the Contents (page [ii](#)) for the information you are looking for. Some sections have hyperlinks—in blue—which you can click on if you are reading this document on a computer. If the information you are looking for is not in Contents, try the Frequently Asked Questions section (page [33](#)). Finally, if the information you are looking for is not in this handbook, contact the [Director of Graduate Studies](#) at jdepierola@utep.edu. Alternatively, you may contact the program writing to creacionliteraria@utep.edu or creativewriting@utep.edu.

The Creative Writing Department

The Creative Writing Department at UTEP was created to foster intellectual and creative growth for students pursuing an undergraduate major or minor in creative writing, and a MFA in creative writing both on campus and online.

Our Bilingual MFA in Creative Writing is the only one of its kind in the world, and it attracts students—from the Americas and beyond—who want to pursue their development as writers in a uniquely situated university and intellectual community. We understand bilingualism not as a requirement that our students fluently speak both languages, but rather as the co-existence of Spanish and English in the same classroom.

OFFICE

The Creative Writing office is located in the Education Building Room 900. The best way to get to our office is through the side entrance at the corner of Hawthorne St. and University Avenue. In the main office you will find our Chair, Daniel Chacón, and our administrative assistant Carla Gonzalez, as well as a conference space you can use to study and work when there are not meetings or defenses scheduled.

OFFICE HOURS

Hours are as follows when the university is in full session (hours are reduced during intersession and during the summer).

- Main Office: Monday – Friday 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
- Should you need to talk with our chair, please, make an appointment at danchacon@utep.edu.

PHONES

- Main Office Phone: 1-915-747-5713
- Main Office Fax: 1-915-747-5523

MAILING ADDRESS

Correspondence for faculty and chair should be addressed to:

Department of Creative Writing
University of Texas, El Paso
500 W. University Ave. EDUC 900
El Paso, TX 79968

MFA Curriculum

During your three years of studies, you will need to complete the coursework described in this chapter. Some courses, such as those required for first-year students or thesis hours for third-year students, must be taken in the corresponding semesters. The order in which you take the other courses will depend on your overall plans for your MFA, which you should discuss with your advisor.¹

Regardless of how you plan your coursework, if you are a full time student, you should complete your MFA in three years. Please, consider the following:

- You need to complete 48 hours coursework in 6 semesters.
- In your first 5 semesters, you need to register for 9 hours (3 courses) to be considered a full time student (a requirement for all students holding a teaching assistantship; see page 12).
- You may take courses in our summer sessions. These courses may count towards your 48 hour requirement, but they do

not count towards your 9 hours requirement to be a full time student in Fall and Spring.

- You will enroll in CRW 5398 Thesis I in your fifth semester, concurrently with two other courses to complete your full time requirement.
- CRW 5399 Thesis II, which you take in your sixth, and last semester, counts as full time enrollment.

FIRST YEAR

REQUIRED FORM AND THEORY (9 HOURS)

These are required courses that must be taken during your first year. Usually CRW 5321 is taught in Fall, whereas CRW 5364 and CRW 5365 are taught one in Fall and Spring, respectively.

- CRW 5321 Narrative Theory and Poetics
- CRW 5364 Forms and Techniques of Fiction
- CRW 5365 Forms and Techniques of Poetry
- Optionally, a pedagogy class in the Department of English (ENG 5346) or Language and Linguistics (LING 5308) for students holding a TA with the respective department. Either

¹ If you do not know who your advisor is, check the Advisor List (page 34).

one of these courses will be counted as one of your electives (see the section below).

FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD YEAR

WORKSHOP AND/OR VARIABLE TOPICS (15 HOURS)

Only three in a single genre. The class CRW 5368 Variable Topics is a workshop with a different thematic content each semester. Check the Course Catalog before you enroll in this course.

- CRW 5366 Advanced Fiction Writing
- CRW 5367 Advanced Poetry Writing
- CRW 5369 Advanced Playwriting
- CRW 5371 Writing the Novel
- CRW 5372 Advanced Screenwriting
- CRW 5373 Advanced Creative Nonfiction
- CRW 5374 Ten Problems for the Fiction Writer
- CRW 5381 Writing Children's Literature
- CRW 5368 Variable Topics
- CRW 5370 Literary Translation

LITERATURE AND/OR STUDIES IN FORM (12 HOURS)

These courses require reading at least six book-length works, and an analytical final project; although they may also include creative assignments.

The class CRW 5382 Studies in Form is a literature class with a different content each semester. Check the Course Catalog before you enroll in this course.

NOTE: In exceptional cases, one graduate level literature course may be taken from another department, such as English and Language and Linguistics, with your advisor's approval.

