

Department of CREATIVE WRITING

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Residential Bilingual MFA Program Student Handbook



UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, EL PASO
500 W. University Ave. — Education Building 900
El Paso, TX 79968

MFA Handbook

Residential Bilingual MFA Program

Department of Creative Writing

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, EL PASO

500 W. University Ave. EDUCATION BUILDING 900

El Paso, TX 79968

utep.edu/cw

Contents

Introduction	I
The Creative Writing Department	2
Office	2
Office Hours	3
Phones	3
Mailing Address	3
MFA Curriculum	4
First Year	5
First, Second and Third Year	5
Third Year	7
Independent Study	8
Guidelines	8
Requirements	8
Advising Policies	10
Types of Courses	10
Coursework	11
Thesis	12
Grading	13
Grades	13
Dropping Courses	13
Incomplete	13
Teaching Assistantships	14
Teaching Assistantship Assignments	15

Tuition and Scholarships	19
Paying for Tuition	19
Estimated Living Expenses	20
Información para estudiantes internacionales	21
Seguro de Salud	21
Seguro Social	22
Vivienda	22
Más información	23
Teaching in the Department of Creative Writing	24
Requirements	24
Applying	24
Why teach creative writing?	25
While you teach	25
Improvements and Grievances	26
Suggestions	26
Grievances	27
Working on Your Thesis	28
Thesis Requirements	28
Choosing Your Thesis Director	28
Submitting Your Thesis Proposal	29
Forming A Thesis Committee	31
Writing Your Thesis	32
Defense and Graduation	36
Graduation	36
Defense	37
Forms	37
Suggested Deadlines	37
After Graduation	39
International Students	39
Ph.D. Programs	40

Applying for Teaching Jobs	40
Publication	41
Letters of Recommendation	41
Bilingual Creative Writing Students' Organization	42
Officers	42
Elections	43
Current Representative	43
Frequently Asked Questions	44
Advisor List 2021–2022	46
Jeff Sirkin	46
Lex Williford	46
Sasha Pimentel	46
Nelson Cárdenas	46
Daniel Chacon	46
José de Piérola	46
Rosa Alcalá	46
Andrea Cote	46
Acknowledgments	47
Feedback	48

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 iii) 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 44). Finally, if the information you are looking for is not in this handbook, contact:

- Director of Graduate Studies at jdepierola@utep.edu.
- Programa de maestría at creacionliteraria@utep.edu
- MFA Program at <mailto:creativewriting@utep.edu>

The Creative Writing Department

The Creative Writing Department at UTEP was established 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, Rosá Alcalá, and our Administrative Services Coordinator, Carla Gonzalez, as well as a conference space you can use to study and work when there are no 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 ralcala1@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 of 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 14).
- 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.

¹If you do not know who your advisor is, check the Advisor List (page 46).

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 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 8) 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 with a critical preface. The thesis may be a work of fiction, poetry, non-fiction, screen or stage plays, as well as literary translation. Each candidate is required to submit a thesis proposal and writing sample 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 28) for more details.

Independent Study

An Independent Study may replace a workshop, variable topics or literature course. The Independent-Study format 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 semesters 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.

INDEPENDENT STUDY

- 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 46). 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 them 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 your advisor 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 6) 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 writing 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 their 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 8).

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 residents 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, assigns teaching assistantships. 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 they have doubts about suggestions. 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. Students working in absentia will forfeit their teaching assistantship appointment. 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 leaves of absence, check the corresponding section in Frequently Asked Questions on page 44.

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

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.

Students with a teaching assistantship are evaluated every year. The renewal of their appointment depends on performance. Please do not lobby for a particular assignment, and unless there are extenuating circumstances, please do not request a substitute assignment.

NOTE: First-year students enrolled in a pedagogy class (either LING 5308 or ENG 5346) are given only a 10 hours per week assignment during that semester.

The possible duties for a teaching assistant in the Department of Creative Writing are one of the following:

- Assist the Department's office
- Assist one of the program directors
- Edit the *Rio Grande Review*, our literary journal
- Help organize the "Congreso de Literatura Mexicana" or the *Revista de Literatura Mexicana*
- Teach introductory courses in our department
- Teach introductory courses in other departments
- Assist a faculty member with their teaching

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP ASSIGNMENTS

First-year students do not teach. They are given other kinds of assignments that benefit Department and student.

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 students funded by our department teach for English or Language and Linguistics as well, on a loan basis, but are eligible for other assignments.

