

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Online MFA in Creative Writing. This document will help you answer questions about our program. In here you will find information about curriculum, thesis and advising. You can contact the Online MFA staff at onlinemfa@utep.edu, or at (915) 747-6255, if you have a question that's not covered in here.

ONLINE MFA CURRICULUM

Our program is designed to be completed in three years. This, if the student is enrolled in full time (9 credits/3 classes) during the regular terms (Spring/ Fall). However, students have the flexibility to take as little as one class per semester. We also offer classes during the summer, which is a great opportunity for students to catch up on their MFA course work. Keep in mind that according to University policy, the time frame to complete Master programs is six years. Also, students must keep at least a 3.5 GPA in order to stay in the program.

FIRST YEAR

REQUIRED FORM AND THEORY (or gateway courses)

These are required courses that must be taken during your first year.

- CRW 5321-Narrative theory & Poetics
- CRW 5364- Forms & Techniques of Fiction
- CRW 5365-Forms & Techniques of Poetry

FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD YEAR

- WORKSHOP AND/OR VARIABLE TOPICS (15 HOURS)

Only three in a single genre

5366-Advanced Fiction Writing

5367-Advanced Poetry Writing

5369-Advanced Playwriting

5371-Writing the Novel

5372-Advanced Screenwriting

5373-Advanced Creative Nonfiction

5374-Ten Problems for the Fiction Writer

5381-Writing Children's Literature

5368 -Variable Topics

- LITERATURE AND/OR STUDIES IN FORM (12 HOURS)

These courses are designed to critically analyze literature works. They're usually heavy reading.

CRW-5370 Literary Translation

CRW-5375 Writing Comics and Visual Culture

CRW-5376 Writing About Popular Music

CRW5377 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 5368-Variable Topics
CRW 5387-Contemporary Latin American Novel
CRW 5388-Storytelling in Film and Literature
CRW 5389-High Modernism in Latin America

Please note: CRW 5368 counts either as workshop or literature.

- **ELECTIVES (6 HOURS)**

These courses can be taken from another department. However, the student is not obligated to do so. Electives must be graduate courses from UTEP. Students may take extra workshops or literature course to fulfill the electives.

- **INDEPENDENT STUDY (3 HOURS)**

You may take an independent study from any department. It can replace a literature course or an elective.

THIRD YEAR

- **THESIS (6 HOURS)**

CRW 5398-Thesis I
CRW 5399-Thesis II

(Please see below for Thesis guidelines)

INDEPENDENT STUDY

An independent study may replace an elective or literature course. It is designed to allow you to explore a particular area of interest not offered as a regular course in the program.

Guidelines:

1. You are not required to take an Independent Study, nor are you guaranteed one.
2. You must request an independent study the semester prior to the one you wish to take it.

The first step is 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 the Online MFA, professor Daniel Chacón.

Your proposal should consist of the following:

1. A brief letter stating how the proposed independent study will contribute to your development as a writer or to the writing of your thesis.
2. A detailed syllabus for the course. It must include:
 - Introduction
 - List of readings
 - Evaluation system
 - List of assignments
 - Calendar (weekly breakdown of readings, evaluations and assignments).

ADVISING

Every semester the Online MFA advisors will send out an e-mail to all students to make them aware of advising dates. They will make available the course catalog and the advising sheet, which is also available on our webpage under the button “For current students.”

Advising is done mostly through e-mail, but students may request to have the staff call them. Keep in mind that phone calls will only be done during office hours.

Please make sure to thoroughly read the information contained in the e-mails your advisors send out, wherein most of your questions will be answered. Also, please check your UTEP e-mail, since we may send out updates and/or changes.

All advising is done on a case-by-case basis, and e-mails will be answered in the order that they are received. The Online MFA advisors have access to your records, and we will help to make sure that the classes you request are the ones you need for your degree plan.

Please take note of the following:

1. The Form & Theory courses (or gateway courses) should be the first courses that students take. However, we are not able to offer all of them every semester, so students may take other courses. Students should take these courses (CRW 5364, CRW 5365 & CRW 5321) as soon as they can.
2. Only three workshops should be taken in one genre.
3. CRW 5368 can count as a workshop or as a literature (Variable Topics) course.
4. Students should use the advising sheet to keep track of their progress. Advisors have access to all records, so they don't need students to send it back to us.
5. Students are allowed to take up to nine credits during the summer, and nine credits in the fall. If you wish to take more credits, you will need to obtain permission from the advisors and from the Online MFA director Daniel Chacón.
6. The office is closed during the summer session since there are not any assistants available. Make sure you get advised before the Spring semester is over, or else you'll risk having to wait until Fall sessions start to be able to register for courses.

Advising for Thesis

If you're in the process to start your thesis, please make sure to read the thesis guidelines portion of this handbook, or the thesis guidelines document before requesting to get your holds removed. You should get approval from your thesis director, and from the Director of the Online MFA, Daniel Chacón, in order to enroll in CRW 5398 (Thesis I).