- CRW 5375 Writing Comics and Visual Culture
- CRW 5376 Writing About Popular Music
- CRW 5377 Rewriting America Since 1960s
- CRW 5378 The Politics of Narration
- CRW 5379 Kafka and the Art of Fiction
- CRW 5380 The Physics of Creative Writing
- CRW 5382 Studies in form
- CRW 5383 History of the Short Story Form
- CRW 5384 Forms in the Prose Poem and the Short Story
- CRW 5385 Forms in the Contemporary Short Story
- CRW 5386 Minding Fiction
- CRW 5387 Contemporary Latin American Novel

- CRW 5388 Storytelling in Film and Literature
- CRW 5389 High Modernism in Latin America

ELECTIVES (6 HOURS)

These are graduate-level courses taken from any department with an advisor's approval. The pedagogy course counts as one elective.

INDEPENDENT STUDY (3 HOURS)

This is not a course per se, but a way of taking a course, and it is designed to allow your development as a writer. You can take an independent study from any department with your advisor's approval. It may replace a literature or an elective course. See the Independent Study chapter (page 7) for more details.

THIRD YEAR

THESIS (6 HOURS)

- CRW 5398 Thesis I
- CRW 5399 Thesis II (can only be taken in the last semester, and counts as a full course load).

The thesis should consist of a book-length original creative manuscript presented by a critical preface. For the thesis, students may write fiction, poetry, nonfiction, screen or stage plays, or works of literary translation. Each candidate is required to submit a thesis proposal and a sample of the thesis-in progress before enrolling in Thesis I. The thesis will be prepared under the supervision of a thesis director and defended orally before a three-member committee. See Working on Your Thesis (page 21) for more details.

Independent Study

An independent study may replace a workshop, variable topics or literature course. Independent study is designed to allow you to explore a particular area of interest not offered as a regular course during your three years in the program.

GUIDELINES

- You are not required to take an Independent Study, nor are you guaranteed one.
- Make sure you ask for an Independent Study within the area of interest, research or creative work of the professor you ask.
- Independent studies for fall and spring must be requested no later than the spring semester of the previous academic year.
- Ask for an Independent Study class during the spring semester, and be mindful of the requirements.

REQUIREMENTS

Prior to registering in your Independent Study, you need to present a proposal. The proposal must be approved by the professor you will be taking the Independent Study with, and by the Director of Graduate Studies.

Your Independent Study Proposal will consist of the following:

- A brief letter stating how the proposed independent study will contribute to your development as a writer or to the writing of your thesis.
- A detailed syllabus for the course. The syllabus may follow any format, but it must include:
 - An introduction
 - A list of readings
 - A means of evaluation
 - A list of assignments
 - A weekly break down of readings, evaluations and assignments

Advising Policies

You will be assigned an advisor to guide you during the three years of your MFA (see Advisor List on page 34). Your advisor is meant to help you design an overall plan of development for your MFA, including the coursework, fulfillment of requirements, and to help you with registration. Your advisor is your main contact with our department, and you should meet with him or her whenever you have concerns or questions regarding your academic responsibilities.

You might request a change of advisor at any semester, but if you decide to do so, you will need to contact the Director of Graduate Studies as early as possible, preferably at the beginning of a semester.

Every semester you are required to meet in person with your advisor to discuss the courses you are planning to take the following semester. The courses you choose must fit an overall plan of development as a writer as you pursue your MFA. Once you and your advisor have agreed upon your coursework, make sure

that she or he fills out your Advising Sheet and lifts your holds, so you may proceed to registration.

Keep in mind the following policies regarding your study in our program:

TYPES OF COURSES

FIRST-YEAR Students must complete these requirements before they can enroll in any other course. If a course is not available in their first semester, they must enroll in that course during their second semester. This requirement applies to part-time students too.

WORKSHOPS Courses under the **ADVANCED WRITING** or **VARIABLE TOPICS** category focus on your own writing; most of these classes follow the workshop format and the final project is creative. Students may take up to three workshop courses in each category.

LITERATURE Courses offered under the **LITERATURE** heading in the **MFA CURRICULUM** (page 5) focus on analytical reading; most of these classes follow the seminar format and the final project is an analytical paper. These courses require reading at least six book-length texts, and the writing of an analytical final project of at least 15 pages.

ELECTIVES Students may take any graduate level course at UTEP as an elective with approval from your advisor.

INDEPENDENT STUDIES Each student is allowed one independent study (CRW 5390) during the course of the MFA. The proposed independent study should not duplicate a course that we regularly offer. It is recommended the independent study be taken in the second year of study (for more information, see Independent Studies on page 7).

COURSEWORK

1. We do not accept undergraduate courses for graduate credit, no exceptions. Language study does not count towards the degree.
2. Students funded by UTEP, whether through the Department of English or the Department of Creative Writing, must enroll in nine hours (three courses) each semester to maintain their TA eligibility.
3. We strongly recommend that students not enroll in more than nine hours per semester.
4. After six semesters of study on assistantship (plus one final summer if necessary), the university will charge students out-of-state tuition if they continue to enroll, unless they are res-

idents of Texas. Students funded by the Department of Creative Writing for six semesters of studies do not receive extensions.

