Resolution #24
2002-2003
FACULTY SENATE

TO: Dr. Paul Yu, College President
FROM: The Faculty Senate Meeting on: April 21, 2003
RE: MFA in Creative Writing

SUBJ: MFA in Creative Writing
Signed: Date Sent: 5/24/03
(Dr. Kenneth O'Brien, 2002-2004 Faculty Senate President)

TO: The Faculty Senate
FROM: Dr. Paul Yu, College President

RE: Decision and Action Taken on Formal Resolution (circle)
   Accepted. Effective Date: 5/5/03
   Deferred for discussion with the Faculty Senate on __/__/ __
   Unacceptable for the reasons contained in the attached explanation

II, III. Response to Recommendation or Other/FYI
   Received and acknowledged
   Comment:

DISTRIBUTION TO: President, Staff and School Deans

Distribution Date: 4/24/03
Signed: Date: 5-5-03
(Dr. Paul Yu, President, SUNY College at Brockport)
To Osman Yasar and the Graduate Committee

From: Dr. Stanley S. Rubin and Judith Kitchen

February 22, 2003

Re: MFA in Creative Writing Proposal

Thank you for meeting with us and clarifying what you would need from us to take our proposal to the Faculty Senate. What we’ve done is lead with the justifications for such a program at SUNY Brockport, followed by a brief (one page) description of how a low-residency program works. This is followed by a structured breakdown of the proposed program, a comparison with other low-residency programs to show just how ours differs from them, our admissions and assessment policies, our Website information, and the letters of support.

We wish we had known that we were expected to provide this shortened version—as you can see, it was no problem to provide it. If possible, the Office of Graduate Studies should supply a list of what is needed—and when—and even where—to those who are submitting proposals. Your committee was receptive and helpful, especially once we were aware of how it was intended to function in the process. We hope that this “packet” will make an easier presentation to the Senate and that they will not have to wade through the more comprehensive answers to the questions on the college template (A-H).
Why an MFA in Creative Writing at SUNY Brockport?

• There is a strong demonstrated local interest in such a program (our own surveys of workshop participants have produced dozens of enthusiastic responses from prospective applicants)•

• It would complement the existing MFAs in Dance and Visual Studies•

• It would capitalize on the national prestige of The Writers Forum•

• It would build on the reputation and extensive experience of our Summer Writing Workshops•

• It would be a high-quality, high-prestige program with a national profile•

• It would not require new lines or significant commitment of resources•

• It would be financially self-sustaining within three years•

• It would attract a number of established professionals from greater Rochester and around the state who would, in turn, boost recruitment for Brockport•

• It would be a natural focus for endowment from its graduates•

• It would further differentiate Brockport from other SUNY Colleges•

• It would capitalize on our strong tradition of creative writing•

• It would attract students to graduate courses in English and other areas•
M.F.A. IN CREATIVE WRITING
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Proposed Program Title:
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

We propose a low-residency MFA program in Creative Writing. Low-Residency means just that—students would be in residence for 8 full days in early summer and would otherwise work during the year from home under close supervision of a nationally-credentialled mentor, or master-writer. Students will earn 48 credits, 15 per year over three years plus a 3-credit external experience. The final project will be the completion and submission of a substantial creative collection, or MFA thesis. The degree will be awarded for: completion of three years of supervised academic work, participation in 4 residencies, a successful field experience, and an acceptable thesis consisting of a substantial critical paper as well as an original book-length portfolio of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry. Graduating students will also be required to give a public critical presentation and a reading from their work.

Mentors work intensively with students in the program in order to develop, sustain, and achieve an individualized writing project, including assigning and evaluating critical readings relevant to the project. Because of the nature of such a program, faculty need not be restricted to any geographical area. These positions will be filled by writers of significant achievement: impressive publication record, demonstrated excellence in teaching, and significant national reputation.

During the year, students are expected to devote approximately 15 hours each week to their writing and reading. Over each eight-week period, the student will continue to work on original writing, will read and analyze at least 3-4 books, and will compile a “mailing” of these activities. The faculty mentor will respond within two weeks, making comments and suggestions for the work and monitoring the student’s scholarly improvement. There is room for variation within the program in order to suit a particular student’s interests or circumstances.