The assignments are given as follows:

HELP IN THE DEPARTMENT'S OFFICE

- Office staff is selected based on aptitude for the job and/or previous experience.
- Office staff is expected to perform professionally and put the priorities of the department first at all times.
- Considering that a new teaching assistant working for the office goes through a period of training, we try to maintain continuity in these assignments for at least two years.
- Teaching assistantships in this category may be for 10 or 20 hours per week.

ASSIST ONE OF THE PROGRAM DIRECTORS

- Depending on previous experience, some teaching assistants are assigned to the respective directors: Graduate, Undergraduate, Online.
- The qualifications for these crucial assignments are similar to those for office staff.
- We will try to maintain continuity in these positions, since there is technical training involved (AppReview, Banner, CAPS, DNN, Cascade, CMS), which requires a learning curve; therefore, these assignments are at least for two years.

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

- Teaching assistantships in this category may be for 10 or 20 hours per week.

EDIT THE *RIO GRANDE REVIEW*

- 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 make mistakes while still focusing on quality.
- No RGR staff member is expected to work more than an average of 20 hours per week, irrespective of the magazine's self-perceived needs. Staff is accountable to the RGR advisor and the department chair. 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.
- Four editor positions are available as RGR staff: three junior editors, and one senior editor. Junior editors are assigned a 10 hour per week workload, and the senior editor is assigned a 20 hour per week workload.
- RGR staff is determined annually on a competitive basis, as follows:
 - A call for applications is sent at the beginning of May of each year.
 - At the start of their first, second, and third years are eligible to apply for the junior editor position.
 - All junior editors are eligible to apply for the senior editor position.
 - The editors are selected by a three-member committee: the current RGR advisor, the current senior editor, and a faculty member.
 - In the extraordinary case that no junior editors apply for the senior editor position, the selection committee may appoint one of the current applicants.

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

TEACH INTRODUCTORY COURSES IN OUR DEPARTMENT

- First-year student cannot be assigned teaching duties, unless they already have a masters degree or equivalent.
- Most second- and third-year students may be assigned to teach introductory courses in our department.
- These teaching assistants are selected every year by the Chair in consultation with the director of graduate studies.
- Continuing to teach is contingent on success in the classroom.
- Each class assignment is equivalent to a 10-hour workload per week. You may be assigned to teach a class in addition to serving 10 hours per week in another duty.

TEACH INTRODUCTORY COURSES IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS

- Some second- and third-year students may be assigned to teach introductory courses in other departments (English/Language and Linguistics) as we are able.
- These students are selected every year by the Chair in consultation with the director of graduate studies as well as the program directors or coordinators in other 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 involved as a final resort, after you have tried working things out with the coordinator.
- Each class assignment is equivalent to a 10 hour workload per week. You may be assigned to teach a class, in addition to serving 10 hours a week in another duty.

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

HELP WITH THE “CONGRESO” AND THE *REVISTA*

- Some students may be assigned to help with the organization of the “Congreso de Literatura Mexicana” or in the *Revista de Literatura Mexicana*, hosted by the Department of Language and Linguistics.
- These teaching assistants report directly to their respective coordinator.
- The renewing of these appointments depends on performance.
- If there is a legitimate grievance or perceived inequity, our Chair will get involved as a final resort, after you have tried working things out with the coordinator.

ASSIST A FACULTY MEMBER

- Some students may be assigned to help a faculty member as a teaching assistant with duties depending on the needs of the class they are assisting.
- These assignments may count as 10 or 20 hours per week, depending on the needs of the faculty member.
- Students report directly to the faculty member.

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.

TUITION AND SCHOLARSHIPS

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, if books assigned for your courses are available in the Main Library, this will lower that line item too. The 12 month column applies to students taking courses during summer. For the most up-to-date estimates, visit [Financial Aid](#).

2022-23 ACADEMIC YEAR

	TX RESIDENT	TX NON-RESIDENT
Tuition and Fees	\$ 7,696.30	\$ 17,530.00
Room and Board	\$ 5,134.00	\$ 5,134.00
Books and Supplies	\$ 1,266.00	\$ 1,266.00
Transportation	\$ 2,284.00	\$ 2,284.00
Personal Expenses	\$ 1,986.00	\$ 1,986.00
TOTAL	\$ 18,366.00	\$ 28,200.00

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 vía internet. Las notificaciones de inscripción se envían por correo electrónico.

