

NC State MFA FAQ's

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PROGRAM STRUCTURE

What does a typical semester look like (number of workshops, craft seminars, electives)?

NC State's MFA program is a two-year degree program. In terms of required courses, students take a workshop every semester. In addition, students are required to take six credits of literature electives in either first or second year. In their second year, students take six hours of thesis hours across the fall and spring semesters. After these requirements, the rest can be elective courses, although some of the electives are utilized for pedagogical training depending on which teaching assignment they are assigned.

[Here](#) is an overview of all the MFA degree requirements and the timeline.

Will I work primarily in one genre, or is cross-genre study encouraged? Can I work across genres or pursue hybrid/experimental work?

Students apply for one track, and because it's a two-year program we want students to specialize in that track, but they can utilize their elective credits for taking other classes. Our 590: Studies in Creative Writing courses are a place for cross-genre study. Recent topics include: The Practice of Poetics, Literary Citizenship and Controversies, Memoir, Teaching Arts Practicum, and Writing as Ritual.

How many workshops will I take in my genre? How large are workshops and seminars? What are the graduate workshops like?

Students take a workshop every semester with a different creative writing faculty member. On average, the workshop class size consists of twelve students. Every faculty member has a different style and pedagogical focus.

Are there opportunities to take courses outside the English department (examples: film, design, languages, interdisciplinary arts)? What about at other universities?

Yes, they can take courses in any department as long as it's approved by their academic advisor (Chelsea Krieg, Administrative Director). Students can also take classes at UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke University.

What is the MFA Exam process like?

Working with your thesis advisor, students will compile an MFA Exam list of twenty books—ten from the Creative Writing Program MFA Exam Book List and ten of the student's choice. Typically, students will read the books during the summer before starting the fall semester of their second year. During the fall semester, students will discuss with their advisor the books and topics of interest they may want to write about for the exam. The faculty advisor writes the MFA Exam and students write the exam over the course of a weekend, typically in October of the fall semester of the second year.

To see examples of the MFA Exam Book List or MFA sample questions, please contact faculty in the program to see if they can be provided.

What does the thesis process look like? When do students begin, how is it structured, and what kind of advising is provided?

Students begin preparing for the thesis during the spring semester of their first year when they are matched with a faculty thesis advisor. Advisors work closely with students to guide the project. While advising styles vary, all faculty provide sustained mentorship through the drafting and revising of the thesis.

In the second year, students enroll in thesis hours in both the fall and spring semesters. During this time, they focus primarily on completing and revising their manuscript in regular consultation with their advisor. For poetry, it is a collection of fifty pages. For fiction students, the thesis typically consists of a book-length creative manuscript such as a novel, novella, or short story collection of at least 200 pages. The process culminates in a thesis defense during the spring semester of the second year. The defense committee includes two creative writing faculty members and one faculty member from outside the program. The defense is a formal but supportive conversation about the project, craft decisions made, and the project's development over the course of the student's time in the program.

TEACHING & FUNDING

What is the teaching assistantship load? Will I get to teach creative writing?

Students don't teach in their first year. They teach in the second year, either a 1-2 or a 2-1 load, depending on their scheduling preference. Assignments are either in creative writing or first-year writing.

What is the stipend? Is funding guaranteed for the full program length?

Teaching assistantships carry a stipend of 20K for each year, guaranteed for both years students are in the program. Teaching assistantships also include full tuition remission and health insurance.

What training do new TAs receive before teaching? Is there a pedagogy course or mentoring?

GTA's get training either through the FYWP (First Year Writing Program) or through the Creative Writing Program, depending on their teaching assignments.

During the year, students can participate in the Guest Teacher Mentorship Program which gives graduate students mentored teaching experience and provides faculty additional opportunities to observe graduate teaching.

Are there additional paid opportunities (tutoring, editing, summer teaching, research work) available?

Students can apply for the [Young and Teen Writers Workshop](#) (four-weeks usually from July through August). Instructors lead 80-minute workshops of 10-12 kids (ages 9-19). Info on the program can be found at <https://english.chass.ncsu.edu/youngwriters/>

In the past, students have or are currently interning at the [Red Bud Writing Project](#) the [Griot and Grey Owl Black Southern Writer's Conference](#), [Blair Publishing](#), [UNC Press](#), and as part of the Teaching Arts Practicum course in the Creative Writing Program.

COMMUNITY & CULTURE

How many students are admitted each year? What's the typical cohort size and genre distribution?

Every year, the program accepts six students in fiction and six in poetry, for a total incoming cohort size of twelve students.

Are there student-run journals, reading series, or editorial opportunities?

The program helps support students who want to volunteer with local literary journals/presses, including [Raleigh Review](#) and [UNC Press](#).

The program has several graduate readings throughout the year—the MFA Graduate Reading Series, which takes place at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters, and the MFA Thesis Reading that happens near the end of the spring semester.

In addition to this, graduate students in the program have started their own reading series, Sweetbitter, that takes place at the independent bookstore [So and So Books](#).