In our model, at some time (probably in the second year), the student would have an outside experience. This experience is to introduce the students to other aspects of the writing life, to ongoing opportunities for writers, to voices and approaches other than those of our faculty, and to an independent writing life. We envision residencies at various arts colonies throughout the nation, courses abroad, community service projects, teaching, or internships.

Programs such as these have been very successful in creative writing precisely because of the nature of the course of study which involves intensive reading, writing original pieces, and receiving feedback from a mentor. This closely resembles the writing process itself and appeals especially to mature students who are already established in a job or family and want to perfect their craft in a leisurely but structured manner.

Inclusions:

A: SUNY Brockport Program Structure
B: Comparison with Other Low-Residency Programs
C: Admissions and Assessment Policies
D: Potential Website Information—an overview of the program
E: Letters of Support
A
MFA in Creative Writing
SUNY Brockport Program Structure

• Residency #1
14 hours of required workshops; 25 additional hours of classes, lectures, and readings; assignment of faculty mentor, design course study. 0 credits

• First year
ENL 700.01, 700.02. 6 mailings: emphasis on ongoing original work (amount to be determined by participant and mentor); reading 24 required texts with approximately 40 pages of critical writing. 15 Credits

• Residency #2
14 hours of required workshops; 25 additional hours of classes, lectures, and readings; assignment of faculty mentor; planning for field experience; design course study. 0 credits

• Second year
ENL 700.01, 700.02, field experience. 5 mailings: continued emphasis on original work; reading 18 required texts with approximately 25 pages of critical writing.
Implementation of field experience; report on field experience. 3 credit equivalent

• Residency #3
14 hours of required workshops; 25 additional hours of classes, lectures, and readings; assignment of thesis adviser, discussion of critical paper. 0 credits

• Third year
ENL 798, Thesis. 6 mailings: reading 8 required texts; writing of critical paper (20-40 pages); organization of creative portfolio (book-length manuscript); revision of paper and portfolio; planning for class or lecture. 15 credits

• Residency #4
14 hours of required workshops; 18 additional hours of classes, lectures, and readings; teaching a class; public reading; graduation.

Total: 48 credits

Residencies:
56 hours of workshops
100 hours of classes, lectures, readings
Work with Mentors (17 mailings w/feedback):
2250 hours on reading and writing
50 annotations of required texts
critical paper
thesis
Field Experience
Comparison with other Low-Residency Programs

Two programs of this nature have been long established: Warren Wilson College in North Carolina and Vermont College. In the past few years, Bennington College in Vermont has also developed a low-residency program from its Summer Workshops, and Goucher College in Maryland now offers such a degree in nonfiction alone.

Very recently, several other colleges have begun to offer low-residency MFA programs in writing; Spalding University in Kentucky; New England College in New Hampshire; Antioch College in Los Angeles; Queens University in Charlotte, NC. In addition, the University of Southern Maine will soon be offering an MFA, and the University of New Orleans now has a low-residency combined with study abroad.

Comparison Table:

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<th>Other Programs</th>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of residencies</td>
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<td># of required texts</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2200-2500</td>
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NOTE: The program itself will be competitive—one of the least expensive programs of this type in the country. The fact that these costs are spread over three years (instead of the usual two) will also be attractive to many prospective students.

Other MFA Programs in Upstate New York

Conventional MFA Programs are aimed at younger students who have recently completed undergraduate degrees. They expect the student to be in residence on campus and to attend workshops and classes. Often, students are given teaching assistantships. These programs vary to a large extent, some taking two years, others taking three to four years (42-60 credit hours). Upstate New York has two such MFA programs, one at Syracuse University and a very small program at Cornell.