SEGURO SOCIAL

Antes de poder trabajar legalmente como Teaching Assistant en los Estados Unidos, todo estudiante debe tener un número de seguro social. Para obtener una tarjeta de seguro social, necesita la carta de oferta de Teaching Assistantship. Esta carta deberá ser llevada a Office of International Programs and Study Abroad y solicitar una carta de seguridad social. El OIP creará una carta verificando que está inscrito a tiempo completo como T.A. y que mantiene su estado migratorio. El Asesor de Estudiantes Internacionales firmará luego la carta de oferta. Deberá llevar ambas cartas a la oficina de la Administración del Seguro Social para solicitar la tarjeta.

Para más información, contacte con Office of International Programs and Study Abroad.

VIVIENDA

La universidad está ubicada en una zona de El Paso donde es factible 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 con otros estudiantes que ya hayan vivido en el área por medio del correo de nuestro Departamento. Recomendamos algunas opciones, como una idea general de lo que está disponible en el área. Debe tomarse en cuenta que los costos mínimos de alojamiento rondan entre los \$450 y \$600 dólares al mes, aproximadamente, y por lo general incluyen servicios de agua, luz y gas. La mayoría de los departamentos o habitaciones en alquiler solicitan un anticipo o depósito en garantía, así como la firma de contrato.

CERCA DE UTEP

Highlander apartments

1700 Hawthorne St

\$595 por mes, para una sola persona. Incluye todos los servicios

INFORMACIÓN PARA ESTUDIANTES INTERNACIONALES

1127 Los Angeles St. Apartments
Downtown 301 East River Ave.

Victor Valdez—Rooms for Rent
528 Prospect Avenue.
\$500 por mes. Incluye todos los servicios
Contact: email

DORMITORIOS UTEP

Miner Village Summit Hall
2401 N. Oregon St.
Contact: website

Miner Heights Apartments
300 W. Schuster Ave.
Contact: website

OTRAS OPCIONES

Sugerimos también las siguientes páginas web de búsqueda:

- Apartments.com
- ApartmentFinder.com
- Zillow.com

MÁS INFORMACIÓN

Cuando empiece a planear su viaje a El Paso, no deje de consultar la información más reciente y más detallada que aparece en nuestra página web en los siguientes recursos:

- [For accepted students.](#)
- [Trámites al llegar a UTEP.](#)

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. All second- and third-year students are eligible to apply for teaching in Summer, regardless of their funding status.

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 week¹

WHY TEACH CREATIVE WRITING?

- To gain teaching experience
- To work with undergraduate student writers
- To use knowledge learned in the program outside of your 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 you are passionate about.
- Organize your syllabus carefully.
- Find a grading system which works best for you such as Engrade or Blackboard.
- Make sure the course materials, assignments and activities are something you would enjoy yourself as a writer or poet.

¹For samples, contact the Director of Undergraduate Studies

Improvements and Grievances

Our department works hard to make your experience in our MFA program the best one possible. However, there may be times when you are not satisfied with your experience in our MFA program. This section outlines ways you can help improve our program and what grievance process is available to you.

SUGGESTIONS

These are general suggestions to help improve your experience during your MFA. They might correspond—but are not limited—to one of the following categories:

- New classes you would like to see offered.
- New policies regarding any aspect of your experience as student.
- Ideas for community-building and community-outreach projects, such as readings and workshops.

In these cases, you have three options:

- Talk to your representative; they will bring your suggestions to our faculty meeting.
- Talk to the Director of Graduate Studies directly.
- Talk to our Department Chair.
- Request to present your suggestion directly in our faculty meeting.

GRIEVANCES

There may be instances in which you are not satisfied with your experience in our MFA program for reasons affecting you at a personal level. You have the following options:

- **INSTRUCTOR:** If the issue relates to the class you are taking, visit your instructor during their office hours.
- **ADVISOR:** If the issue is not resolved by your instructor, or it is not specific to one particular class, go to your advisor's office (see Advisor List on page 46).
- **DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES or CHAIR:** If the issue cannot be resolved by your advisor, or is not specific to our MFA program but is still UTEP-related, see the Director of Graduate Studies or our Department Chair.
- **COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE STUDIES:** Our department has a Committee on Graduate Studies whose role it is to oversee our graduate program and handle conflicts among graduate advisors, faculty members or students regarding degree program compliance.
- **STUDENT COMPLAINT PROCEDURES:** For complaints not resolved in our Department, or which cannot be resolved in our Department, follow the steps on UTEP's [Student Complaint Procedures](#) web page.