5. The Department Chair, in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies, makes TA assignments. They are not done by petition of students. Assignments are calibrated to serve the needs of the Department of Creative Writing and are subject to change from semester to semester.
6. The renewal of teaching assistantships from year to year is not automatic; it is contingent on satisfactory progress in both coursework and TA assignments.

THESIS

- Thesis directors have the prerogative of giving both binding and non-binding instructions for manuscript revision when working on an MFA thesis with a student. Students must implement these binding instructions.
- Students are responsible for asking their thesis directors when in doubt. Students should not switch thesis directors during Thesis II. If a change is to be made, this determination should happen no later than the end of the Thesis I semester.

- Students may take only one set of thesis hours at a time: first CRW 5398, in their next-to-last semester, and then CRW 5399 in the following semester. Students may take CRW 5399 as many times as needed; however, we expect them to complete their thesis within three years.
- Students may write their theses in absentia, as long as they finish their coursework, and as long as the thesis committee agrees. Regardless of how they complete their thesis, students must be physically present for their defense.

Grading

GRADES

- The grading system for graduate students at UTEP goes from A to F, in full letter increments. There is no B+ or A-.
- To keep a good standing as a graduate student, your GPA must remain at 3.0 or higher.
- Make sure you understand the grading policy in each class you take.

DROPPING COURSES

- Except for a family emergency, we strongly discourage students from dropping their classes. Nevertheless, should you need to withdraw from a class, consult the [Academic Calendar](#). Usually the deadline to drop a class is around Week 8.
- If you hold a Teaching Assistantship, you must remain a full time student (9 hours); otherwise, your appointment will be canceled.

- For leave of absences, check the corresponding section in Frequently Asked Questions on page 33.

INCOMPLETE

- Students who cannot complete the assignments of a course will earn either an F or an I (incomplete), depending on the policies of that particular course.
- Students with an incomplete need to make arrangements with the instructor to fulfill the requirements. **NOTE:** It is the student's responsibility to make these arrangements.
- A student who does not complete the necessary assignments within a year of the course's completion will receive an F for that course.

Teaching Assistantships

WHAT IS A TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP?

Depending on the strength of their application, some incoming students are awarded a teaching assistantship. This is a part-time assignment (20 hours per week) meant to help them pay for tuition, living expenses and books. The possible duties for a teaching assistant in the Department of Creative Writing are one of the following:

- Help in the department's office
- Assist one of the program directors
- Edit the *Rio Grande Review*, our literary journal
- Help with the organization of the "Congreso de Literatura Mexicana"
- Help in the *Revista de Literatura Mexicana*
- Teach introductory courses in our department
- Teach introductory courses in the Department of Language and Linguistics
- Assist one of the professors in a research project

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP ASSIGNMENTS

New students do not teach until their second and third years. For first-year students, we try to spread out other kinds of assignments in a way that will benefit both the department and the students themselves.

Students given assistantships on the budget of other departments such as English give service exclusively to those departments. Those students are not available for departmental assignments such as *Rio Grande Review* or teaching creative writing. Some of the students on our budget teach for English or Language and Linguistics as well, on a loan basis, but are eligible for other assignments.

When we make assignments, the order is as follows:

FIRST

- Needs of the Creative Writing Department, e.g., office staff, teaching our own courses (awarded on a competitive basis), and *Rio Grande Review* (awarded on a competitive basis).
- Office staff is hand-picked based on aptitude for the job and/or previous experience, and usually students continue in the job for 2 or 3 years. Office staff are evaluated every year, are expected to perform at a high level and put the priorities of

the office first at all times, and this performance determines whether the TA will be continued.

- Editors for the *Rio Grande Review* are appointed for one year only. Editing the RGR is a privilege, not a right. The office, the magazine budget, and the equipment all belong to the department. The RGR is not a freestanding entity and should not be edited as such. It is not a professional journal but an educational opportunity, a place to learn and even to make mistakes while still focusing on quality. No staff member is expected to work more than an average of 20 hours per week, irrespective of the magazine's self-perceived needs. The rule for them is the same as for all other TA assignments. Staff is accountable to the RGR advisor and the department chair, and regular briefings are required. Please remember that being named an editor is a TA assignment, just like any other, and all the same expectations and accountability hold as those in other TA positions.
- RGR staff is determined annually by each prospective team presenting a written proposal which is then vetted, transparently and equitably, by a committee consisting of: the full faculty of the Creative Writing Department and the two graduate student reps selected from the officers of the BCWSO.

All of the above are part-time assignments, unless otherwise specified.

SECOND

- After the needs listed under the previous heading are covered, assistants are assigned to the respective Directors: Graduate, Undergraduate, Online. The qualifications for these crucial assignments are similar to those for office staff. Again, though these students may apply for other opportunities, we will try to maintain continuity in these positions, since there is technical training involved (AppReview, Banner, CAPS, DNN), and a definite learning curve.

THIRD

- Most remaining second- and third-year students are then assigned to other departments (English/Spanish) for teaching, as we are able. We work out these schedules in consultation with the respective departments.
- Continuing to teach is contingent on success in the classroom and in the training/pedagogy programs the allied departments offer. Bear in mind that you report directly to the coordinator in the appropriate department. If there is a legitimate grievance or perceived inequity, our chair will get in-

volved as a final resort, after you have tried working things out with the coordinator.