In addition, SUNY Binghamton and SUNY Buffalo grant a Ph.D. with a creative thesis. There are no low residency MFA programs in New York State, nor any MFA degree programs in Creative Writing in SUNY.
Admission of Students

Students will submit an application consisting of a portfolio (15 pages of poetry, 30-40 pages of prose), a one-page "review" of a book they have read recently, and a two-page statement of their background in writing and literature, their reasons for wanting to enroll in the program, what they hope to accomplish, plus two letters of recommendation. An undergraduate degree is required. Upon acceptance, they will need to furnish a transcript of undergraduate work.

Each application will be read and evaluated by a committee consisting of the director, the assistant director, and one faculty member. Creative work in the portfolio must be at a level indicating a high degree of proficiency in the genre for which matriculation is requested: i.e. demonstrable skill including knowledge of literary craft and tradition, and a critical vocabulary appropriate to the genre. As a general guideline, creative work submitted should be of publishable quality or indicate a clear potential of achieving publication. The program is intended for mature students. Candidates' applications should document the ability to work independently and to bring significant writing projects to completion.

Assessment of Student Progress

At the end of each semester, the mentor will submit a written evaluation of the student's progress and level of achievement to the Director of the program. At the completion of each academic year, the student's progress and level of achievement will be evaluated by a Board consisting of the Director and two faculty mentors. A cumulative transcript will document the courses of study during the residency, the mentor's report, and the student's yearly evaluation of the year-long experience. A satisfactory yearly evaluation is required as a prerequisite for entry into the following year of the program. At the end of each year, students will complete individual self-assessment and program-assessment forms to establish a mutual understanding of the student's progress to date and future prospects.

At completion of the program, students will submit an M.F.A. thesis consisting of (a) a substantial body of original creative work (the equivalent of a book-length manuscript) and (b) a substantial critical paper (20-40 pages) on a topic selected in collaboration with the thesis director, who will be a designated faculty mentor. The purpose of this paper is to indicate a high degree of critical proficiency. It is intended to be the equivalent of a published article and should be of publishable quality. Each thesis will receive a written evaluation from the Director, the thesis director, and a designated faculty mentor or "outside" writer in the field. The thesis will receive a grade of "unsatisfactory" (with rationale), "satisfactory," or "distinguished." Upon acceptance of the thesis, the student will conduct a class meeting based on it, and make an open presentation of the work at the final residency.

As is customary in these specialized low-residency programs, grades are either "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory." Work is considered satisfactory at the 700-level if the student meets or exceeds the course of study contracted for and is deemed by the evaluative board to be making reasonable progress toward completion of the writing project required for graduation. Work is considered to be unsatisfactory at the 700-level if the student does not send in the required mailings, does not meet deadlines, fails to show development of critical and creative capabilities in a manner that would indicate successful fulfillment of the required degree project. As stated in the Graduate Studies Catalogue, an "S" grade shall indicate that work completed is at least "B" quality.

Students may formally appeal an unsatisfactory assessment by submitting a written request for review by the Director who may constitute a special Appeals Board for further action. This board will be composed of the Director, Assistant Director, one faculty mentor named by the Director and one named by the student. If permitted, students may take one extra semester to bring work to a satisfactory level or they may be dropped from the program for inadequate work.
The Brockport Writers Forum Low-Residency MFA in Creative Writing

- The Brockport Writers Forum offers a low-residency Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in Creative Writing. Designed to be more leisurely (and better suited to the schedule of a professional and/or family member) than other low-residency programs, students will be in residence for one intensive 8-day period in early summer and will otherwise work from home with an individual mentor. Participants are most likely to be mature, adult students who have a sustained interest in writing and literature. The program is intended to enhance already-established work habits. Between residencies, students spend the year corresponding directly with a core faculty member. Guest faculty serve as lecturers during the residencies, teaching literature and craft.

- Our program also features an innovative “outside experience” to foster an independent writing career and to introduce students to other aspects of the writing life: national and international opportunities for writers, voices and approaches other than those of our faculty. The program will help arrange for an independent residency at such places as the Vermont Studio Center, Centrum (WA), the Anderson Center (MN), or study abroad in a variety of programs in literature, writing, or language. We also encourage innovative internships, community service, teaching, or other projects that might serve this aspect of the program (for which you may earn a small salary).

