



May 2011

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and Poetics University of Washington Bothell

Introduction

The University of Washington Bothell (UWB) proposes to offer a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and Poetics beginning Fall 2012. This self-supporting program would accommodate working students by offering evening first-year courses, and flexibility in scheduling courses on or off campus during the second year.

UWB projects initial enrollment of 18 FTE students, increasing to 37 FTE students the fifth year. By the fifth year, 22 students per year would graduate, prepared to create original written works using diverse media, and apply writing and critical thinking skills in various occupations. UWB's Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences (IAS) unit would partner with UW Professional and Continuing Education to implement the proposed program.

Relationship to Institutional Role and Mission and the Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education in Washington

By emphasizing creative writing in workshops and critical thinking in poetics seminars, the proposed program would support UWB's mission goal of emphasizing and developing critical thinking, writing, and information literacy. It also would support UWB's 21st Century Campus Initiative, which identifies visual, literary, and performing arts as one of several fields for new or continued development. First-year evening course scheduling and the second year off-campus attendance option would align with the *Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* strategy of creating a system of support for lifelong learning by increasing access for working students.

Program Need

The state's 2009 employer needs assessment report identifies a gap between supply and demand for editors/writers/performers.¹ In addition, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook forecasts that national employment growth for authors, writers, and editors will be about average, relative to growth for other occupations during 2008-18. However, the Employment Security Department's occupational employment projections indicate slightly less than average statewide employment growth for writers and authors during 2013-2018.

¹ Higher Education Coordinating Board, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board. *A Skilled and Educated Workforce: An assessment of the number and type of higher education and training credentials required to meet employer demand* (2009), pages 12 and 13.

Despite these somewhat mixed forecasts, employer demand for the proposed program is probably broader than employment projections indicate, since many jobs involve writing even though the job title does not clearly indicate a writing component.

The proposed program would impart skills that a broad range of employers value. A national survey commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities indicates the top two learning outcomes employers want colleges to emphasize are “the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing” and “critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills.”² The proposed program’s writing workshops and poetics seminars would help students achieve these learning outcomes.

MFA writing programs have been popular with students. UW Seattle’s MFA Creative Writing program typically receives 250-300 qualified applications for 16-20 seats. Similarly, Eastern Washington University’s MFA Creative Writing program typically receives 100-140 applications for 30 seats. Furthermore, the number of such applications is increasing nationwide according to one of the proposal’s external reviewers.

UWB conducted three surveys to ascertain student demand for a MFA program at UW Bothell.

- The first was a website-based interest survey active from June-October 2009. Of 33 respondents interested in English/writing, 28 were strongly interested in an MFA and 26 preferred Bothell as a location.
- The second was a website-based survey active from October 2009-September 2010. Of 47 respondents, 42 were interested in an MFA entitled “Writing and Poetics” and 36 preferred Bothell as a location.
- The third was a UW Educational Outreach survey of UW alumni, students, and applicants. Of 583 respondents, 127 were very or somewhat likely to consider participating in an MFA entitled “Creative Writing and Cultural Poetics.”

The proposed program would benefit the community by stimulating creative activity through events open to the public. For example, the program’s Fall Convocation and Spring Extravaganza would feature public readings and lectures by faculty, resident artists, and invited writers, including some who emphasize interdisciplinary arts. The proposed program also would broaden the pool of writers participating in UWB’s Writing for Their Lives reading series.

Although the University of Washington Seattle campus and Seattle Pacific University both offer MFA Creative Writing programs near Bothell, the proposed program would complement rather than duplicate them. It would do so by emphasizing experimental writing practices as well as poetics, which program planners define as “why we write how we write.” Furthermore, it would be organized around areas of inquiry (examination of cultural, social, and technological aspects of what and how we write) rather than genres (poetry, fiction, or non-fiction).

²Hart Research Associates, *Raising The Bar - Employers’ Views On College Learning In The Wake Of The Economic Downturn*, January 20, 2010, page 9.

Diversity

IAS intends to work with UWB's Diversity Council to evaluate diversity goals. To enhance student diversity, the IAS unit intends to advertise in publications and web-based resources likely to be read by underrepresented students as well as their undergraduate professors. IAS also intends to work to secure scholarship money so economically disadvantaged students will be able to attend.

To enhance instructor diversity, IAS intends to attract applicants for senior lecturer and artist-in-residence positions through contacts made with underrepresented writers featured in UWB's Writing for Their Lives reading series. IAS also intends to advertise with organizations such as Cave Canem (a national organization committed to cultivating professional growth of African American poets) and the Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS).

Program Description

The proposed 60 quarter credit program would serve students interested in becoming better writers. Students would hold a B.A. or a comparable degree and be admitted primarily based on writing portfolio quality, recommendation letters, and prior writing coursework. Full-time students would typically complete the program in two years, and part-time students would complete it in three to four years.