FOURTH

- Finally, some students are assigned to other jobs, such as assisting a professor in his or her classroom, with online course development, or with some other project. The first options for these assignments are first-year students, as they cannot yet teach. Second- and third-year students may be available only if they are not given any assignments under the headings one through three.
- Please do not lobby for a particular assignment. These will always be determined and made by the office, not by individual professors. Lobbying a professor will not increase your chances of achieving a particular assignment.
- Please do not ask us to substitute an assignment we have given you unless there are extreme extenuating circumstances.

FIFTH

- First-year students enrolled in a pedagogy class (either LING 5308 or ENG 5346) are not to exceed 10 hours weekly average in that semester. In any other case, teaching assistantships are 20-hour per week assignments (usually made up of combined assignments).

Tuition and Scholarships

PAYING FOR TUITION

All graduate students at UTEP, including those with a teaching assistantship appointment, are expected to pay for tuition. The information below should help you fulfill this obligation. Follow the links to obtain more up to date information under each category.

COMPLETE AND SUBMIT FAFSA

The financial aid process begins after you submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The information you submit is used to determine your eligibility for grants, loans and work study. Our school code is 003661.

IMPORTANT: For best results, submit your application by February 14 (mark your calendar).

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

If you are admitted to the program without a teaching assistantship it is still possible to work on campus. Contact Job Mine at 915-747-5640 or careers@utep.edu.

FINANCIAL AID RESOURCES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

College students have a number of options available for financing their education. The most common types of assistance include grants, loans, work study and scholarships. Additional resources including private loans, internships and fellowships are also available.

Information for aid resources can be found at the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid. All loan forms can be found on the Financial Aid page under “Forms” as well as information about topics below under “Funding”.

- [Federal Grants](#)
- [State Grants and Programs](#)
- [Student Loans](#)
- [Workstudy](#)
- [Tax Credits and other Programs](#)
- [Waivers](#)
- [Scholarships](#)

- [Additional Financial Aid Resources](#)
- [PLUS Loans for Graduate and Professional Degree Students](#)

ESTIMATED LIVING EXPENSES

The following tables show an estimate of expenses for graduate students at UTEP. Keep in mind that some of the line items might not apply to you. For instance, if you plan to live near UTEP, and walk to the university, your transportation expenses will be much lower than those estimated. In the same fashion, most of the books in the courses are available in the Main Library, which will lower that line item too. The 12 month column considers taking courses during summer. For the most up to date estimates, visit [Financial Aid](#).

LIVING AT HOME

	12 MOS	9 MOS
Tuition and Fees	\$ 7,233.00	\$ 5,736.00
Books and Supplies	\$ 1,483.00	\$ 1,186.00
Transportation	\$ 2,840.00	\$ 2,130.00
Personal Expenses	\$ 2,330.00	\$ 1,748.00
Room and Board	\$ 5,435.00	\$ 4,400.00
TOTAL	\$ 19,321.00	\$ 15,200.00

ON CAMPUS

	12 MOS	9 MOS
Tuition and Fees	\$ 7,233.00	\$ 5,736.00
Books and Supplies	\$ 1,483.00	\$ 1,186.00
Transportation	\$ 2,840.00	\$ 2,130.00
Personal Expenses	\$ 2,330.00	\$ 1,748.00
Room and Board	\$ 11,675.00	\$ 9,080.00
TOTAL	\$ 25,561.00	\$ 19,880.00

OFF CAMPUS AND STUDENTS WITH DEPENDENTS

	12 MOS	9 MOS
Tuition and Fees	\$ 7,233.00	\$ 5,736.00
Books and Supplies	\$ 1,483.00	\$ 1,186.00
Transportation	\$ 2,840.00	\$ 2,130.00
Personal Expenses	\$ 2,330.00	\$ 1,748.00
Room and Board	\$ 15,227.00	\$ 11,744.00
TOTAL	\$ 29,113.00	\$ 22,544.00

Información para estudiantes internacionales

SEGURO DE SALUD

La universidad ofrece a todos los estudiantes la posibilidad de enrolarse en el plan BlueCross/BlueShield. Tenga en cuenta, sin embargo, que este plan requiere el pago parcial por los servicios, por lo que algunos estudiantes optan por usar los servicios de doctores y sobre todo dentistas de Ciudad Juárez, afiliados con BlueCross/BlueShield.

Para obtener información más reciente consulte la siguiente presentación en formato PDF: [Beneficios BlueCross](#).

IMPORTANTE: Cada año hay una sesión de orientación para Estudiantes Internacionales a la que es importante asistir, ya que aclara muchas dudas para quienes empiezan su maestría en UTEP. Para más información, visite la página siguiente: [Resources for Students](#).