- The Brockport Writers Forum has a national reputation for excellence. It was awarded the “Cultural Organization of the Year” Award from the Arts & Cultural Council for Greater Rochester for its reading series. Its summer workshops were rated “A+” in Resources for Writers. The Videotape Library, a series of “discussions of craft” begun in 1968, is considered perhaps the finest resource of its type. The archive includes five Nobel laureates, numerous Pulitzer Prize winning authors and recipients of other high honors.

- Residencies consist of a combination of workshops, readings, classes, talks, and discussions. During the residency, workshops conducted by a combination of core and guest faculty will be held each morning in each genre. Workshops are small—never more than 12 people. In addition, faculty members may give readings of their work, offer a one- or two-day class or a one-hour formal lecture on a literary topic or on some aspect of craft. Workshops are required; students are further expected to attend a total of 25 hours of additional activities during the residency and design their courses of study for the year.

- The course of study is largely structured by the student and is uniquely tailored to the student’s needs and experience, but the program may require some stringent study of literature for those whose backgrounds are in other fields. By the time of graduation, students will be expected to have read a substantial (at least 50) number of books on a suggested list. In consultation with the mentor, each student will devise a reading program and submit critical responses to these books along with original work in fiction, poetry, or nonfiction. The responses may take the form of short response papers or of longer, more discursive essays.

- Students are expected to devote approximately 15 hours each week to their writing and reading. Over each eight-week period, the student will continue to work on original writing, will read and analyze at least 4 books, and will compile a “mailing” of these activities. The faculty mentor will respond within two weeks, making comments and suggestions for the work and monitoring the student’s scholarly improvement. Students and faculty will both provide mid-year evaluations to the MFA director. These become part of the student’s narrative transcript.
• The degree will be awarded for completion of 3 years and 4 residencies, a successful field experience, and an acceptable thesis consisting of a critical paper as well as an original portfolio of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry. The critical paper should arise from the areas of study and will usually be completed during the third year. It should serve as the basis for a course to be taught by the graduating student in the final residency. Each thesis will be read by a board of two faculty members and the director or assistant. Graduating students will also give a public reading from their work.

• Participants who already have an M.A. in writing or literature will be allowed to complete the program in two years and three residencies.

• There is room for variation within the program in order to suit a particular student’s interests or circumstances. The following is a suggested program:
  • Residency #1—assignment of faculty mentor, design course study.
  • First year—6 mailings, emphasis on ongoing original work and reading required texts with approximately 40 pages of critical writing.
  • Residency #2—assignment of faculty mentor, planning for field experience, design course study.
  • Second year—5 mailings, continued emphasis on original work and implementation of field experience, with approximately 25 pages of critical writing, plus report on field experience.
  • Residency #3—assignment of thesis adviser, discussion of critical paper.
  • Third year—6 mailings, writing of critical paper (20–40 pages), organization of creative portfolio (book-length manuscript), revision of paper and portfolio, planning for class or lecture.
  • Residency #4—teaching a class, public reading, graduation.

• In general, a student will apply to work in a genre of his or her choice and will work with faculty members writing in that genre. However, in the interest of a varied experience, we will allow students to work in more than one genre and we will accept mixed-genre theses. Many of our faculty members work in more than one genre so there is ample opportunity for experimentation.

• We encourage study of literature and will grant credit if a student takes a graduate course at another institution, or if a student attends a graduate course or a 600-level seminar in the English Department at SUNY Brockport. Students may elect to take one such course per year; under these circumstances the requirements for the independent project will be adjusted accordingly.

To apply: Send a portfolio of some of your best work (15 pages of poetry, 30–40 pages of prose), a one-page “review” of a book you have recently read, and a two-page statement of your background in writing and literature, your reasons for wanting to enroll in the program, what you hope to accomplish. Two letters of recommendation from someone who knows your work, your work habits, or your ability to work independently. Upon acceptance, you will need to furnish a transcript of your undergraduate work. Nonrefundable application fee.