Working on Your Thesis

The final project for your MFA will be a book-length manuscript of a publishable quality. Even though you are expected to complete your thesis in your last year (CRW 5398 Thesis I and CRW Thesis II), you should discuss your plans with your advisor as soon as possible, so that your coursework becomes the basis of your thesis. This section is intended for third-year students but first- and second-year students will also find it beneficial. Planning is the best policy for successfully completing your MFA.

THESIS REQUIREMENTS

Minimum 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

You should choose a thesis director during your fourth semester. This corresponds in most cases to the end of your second year. Before you approach a faculty member to discuss the possibility of having them as your thesis director, keep the following in mind:

- Only approach faculty members with whom you have taken at least two courses.

- Read as much of their work as possible to familiarize yourself with your prospective thesis director's poetics. This will help you decide whether they might be a good match for you.
- If the faculty member cannot direct your thesis, it doesn't mean that they do not consider your work valuable; in most cases it is due to previous commitments.
- In order to secure a thesis director by the end of your second year, begin the process early; ideally, at the beginning of your fourth semester.
- Once a faculty member has agreed to be your thesis director, you will need to send an email to the Director of Graduate Studies requesting approval.

SUBMITTING YOUR THESIS PROPOSAL

The first document you will write with the direction of your prospective thesis director is your thesis proposal. The thesis proposal gives you a chance to understand the scope of your project, including how doable it is within the time constraints of your third year. It also allows your thesis director to understand your goals so they may advise you accordingly. You must write your thesis proposal during your fourth semester (see Suggested Deadlines on page 37).

THE THESIS PROPOSAL

You are free to organize your thesis proposal as you see fit, as long as the form is approved by your thesis director. However, it should cover the following main topics:

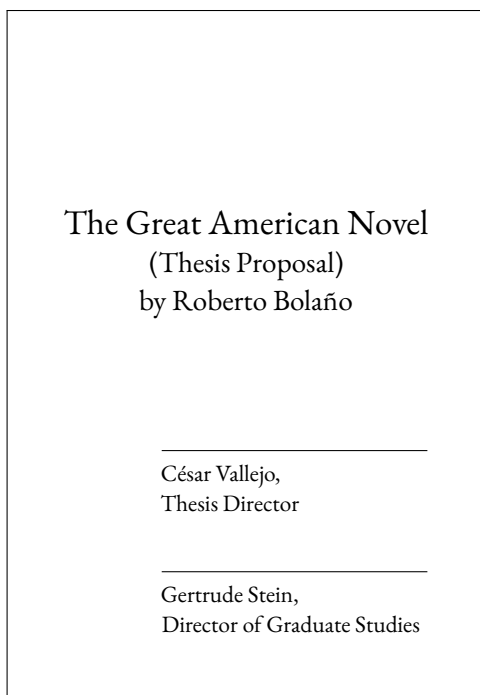
- A statement outlining your project in terms of structure, themes, issues explored, and the main intent.
- A discussion of the sources and references that you plan to use during the writing of your thesis. These may include film, music, theater, and so forth.
- A discussion of the form—or forms—you will be using to write your thesis 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 members of the committee, revision, and defense. This schedule should be as granular as possible (preferably broken down by weeks).
- A writing sample of about 10 poems (or sequence) or 20 pages of fiction (a short story or full chapter). If you are writing on a different genre, ask your thesis director.

SUBMITTING YOUR PROPOSAL

You may write your thesis proposal before you have secured a thesis director. However, it is advisable that you meet with your thesis director to discuss your project before writing your thesis proposal. Given that your prospective thesis director is—ideally—someone who knows your work, they will help you clarify your thesis as a creative writing project, as well as assist you in developing your proposal.

- The cover page of your proposal should include two signature lines: one for your thesis director, and one for the director of graduate studies (see a sample on page 31).
- The proposal should be approved by your thesis director, and then submitted to the director of graduate studies, who should approve it before you register for Thesis I (the first semester of your thesis writing year).
- Your thesis director and/or the director of graduate studies may ask for revisions prior to formal approval. Submit the proposal in advance so you have time to address any concerns prior to registering (around week 8).



Thesis proposal title page

FORMING A THESIS COMMITTEE

Once your thesis proposal has been approved, and you have secured a thesis director, start thinking about your thesis committee—your thesis director will help you in the process. The thesis committee will be crucial in giving you meaningful feedback for your project. The committee will also evaluate your thesis the day of your defense. Their signatures in the defense documents will be required for you to graduate.