IMPORTANTE: Cada semestre, durante la primera semana de clases, cada estudiante debe ir a la Oficina de Recursos Humanos

de UTEP para firmar la inscripción al seguro de salud para que el costo del mismo sea aplicado como un crédito en la matrícula del estudiante, de otro modo el estudiante tendrá que asumir el pago. Este proceso también se puede efectuar via internet. Las notificaciones de inscripción se envían por correo electrónico.

VIVIENDA

La universidad está ubicada en una zona de El Paso donde es fácil encontrar alojamiento que permite caminar a la universidad, y a la mayoría de servicios cercanos. La mejor forma de obtener la información más actualizada es contactando a otros estudiantes que ya hayan vivido en el área. Sin embargo, estas son algunas opciones, para ofrecer una idea de lo que está disponible.

SUNSET HEIGHT AREA

Highlander apartments

1700 Hawthorne St

\$525 por mes, para una sola persona. Incluye todos los servicios

1127 Los Angeles St. Apartments

Desde \$375 para una sola persona. No incluye los servicios

DOWNTOWN

301 East River Ave

Casas compartidas

Desde \$330–560 Incluye todos los servicios

DORMITORIOS UTEP

Miner Village

Summit Hall, 2401 N. Oregon St

<http://sa.utep.edu/housing/>

Miner Heights Apartments

300 W. Schuster Ave.

<http://sa.utep.edu/housing/>

Victor Valdez—Rooms for Rent

528 Prospect Avenue.

vicktor1987@hotmail.com

Teaching in the Department of Creative Writing

Second and third-year students with a teaching assistantship funded by our department, and in good academic standing, are eligible to teach one of our introduction to creative writing courses. Because we offer few courses, the process is competitive, and requires you to submit an application early in Spring of each year to be considered for teaching the following year.

REQUIREMENTS

- To have completed the “Teaching Creative Writing Colloquium” scheduled for Spring each year
- To hold a Teaching Assistantship funded by the Department of Creative Writing
- To be in good academic standing and be a full time student
- To submit an application

APPLYING

Students will not be considered for teaching unless they submit an application to the Director of Undergraduate Studies during Spring of each year. The application should consist of:

- **LETTER OF APPLICATION** in which you state why you want to teach, and why you will be a good instructor for one of our introduction to creative writing courses
- A complete syllabus, including assignments, readings and grading policies, broken down by week²

² For samples, contact the Director of Undergraduate Studies

WHY TEACH CREATIVE WRITING?

- To gain teaching experience
- To work with undergraduate student writers
- To use knowledge learned in the program outside of their own writing
- To develop and execute a syllabus and lesson plans
- To improve your own writing through teaching

WHILE YOU TEACH

- Use faculty and fellow students as resources.
- Pick works and selections in each genre you are passionate about.
- Organize your syllabus carefully.
- Find a grading system which works best for you such as En-grade or Blackboard.
- Make sure the course materials, assignments and activities are something you would enjoy yourself as a writer or poet.

Working on Your Thesis

Your final project for our MFA program will consist of a book-length manuscript of a publishable quality. Even though you are expected to complete your thesis during your last year (CRW 5398 Thesis I & CRW 5399 Thesis II), you should discuss with your advisor your plans as early as possible, so that your coursework becomes the basis of your thesis. This section is intended for third-year students, but both first- and second-year student will benefit from it.

THESIS REQUIREMENTS

Page length requirements by genre:

- Fiction: 120 pages.
- Poetry: 60 pages.
- Screenplay: 90 pages.
- Translation: see the requirements for the specific genre above.
- For other genres, check with your thesis director.

CHOOSING YOUR THESIS DIRECTOR

Early in your fourth semester, at the end of your second-year, you should approach a member of the faculty to discuss whether she or he can serve as your thesis director. Before you do so, keep the following in mind:

- Approach a faculty member with whom you have taken at least two courses.
- Read as much of his or her work as possible to familiarize yourself with your future thesis director's poetics, and make sure that she or he is a good match for you.
- If the faculty member turns you down, it does not mean that she or he does not consider your work valuable. The most common reason is possible overcommitment.
- Approach your prospective thesis director early.
- Once a member of the faculty has agreed to be your thesis director, you should request the Director of Graduate Studies' approval.

SUBMITTING YOUR THESIS PROPOSAL

Before beginning to work on your thesis, you must prepare a thesis proposal, which must be approved by your thesis director and the Director of Graduate Studies. This usually happens during your fourth semester in the program (see Suggested Deadlines on page 27).

The thesis proposal is meant to help you articulate plans and goals for your thesis. It will also allow your thesis director to get a sense of what you would like to achieve, and help him or her advise you accordingly.

THE THESIS PROPOSAL

You are free to articulate and organize your thesis proposal as you and your thesis director see fit. Nevertheless, it should include the following sections:

- A statement outlining your project in terms of structure, themes, issues explored and the main intent.
- A discussion of the sources and references that you are and will be using during the writing of your thesis.
- A discussion of the form or forms you are choosing and their relationship with the main intent of your thesis.
- A bibliography with the theoretical and/or literary framework for your proposed project.
- A tentative schedule for the completion of your first draft, circulation of your thesis among the readers, revision and defense.
- A writing sample of about 10 poems (or sequence) or 20 pages of fiction (a short story or full chapter).