Basic costs: New York State Residents: approx. $3200.00 per year tuition; Out of State Residents: approx. $5300.00 per year tuition; Summer residencies: $1000.00 (some scholarships available).
Date: May 1, 2001

To: Timothy Flanagan, Vice President
    Academic Affairs

From: Earl Ingersoll, Chair
      Department of English

RE: “Trial Balloon” review of the MFA in Creative Writing Proposal

In line with the Department’s recent vote to support the proposal for a low-residency MFA in Creative Writing, I endorse the venture and look forward to its expeditious movement toward approval.
MEMORANDUM

To: Timothy J. Flanagan
   Provost/VPAA

From: Michael A. Maggiotto
   Dean

Re: MFA in Creative Writing

February 9, 2002

Enclosed please find a new program proposal prepared by Professors Rubin and Kitchen that builds on the Academic Priorities Committee’s positive response to their trial balloon proposal. I submit it to you for your preliminary review and for any suggestions that you would like to make before a final draft is submitted to Faculty Senate. The English Department chair supports the present proposal. It is my understanding that the Department of English also supports this proposal, although a letter to that regard was not included. Such a letter would be helpful.

I have read the proposal and support its adoption with the following caveats. It is my understanding that the directors serve for fixed, renewable terms and are not seeking course releases to perform their duties. They report to an advisory body that includes the English Department Chair and graduate director among others. The advisory body and the program itself fall under the jurisdiction of the Dean of Letters and Sciences. I suggest that this be made clearer in the proposal. It is also my understanding that the program is self-supporting and that it will reimburse the department with adjuncts, should departmental faculty become involved as mentors.

Please let me know what further action you would like me to take to ensure swift passage of this proposal through Senate.

Encl.

xc: Earl Ingersoll, Chair
    Stan Rubin
    Judith Kitchen
November 29, 2001

Dr. Stan Rubin
Writer's Forum
204 Hartwell Hall

Dear Dr. Rubin:

This letter is sent regarding the Writer's Forum proposal to offer:
A Low-Residency MFA Program in Creative Writing

It is anticipated that the program is primarily intended for mature students most of whom will be expected to work largely off campus and/or bring their own laptops for on-campus classes. The program may use course management software such as Angel and requires on-going web page development. Since class size is expected to be small (10-30 for initial classes), impact on computing resources appears minimal.

It is anticipated that current computing resources will be sufficient to meet program needs as long as software, equipment and campus network access is maintained and upgraded on an on-going basis. Information Technology Support Services supports the low residency MFA in Creative Writing program in their efforts.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo Orzech, Ph.D.
Director, Information Technology Support Services
Memorandum

To: Dr. Stanley S. Rubin  
   English Professor & Writers Forum Director

From: Sally Petty  
       Chairperson, Library Collection Development Committee

RE: Statement of Library Support for the Creative Writing Proposal

Date: March 8, 2002

The Library Collection Development Committee has reviewed the attached evaluation of the library’s holdings as they relate to the Creative Writing proposal and found our holdings to be adequate to support course work in Creative Writing. English Department funding for books, media and serials is adequate to support the course(s). A list of Primary Creative Writing Holdings identifies classifications thought to be relevant to support teaching and research. In addition, we have included a list of Related Creative Writing Holdings, a page of selected video holdings, a list of Writers Forum videos, a list of journals selected by the English Department, and a list of three major literature research databases. Reference holdings include relevant periodical indexes and abstracts, on-line databases, encyclopedias and dictionaries, bibliographies, directories, handbooks and manuals.
Date: March 14, 2002

To: Michael Maggiotto, Dean
School of Letters and Sciences

From: Earl Ingersoll, Chair
Department of English

RE: MFA in Creative Writing

In response to continuing questions of documentation for the MFA proposal, I will make one last effort to get us all "on the same page." On November 19, 2001, I oversaw the counting of the ballots on the MFA. The tally was 16-4 in favor of the proposal. On February 14, 2002, I sent you a letter confirming my support for the proposal. The Department supports the proposal, and I support the proposal.

xc: Timothy Flanagan, Provost and VPAA
Stan Sanvel Rubin
Judith Kitchen