Your thesis committee will consist of three members:

- Your thesis director.
- A second reader: a faculty member from the Department of Creative Writing.
- A third reader, sometimes known as an outside or external reader, can be someone who teaches in another department at UTEP, or at

another university. In this latter case, the outside reader must apply for temporary membership as a UTEP faculty using [this form](#).

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 establish mutual expectations; in other words, how often you will meet, how many pages or drafts you are to present for each meeting, what kind of feedback you expect, and so forth.

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 framework (see details on page 33). Critical prefaces have sometimes included biographical influences, but a critical approach is a must. During Thesis I, discuss with your thesis director what they consider a successful preface. Ask your director when they 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 them. Keep in mind that your thesis director will sign their name on your thesis, and therefore will do so only if they are comfortable with the quality of your work according to their standards.

While you work on your thesis, consider the following:

- Be considerate and polite with your thesis director's time. Though it is part of their service, 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 make sure to meet them. Should you experience any problems or delays, contact your thesis director as soon as possible.

WORKING ON YOUR THESIS

- Keep all scheduled appointments, and be on time.
- During the writing process, your thesis director will provide suggestions and comments. Such suggestions 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. However, they will leave it up to you to make the final decision of whether to incorporate them in your thesis or not.

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 readers—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 may have enough time to read your manuscript (at least from two to three weeks before your defense).
- Schedule 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, and a place to explain the poetics of your work, including its aesthetic statement.

The critical preface will also provide you with a road map for future work on your thesis towards publication.

To make the most of the process of writing your critical preface, as well as to make its writing easier, you may adopt some of the following strategies:

- Keep a notebook for your project. A physical, pocket notebook is best, as you can carry it with you at all times. You may also have a file easily accessible from a cloud drive.
- Take notes when you meet with your thesis director, in particular about readings they might suggest, possible changes requested, new deadlines, and so forth.
- Collect in your notebook everything that, in your view, is related to your project, in terms of influence, inspiration, sources, and the like. Many of these might not be obvious at first, but as you work, you will find yourself identifying them.
- Start writing a draft of your critical preface as early as possible.
- Remember that this is an academic, critical document. Creative critical prefaces are not acceptable, as the main goal of this part of your thesis is to think critically about it, something you will do as a professional writer.

Discuss with your thesis director their specific requirements for your critical preface. Nonetheless, all critical prefaces will follow the requirements and structure detailed below:

Requirements

- Critical approach
- 15–20 pages / 4,500–6,000 words
- Bibliography: The sources consulted, quoted, and referenced in your preface, as well as during the writing of your thesis. Use the MLA format (you may use online resources such as [Cite4Me](#)). 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 address the categories outlined below:

- **PROJECT:** Scope of the project. This may include a brief history of the project, including the writing process, and how you see it in its finished, published form. This is critical for multi-media, interdisciplinary projects.
- **POETICS:** This is a discussion of the poetics that informs this project. You should discuss, at the very least, form and overall intent. You may also include other aspects as audience, genre, and so forth.
- **CRITICAL ASSESSMENT:** This is a self-evaluation of your project as it stands at the end of your thesis writing process. Discuss the challenges you have overcome, the parts of your thesis that—in your view—are working, and the parts that will need further work before publication.
- **FRAMEWORK:** This is a discussion of the historical, literary, theoretical, and cultural network that constitutes the tradition of your thesis. This may include cultural objects beyond literature, such as popular music, films, video games, and so forth. You will need to discuss how your work connects with these works.

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 usually 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 (you may consult the current deadlines at the [official calendar](#)).

GRADUATION

As you approach the semester in which you plan to defend your thesis (usually during your sixth semester), and therefore graduate, you should familiarize yourself with Graduate School procedures. On their website, you will find information regarding thesis formatting guidelines, when to submit your thesis, application for graduate degree, and commencement. The two most useful web pages will be [How to graduate](#), and [Graduate School Forms](#).

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. Some of these forms are electronic, others are in PDF format. Fill out the electronic forms following the link below. Download the PDF forms. You will need some of them the day of your defense.

Make sure you meet with your advisor if you have any doubts about how to fill them out.