SUBMITTING YOUR PROPOSAL

Although the proposal is the first step to securing a thesis director, you might consider meeting with your proposed thesis director prior to writing the proposal. Since your proposed thesis director is ideally someone who knows your work and tendencies, he or she can help you clarify the direction your thesis should take, and assist you in developing the proposal and bibliography.

- The proposal should be submitted and approved by your thesis director and the Director of Graduate Studies prior to registering for Thesis I (the first semester of your thesis writing year).
- The proposal should be submitted first to your thesis director, and after he/she endorses it, to the Director of Graduate Studies.

- The cover page of your proposal should include two signature lines, one for your Thesis Director and the other for the Director of Graduate Studies (see sample cover page below).
- Your thesis director and/or the Director of Graduate Studies may ask for revisions prior to formal approval. Therefore, submit the proposal with enough time to address any concerns prior to registering.

The New American Novel
(Thesis Proposal)
by Roberto Bolaño

César Vallejo, Thesis Director

Gertrude Stein,
Director of Graduate Studies

FORMING A THESIS COMMITTEE

Once your thesis proposal has been approved and you have secured your thesis director, start thinking about your thesis committee—your thesis director will help you in the process. A committee consists of your director and two additional readers (referred to as your second and third readers). Your thesis director and second reader should be Department of Creative Writing faculty; the third reader is considered an “outside reader,” or someone teaching at UTEP but not in the Department of Creative Writing. Ideally, these second and third readers should have some familiarity with your genre and with you as a student.

WRITING YOUR THESIS

You will spend two semesters working on your thesis. During this time, you will work closely with your thesis director. It is important that you discuss a work plan and mutual expectations; in other words, how often you will meet, how many pages or drafts you are to present for each meeting, etc.

Aside from the creative work, an important aspect of your thesis is the 15–20 page critical preface. The preface, like the proposal, outlines the scope and details of the project, and situates it within an historical, literary, and/or theoretical frame. These

prefaces have sometimes included biographical influences, but a critical approach is emphasized. During Thesis I, begin discussing with your thesis director what he or she considers a successful preface, and the issues that will need to be explored in your particular preface. Ask your director when he would like to start seeing first drafts of your preface.

WORKING WITH YOUR THESIS DIRECTOR

Each thesis director has a different approach to their functions. Nevertheless, early in the process, you should ask about your director's approach and state how much involvement you expect from him or her. Keep in mind that your thesis director will sign his or her name to your thesis, and therefore will do so only if she or he is comfortable with the quality of your work.

While you work on your thesis, consider the following:

- Be considerate and polite with your thesis director's time. Thesis Directors are not compensated for the time they invest in helping you with your thesis.
 - Follow your thesis director's preferred means to submit your work.
 - Make sure you have established clear deadlines with your thesis director and you are meeting them. Should you experience any problems, contact your thesis director as soon as possible.
- Keep all scheduled appointments, and be on time.
 - Your thesis director will give you suggestions and comments on your work, they can be Binding or Non-Binding. Your director may use other terms—make sure you understand these according to the following two categories.
 - BINDING: These are required changes. Your thesis director will not sign your thesis if you do not implement these changes.
 - NON-BINDING: These are changes that in your Thesis Director's estimation will improve your work, but he or she is leaving it up to you the final decision of incorporating them in your thesis.

WORKING WITH YOUR READERS

Having a thesis committee affords you a level of advising which you will not find outside your MFA program—you will be working with three professional writers—and it only makes sense that you take full advantage of it. As you work on your thesis, consider the following options for your second and third readers.

- Make sure you follow your readers' requirements to submit your work.

- Submit the final version of your thesis as early as possible so that they will have enough time to read your manuscript.
- Setup follow up meetings with your second and third readers to talk about their suggestions and comments.
- Be courteous and considerate with their time, readers are not compensated for the time they invest in your thesis.

CRITICAL PREFACE GUIDELINES

The critical preface is an essential part of your thesis. This is a self-critical, reflexive introduction to your thesis as a project, but also in terms of its poetics and its aesthetic statement. You will discuss with your thesis director his or her specific requirements for your critical preface. Nonetheless, all Prefaces will follow the Requirements and Structure detailed below.

Requirements

- Critical approach
- 15–20 pages / 4,500–6,000 words
- Bibliography: The books consulted, quoted and referenced in your preface. Use the MLA format. The pages in the bibliography do not count towards the 15–20 pages requirement for your Preface.