The full-time course of study would include three pairs of creative writing workshops and poetics seminars taken on campus the first year, followed by individualized study and a thesis during the second year. Poetics is included as a critical part of the program. A central principal of poetics is that literary artists should teach the art of writing and the theory of writing practice. Three out of six first-year courses – poetics seminars designed to engage critical thinking – are paired with creative writing workshops. The individualized study would consist of either off-campus directed study/research or on-campus electives (which would enable students to bring subject-area expertise to their writing).

Courses would be taught primarily by a mix of current full-time tenured/tenure-track faculty and to-be-hired senior lecturers/resident artists holding a Ph.D. or MFA. Faculty and resident artists would also serve on thesis committees either as thesis advisors or second readers. To ensure continuity between the student's first and second year experience, at least one thesis committee member would teach first-year creative writing or poetics courses. UWB would ensure a stable pool of part-time senior lecturers and resident artists by offering renewable year long contracts initially, and two- to three- year contracts after the program is fully up and running.

Student assessment would employ multiple measures including papers (poems, essays, narratives, and scripts), blogs, projects, and a thesis. Similarly, program assessment would employ multiple measures including course and yearly evaluations by students and faculty, post-thesis reports on work and instructional quality, student focus groups, and post-graduation surveys on career and employment success. Program assessment would also employ entry and exit surveys, including surveys of students who drop out (to determine why they left the program).

Program Costs

At full enrollment, the proposed program would serve 37 FTE students. Instruction (including directed study and thesis committee work) would be provided by 1.4 FTE tenured/tenure-track faculty and 1.1 FTE senior lecturers/resident artists. Administration and student advising would be provided by a 0.2 FTE faculty coordinator and 1.2 FTE staff.

The proposed program would not require new infrastructure but would require hiring new senior lecturers/resident artists. The full cost of instruction, including indirect costs, would be \$488,690 (\$13,208 per FTE student). This lies within the graduate arts and letters cost range reported in the HECB's 2005-06 *Education Cost Study* (July 2007).

The proposed program would be self-supporting, and a student enrolling in 2012 could complete the program for about \$34,000. This is comparable to what peer programs charge.

External Review

Two reviewers evaluated the proposal: Dr. Michael Davidson, Professor of American Literature, University of California San Diego; and Dr. Cynthia Hogue, Professor and Maxine and Jonathan Marshall Chair in Modern and Contemporary Poetry, Arizona State University.

Both reviewers supported the program but offered a few caveats. Both supported the program's integration of creative writing and poetics and organization around areas of inquiry rather than genres. Both noted the high quality of current UWB faculty, but Dr. Davidson worried that faculty would be "stretched pretty thin." Both warned that funding might not be adequate and suggested offering some student funding to attract strong candidates.

Program planners responded by clarifying the reasoning behind the proposed staffing and budget and outlining approaches for funding students. Both reviewers concluded their reviews by saying they would send their undergraduates to the proposed program, and Dr. Hogue recommended the program "with enthusiasm."

Staff Analysis

The proposed program would support the *Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* and UW Bothell's mission. It would build on and contribute to UW Bothell's Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences Unit, complementing existing programs. For example, it would create economies of scale and possibilities for collaboration with the existing M.A. in Cultural Studies program, which could share guest lecturers and resident artists (who could also teach undergraduate creative writing courses).

The proposed program would respond to employer, student, and community demand at a reasonable cost. National and state student demand for MFA Creative Writing programs has been strong, and the proposed program would impart skills that employers find desirable. It would benefit the community by stimulating artistic activity.

Rather than duplicating other programs, it would complement them through its curricular emphasis and structure. The program would be self-supporting, and students would pay about \$34,000, which is comparable to the cost of other programs featuring poetics.

Students would study an innovative curriculum with a structure endorsed by both external reviewers. Instruction would be provided by a mix of resident artist/senior lecturers and tenured/tenure-track faculty (whose strength was noted by both reviewers). Student and program assessment would employ multiple measures.

Staff Recommendation

After careful review of the proposal and supporting materials, staff recommend approval of the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and Poetics at the University of Washington Bothell. The HECB Education Committee discussed the proposal during its April 26 meeting and recommend approval by the full Board.



STATE OF WASHINGTON
HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

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RESOLUTION NO. 11-06

WHEREAS, the University of Washington Bothell proposes to offer a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and Poetics; and

WHEREAS, The program would support *the Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education*, as well as the university's mission; and

WHEREAS, The program would respond to student, employer, and community need without duplicating existing programs; and

WHEREAS, The program has support from external reviewers; and

WHEREAS, The program would be offered at a reasonable cost; and

WHEREAS, The program would be offered on-campus at the University of Washington Bothell, but students would have the option of off-campus directed study the second year;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and Poetics, effective May 19, 2011.

Adopted:

May 19, 2011

Attest:

Earl Hale, Vice Chair

Sam Smith, Education Committee Chair