- [Application for Graduate Degree \(electronic\)](#)

- Degree Plan Form (electronic)

DEFENSE

You will defend your thesis towards the end of your Thesis II semester. Discuss with your thesis director whether they think your thesis will be ready on time for your defense. If so, set a defense date consulting with the three members of your committee, and reserve a room with our administrative assistant. Defenses have often been conducted in our conference room, but if it is not available, you can request any other room in the Liberal Arts Building.

In the past, defenses have been in person. However, some defenses have also been held virtually, on platforms such as Zoom. Discuss with your thesis director what is the best format for you.

FORMS

The day of your defense, you need the following forms ready. If you successfully pass your defense, your committee will sign them. You will file them along with the final version of your thesis with the Graduate School.

- Completion/Defense Form for Master's students
- Thesis Signature Page

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:

DEFENSE AND GRADUATION

SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS

- Choose a Thesis Director Semester 4 / Week 6
- Submit your Thesis Proposal Semester 4 / Week 10

THIRD-YEAR STUDENTS

- Create your Committee Semester 5 / Week 1
- Begin working on your Thesis Semester 5 / Week 1
- Complete draft of your Thesis Semester 6 / Week 4
- Begin working on your Preface Semester 6 / Week 4
- Graduation Application Semester 6 / Week 4
- Complete Preface Semester 6 / Week 7
- Circulate Thesis & Preface Semester 6 / Week 10
- Thesis Defense Semester 6 / Week 15
- Graduate School Application (last day) Semester 6 / Week 16

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

El programa Optional Practical Training (OPT) permite la conversión de su visa de estudiante a una que les permite trabajar por un año después de su graduación. Este programa está diseñado para ofrecer a los estudiantes la oportunidad de adquirir experiencia laboral después de finalizar sus estudios.

Los estudiantes interesados deben solicitar el OPT desde 90 días antes y hasta 60 días después del fin del programa de la visa I-20. Si la solicitud se presenta antes de la expiración de la visa I-20, se descontarán esos días de la visa de trabajo. Para más información sobre los requisitos y el costo de la solicitud consulte la página del [Optional Practical Training UTEP](#).

IMPORTANTE: Los estudiantes interesados en solicitar el OPT **no deben salir de los Estados Unidos** hasta no tener la nueva visa.

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
- Department of English at UTEP

- Diario El Paso
- Comité organizador del Congreso de Literatura Mexicana Contemporánea (UTEF)
- 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 resumé 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 best to request a letters from faculty who served on your thesis committee, from whom you've taken at least two courses, or for whom you've been a teaching assistant.
- 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:** If your letter 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 to 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.

CURRENT REPRESENTATIVE

- Marisol Adame
(madame4@miners.utep.edu)

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, students may only take one course online throughout their MFA, after all you have made the effort to come all the way to El Paso to work directly with our faculty. Online courses require the payment of an extra fee.

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 this class more than twice, as your thesis director might not be able to continue working with you. If you have problems completing your thesis on time, talk to your thesis director as soon as possible. In addition, keep in mind that students with a teaching assistantship will not be funded beyond the sixth semester.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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 take a literature course offered by the departments of English or Languages and Linguistics.

Advisor List 2021–2022

JEFF SIRKIN

- UNDERGRADUATE

LEX WILLIFORD

- Benjamin Bouvet-Boisclair
- Cheyanne Escamilla Lozano [1st year]
- Katherine Espinosa [1st year]

SASHA PIMENTEL

- Noraya Ccoyure
- Daniel de los Ríos
- Ana Mayela de Velázquez Farfán
- Yoshinar Maceda

NELSON CÁRDENAS

- Alyssa R. Estrada
- Claudia Flores Ramirez
- Natasha Rangel [1st year]

DANIEL CHACON

- Ana Llurba Ferreira [1st year]
- Israel Terron Hotzeimer [1st year]
- German Barrera Toro [1st year]

JOSÉ DE PIÉROLA

- Ines Gallo de Urioste
- Alaide Ventura Medina
- Marisol Adame
- Laia Sales Merino [1st year]

ROSA ALCALÁ

- Sergio A. Godoy
- Hugo J. Moreno
- Pauline J. Ku

ANDREA COTE

- Erik Fernández Pozo
- Jacob B. Phillips
- Zazil Collins [1st year]

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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.



Composed for MFA IN CREATIVE WRITING AT UTEP
using EB Garamond in 11 points. “EB Garamond is an open source project to create a
revival of Claude Garamont’s famous humanist typeface from the mid-16th century.

Its design reproduces the original by Claude Garamont.” (from

<http://www.georgduffner.at/ebgaramond/>)

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