Structure

The order, emphasis and detail of each element in the following list will be determined by your thesis director. But all prefaces will include the three sections outlined below:

- **PROJECT:** Scope of the project — brief history of the project
- **POETICS & ASSESSMENT:** Discussion of the poetics that informs the project — technical difficulties found and how they were overcome — critical assessment of the process
- **FRAMEWORK:** Discussion of the historical, literary or theoretical tradition frame — bibliographical influences

Defense and Graduation

You will defend your thesis towards the end of your sixth semester, while you are registered in CRW 5399 Thesis II. This normally happens in the Spring semester. Keep in mind that you will need to fill out the paperwork in advance in order to be included in the graduation ceremonies, and to avoid paying extra fees. Visit the [Official Calendar](#).

GRADUATION

As you approach the semester in which you plan to defend your thesis, and therefore graduate, you should familiarize yourself with Graduate School deadlines. On their website, you will find information regarding thesis formatting guidelines, when to submit your thesis, application for graduate degree, and commencement: danchacon@utep.edu.

Be aware that deadlines for graduation begin early in the semester. Also, you must submit a draft of your thesis to the

graduate school prior to your defense, and then a final version afterwards.

FORMS

These are the forms you will need to fill out before you apply for graduation. Make sure you download them in advance, and meet with your advisor if you have any doubts about how to fill them out.

- [Application for Graduate Degree](#)
- [Degree Plan Form](#)

DEFENSE

During CRW Thesis II, discuss with your thesis director whether he or she thinks your thesis will be ready on time for your defense. If so, set a defense date that is acceptable to your committee, and reserve a room with our administrative assistant. Defenses have often been conducted in our office, but if it is not available, you can request any other room in Liberal Arts. You will find on the [Graduate School website](#) the Defense Completion Form that you need to present to your committee after your defense. If you successfully pass your defense, it will be signed

by the three members. You will then file it along with the final version of your thesis with the Graduate School.

FORMS

The day of your defense, you need the following forms ready.

- [Defense/Completion Form for Master’s students](#)
- First page of your thesis. Use the [Thesis Formatting Guidelines](#).

SUGGESTED DEADLINES

You should discuss with your advisor and with your thesis director the deadlines that will allow you to graduate on your target date (see [Academic Calendar](#)). The following dates are provided only as guidelines:

SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS

- Choose a Thesis Director February 11
- Submit your thesis proposal March 16

THIRD-YEAR STUDENTS

- Create your Committee August 23
- Begin working on your Thesis August 23
- Complete draft of your Thesis February 14
- Begin working on your Preface February 14
- Graduation Application February 18
- Complete Preface February 28
- Circulate your Thesis & Preface among the members of your Committee April 2
- Thesis Defense May 4
- Graduate School Application (last day) May 9

After Graduation

Our Bilingual MFA in Creative Writing is a terminal degree. This means that you are now ready to apply for jobs which require such qualification, and devote yourself to writing. The following are the possibilities you might want to consider.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Los estudiantes internacionales puede optar por solicitar la conversión de su visa de estudiantes a una que les permite trabajar por un año después de su graduación dentro del programa Optional Practical Training. Este programa está diseñado para ofrecer a los estudiantes la oportunidad de adquirir experiencia laboral real después de finalizados sus estudios.

Los estudiantes interesados deben solicitar la OPT dentro de los 60 días previos o 60 días posteriores a fecha de graduación en

la Oficina de Programas Internacionales de UTEP: <http://sa.utep.edu/oip/opt/>

OPORTUNIDADES DE TRABAJO

Después de su graduación, los estudiantes de nuestro programa tienen la oportunidad de trabajar en las siguientes instituciones:

- Departamento of Languages and Linguistics en UTEP
- Diario El Paso
- Comité organizador del Congreso de Literatura Mexicana Contemporánea (UTEP)
- Uno de los *community colleges* en El Paso

PH.D. PROGRAMS

Even though your MFA is a terminal degree, you may decide to continue your studies in a Ph.D. program. When considering this option, keep the following in mind:

- Most Ph.D. programs are completed in at least five years. Usually, coursework completed elsewhere is not accepted.
- If you have plans to apply to a Ph.D. program, keep in mind that the application deadlines usually fall anywhere between

November and January of the year prior to the academic year in which you will start your studies, usually in Fall.

- If you plan to ask for letters of recommendation, be courteous and considerate to your recommenders by following the guidelines under **LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION** below.

APPLYING FOR TEACHING JOBS

This is one of the most common options available to MFA graduates. Should you choose this route, keep in mind the following:

- The job market is very competitive. Do not get discouraged if you do not get a job interview the first time you apply for a job.
- It helps to have publications, particularly in book form.
- Consider teaching at a community college to build your resume and gain experience.
- If you need references, ask your thesis committee and your teaching supervisor, they will be able to write a more personalized letter for you.
- If you need letters of recommendation, follow the guidelines under **LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION** below.