THESIS

CHOOSING YOUR THESIS DIRECTOR AND COMMITTEE

Early in your fourth semester—end of second year—you should approach a faculty member and find out if he/she can serve as your thesis director. Because of the structure of our program though, not all students may be ready to start Thesis I by the end of the second year. Make sure that you will be six to nine credits away from finishing your coursework (without counting Thesis) by the time you start Thesis I. Once a faculty member agrees to be your Thesis Director, you should request the Director of the Online MFA's approval.

SUBMITTING YOUR THESIS PROPOSAL

The semester prior to the semester you will begin working on your thesis, you will have to submit a proposal, along with a writing sample, to your proposed thesis director. This 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 following are meant to guide you through the process of writing the proposal:

- ▶ Your thesis proposal should include a brief statement that outlines your project. For example, you may describe your plot; the themes you have explored and would like to continue exploring; the scope (or length of the project); and issues or arguments you'd like to present in your poetry or fiction. You may also discuss the work you've already written, and in what direction you'd like to take it. It should be accompanied by a bibliography that provides a theoretical and/or literary frame for your proposed project.
- ▶ Along with this proposal and bibliography, you should include a sample of poems (**10** poems or sequence) or fiction (**20** pages, or short story or chapter) that will serve as a foundation for the project.
- ▶ Although the proposal is the first step to securing a thesis director, you might consider having constant communication with your proposed thesis director prior to writing it. Since your proposed thesis director is ideally someone who knows your work and tendencies, he/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 the Online MFA prior to registering for Thesis I (the first semester of your thesis writing year). The proposal should be submitted first to the thesis director, and after he/she endorses it, he/she should submit it to the Online MFA Director, Daniel Chacón, for approval. Make sure you have him/her CC it to Online MFA (onlinemfa@utep.edu) since we are in charge of removing your holds, and we will keep for your records.

► Please note, the thesis director and/or the Online MFA Director may ask for revisions prior to formal approval. Therefore, submit the proposal with enough time to address any concerns prior to registering. (This process should be done before the semester prior to starting thesis ends.)

FORMING A THESIS COMMITTEE

Once your thesis proposal has been approved and you have secured your thesis director, start thinking about your thesis committee. A committee consists of your director, and two additional readers. Your thesis director and ONE reader should be Department of Creative Writing faculty; however, one of your readers must be from outside of the department. If you are an Online student and do not know anybody, ask your Thesis Director for help. Ideally, they should have some familiarity with your genre and with you as a student.

During Thesis I, begin approaching potential readers, and secure a commitment from them. Normally, you will work closely with your director throughout the year and follow his/her recommendations and advice as you produce several versions of your thesis. Your readers will read a late or final draft during Thesis II; during Thesis I you will work exclusively with your director. You should, however, ask your readers how they'd like to work with you. Some readers like to see a version of the thesis well in advance of the defense, in order to offer suggestions; others will only want to see the final version.

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. The 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 she would like to start seeing first drafts of your preface. **Note: Your Thesis Director may have additional requirements for your preface, which you must follow.**

PREFACE GUIDELINES

You will discuss with your Thesis Director his or her specific requirements for your 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

THESIS DEFENSE/ GRADUATION

As you approach the semester 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:

<http://graduate.utep.edu/preparing.html>

Be aware that deadlines for graduation begin early in the semester you plan to graduate. Also, you must submit a draft of your thesis to the graduate school prior to your defense, and then a final version after.

TWO OPTIONS FOR THESIS DEFENSES

- **Synchronous**
 - During Thesis II, discuss with your thesis director whether he or she thinks your thesis will be ready for a defense. If so, set a defense date that is acceptable to your committee.
 - Defenses for the online program are held through Skype, Facetime or other conference program. Talk to your director to set this up. On the Graduate School website you'll find a Defense Completion Form that is to be presented to your committee after the defense.
 - If you successfully pass your defense, it will be signed by the committee. You will then file a final version of your thesis with the Graduate School.
- **Non-Synchronous Thesis Defense.**
 - The MFA candidate and her committee will decide on a Defense Date, and on this date the candidates will receive questions via email from the committee members (with all the members CC'd). The candidate will then have 24 hours to answer the questions in writing.

LOW RESIDENCY OPTION

Although we love doing our classes online, a little face-to-face feedback from our professors and peers can be invaluable for a writer. The low-residency option allows us to meet every summer in an international city known for its literary heritage, where there are summer reading and lecture events, liberal arts universities, libraries, bookstores, etc.

We usually offer an open-genre workshop, with an option to also do an Independent Study with Dr. Ruiter, a faculty member from the English Department. We have the opportunity to interact not only with students from our Online and Residential MFAs, but also with graduate and undergraduate students from the English Department.

The destination changes every year. Information about the trip and the courses is made available at the beginning of the Fall semester and throughout the school year.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The Creative Writing Department is located in the Education Building Room 900. **The Online MFA in Creative Writing** is in EDUC 910.

Office hours vary every semester. The Online MFA staff is available Monday-Thursday. Our phone number is (915) 747-6255. You may contact us by e-mailing onlinemfa@utep.edu.