PUBLICATION

Many of our students go on to publish their thesis in book form. Should that happen, do not forget to:

- Let us know, so we can add links and the good news to our website.
- Acknowledge our program, as well as your thesis director.
- Keep on writing, even when the demands of the new publication seem to take all your time.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Whether you plan to continue your studies, apply for a job or pursue other academic endeavors, it is very likely that you will need letters of recommendation from our faculty. Keep the following pointers in mind:

- Ask for the letters at least one month in advance.
- It is better that you ask faculty members with whom you have taken at least two courses, or from whom you have been a teaching assistant, or have had as your thesis director.
- As a matter of courtesy, have the following ready for each of the institutions you are applying to.
 - Letter's addressee

- Institution
- Department or program
- Mailing address
- **IMPORTANT:** For each letter that needs to be mailed through the US Postal Service, hand your recommender a properly addressed and stamped envelope.

Bilingual Creative Writing Students' Organization

The BCWSO (Bilingual Creative Writing Students' Organization) is a non-profit organization created by our residential MFA students. The goals of the BCWSO are:

- Represent MFA students at our monthly Faculty Meetings
- Organize events to promote the work of our MFA students
- Organize fundraisers to create opportunities for MFA students to attend conferences
- Hold cultural events, such as conferences, readings and workshops

OFFICERS

The BCWSO's officers elected every year are:

PRESIDENT Represents the body of students, and influences the policies of the BCWSO and attends the monthly Faculty Meetings.

VICE-PRESIDENT Seconds the President in functions, and also attends the monthly Faculty Meetings.

TREASURER In charge of all the bookkeeping functions.

PRESS SECRETARY Keeps meeting minutes, and all information pertaining the BCWSO, and in charge of promotion and outreach.

ELECTIONS

Elections are held every year around the first week of class (end of August). Usually, the current officers will call for a plenary meeting to which all graduate students attend, but particularly first-year students. It has been customary that the new officers are elected among incoming students, but it is possible that second- and third-year students are elected as well. Nevertheless, at least one officer from the previous year should remain—in a different role—to ensure continuity.

Once the election is completed, the transfer of duties must happen within a week, and it is usually the case that the new officers attend the first Faculty Meeting in Fall. Should you be interested in becoming a BCWSO officer, contact the organization.

Frequently Asked Questions

These are some of the most frequently asked questions. If the question you have in mind is not here, and not answered elsewhere in this handbook, please contact the Director of Graduate Studies: jdepierola@utep.edu.

Can online students transfer to the residential program?

Online students may opt to transfer to the residential program. Nevertheless, only nine hours of coursework are transferable. This usually covers the required courses for the first semester of first-year students.

Can I ask for a leave of absence?

Yes. Make an appointment with the Director of Graduate Studies as soon as you have decided to take a leave of absence. The possible arrangements vary depending on how far in advance you have requested your leave of absence, the most favorable are those arranged ahead of time. The maximum time for a leave of absence is one year.

Can a residential student take online courses?

Yes. Nevertheless, it is discouraged that residential students take more than three online courses throughout their MFA, after all you have made the effort to come all the way to El Paso to work directly with our faculty.

Can I take CRW 5399 Thesis II more than once?

Yes. You may enroll in CRW 5399 Thesis II as many times as you need. Nevertheless, we strongly discourage students from taking more than six semesters, as your thesis director might not be able to continue working with you. In addition, keep in mind that students with a teaching assistantship will not be funded beyond the sixth semester.

Can I take literature courses in other departments?

The Literature requirement must be fulfilled with courses offered in our department. Our Literature courses, though focused on critical reading and writing, are designed by writers for writers. Nevertheless, you may use your two elective courses to take graduate courses in any department. In exceptional cases, and when the particular course will help you with your thesis project, your advisor may authorize you to substitute one literature course for its equivalent from the English or Language and Linguistics departments.

Advisor List: 2017–2018

JEFF SIRKIN

- Nicolas Cooper (*) [1st year]
- David Hiriart (*) [1st year]
- Chandra Edwards
- Andrea Castillo
- Nora de la Cruz (*)

LEX WILLIFORD

- Jonathan Ayala (*) [1st year]
- Irma Nikicicz
- Saul Hernandez (*)
- Rodolfo Gallinar (*)

SASHA PIMENTEL

- Nicolas Rodriguez (*) [1st year]
- Mariana Hernandez (*) [1st year]
- Margarita Mejia (*) [1st year]
- Jesus Peña
- Will Daugherty

DANIEL CHACON

- All online students

JOSÉ DE PIÉROLA

- Claudia López Zuleta (*) [1st year]
- Cesar Ruiz (*)
- Xochitl Sequeira
- Fiorella Manrique
- Martha Dávila
- Alessandra Narvaez
- Daniela Gonzalez Armijo

ROSA ALCALÁ

- David Bobis (*) [1st year]
- Jorge Manzanilla (*)
- Belen Puente
- Oscar Moreno
- Francisco Barraza
- Paula Cucurrela

ANDREA COTE

- Maria Sosa Rodriguez
- Aldo Amparan
- Criseida Santos
- Mario Martinez
- Daniela Ruelas

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Feedback

Like any other human enterprise, this is a work in progress, and your comments, suggestions and corrections are welcomed. Please, direct them to the [Director of Graduate Studies](#) at jdepierola@utep.edu.



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