How frequently are visiting writers and literary events (readings, craft talks, festivals) offered?

Every year, the Creative Writing Program hosts two readings, one in the fall and the other in the spring, from guest judges of [NC State's Fiction and Poetry Contests](#) as part of our reading series. In addition to judging our contests and giving a reading, guest judges have given craft talks and participated in informal coffee conversations with graduate students about writing and publishing. Past writers have included Halle Hill, Oliver Baez Bendorf, Melissa Crowe, and Annette Clapsaddle. Other recent writers who have come as part of our reading series include Mesha Maren, Jenny Offil, and Smriti Ravindra.

The program also has the MFA Graduate Reading Series, which takes place at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters, and the MFA Thesis Reading that happens near the end of the spring semester.

In the spring semester, we have professionalization panels with alumni from the program.

We recently celebrated the [20th anniversary of the MFA Program](#) through a series of readings and events featuring MFA faculty and alumni of the program.

Are students able to participate in organizing or hosting these events?

We encourage students to participate in the larger Research Triangle creative writing community. Recently, current graduate students have created their own reading series, Sweetbitter, that runs at the independent [So and So Books](#).

Are there mentorship or networking connections with former students?

Every year the program offers professionalization panels with alumni from our program. In recent years, such topics have included: Crafting a CV/Resume, Applying for International Opportunities, Sustaining A Writing Life, Applying for Grants, Residencies, and Fellowships, and Alternative Career Paths Beyond (Traditional) Teaching.

For this year, panels include: Publishing A First Book, the Publishing Industry, and Community Arts Engagement. All panels are open to admitted and waitlisted students. If you're interested in attending, contact Chelsea Krieg, Administrative Director.

In addition, the internships that students have participated in were with organizations founded by alums from our program.

WRITING LIFE & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

What kind of professionalization support is offered (submission strategies, publishing advice, conference funding, CVs, fellowships, PhD prep, job market guidance)?

Most years we're able to offer some funding to offset the costs of conference travel.

Faculty in the program have offered professionalization support both informally and formally in and outside the program. In the past, creative writing faculty have brought in literary agents, literary journal editors, and book editors in their classes to meet and talk with students, have offered panels and advice on applying to residencies, grants, and fellowships, on writing artistic statements, have offered subscriptions to Duotrope and Publisher's Marketplace, and have hosted submission gatherings for students to learn about, discuss and apply to submission opportunities.

Every year, the MFA Program offers professionalization panels with alumni from our program. The topics vary but are developed from students' needs and interests.

During the year, students can participate in the Guest Teacher Mentorship Program which gives graduate students mentored teaching experience and provides faculty additional opportunities to observe graduate teaching.

In addition, the Graduate School also offers several professional development workshops throughout the year.

Are there opportunities for internships, editing work, or community engagement?

Yes! Students have or are currently interning at the [Red Bud Writing Project](#) the [Griot and Grey Owl Black Southern Writer's Conference](#), [Blair Publishing](#), [UNC Press](#), and as part of the Teaching Arts Practicum course in the Creative Writing Program.

Where have recent graduates published or placed professionally (book deals, journals, PhD programs, teaching jobs, arts careers)?

Our MFA graduates are actively publishing. For fiction, they have published in *Lightspeed Magazine*, *Clarkesworld*, *The Indiana Review*, *Copper Nickle*, *Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Terraform*, *The Georgia Review*, *Oxford American*, *Best Debut Short Stories*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Minnesota Review*, *Apogee Journal*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Carve Magazine*, *Nano Fiction*, *Arts & Letters*, *Tin House*, *The Normal School*, *Grist*, *Blackbird*, *New Ohio Review*, and *The Masters Review*. They have won the Nebula, Locus, World Fantasy, Shirley Jackson, and Lambda Awards, been shortlisted for the VCU Cabell Award, longlisted for the Massachusetts Book Award, and received acknowledgements from the Horror Writers Association, the Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy, *The Year's Best Dark Fantasy & Horror*, *The Years Best Science Fiction and Fantasy*, and *the Year's Best Weird Fiction*, and the PEN/Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize for Emerging Writers.

For poetry, our students have published in *Poetry Magazine*, *New England Review*, *Guenica*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *Georgia Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Willow Springs*, *The Offing*, *Kenyon Review*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Eckleburg Review*, *Hobart*, *Word Riot*, *The North American Review*, *Passages North*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Raleigh Review*, *Gulf Stream*, *Best New Poets 2024*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Nimrod*, *Willow Springs*, *Grist*, and *Redivider*, *The Missouri Review*, *Oxford American Poetry Journal*, *Carve Magazine*, *CONSEQUENCE*, and *Pedestal Magazine*. Poetry graduates have won awards from the National Endowment of the Arts, the *Academy of American Poets Prize*, the Jacobs/Jones African-American Literary Prize, [the Whiting Writers](#)

Award, the Juniper Prize for Poetry, the National Book Award, the NAACP Image Award, the Pen/Voelcker Award, the Maya Angelou Book Award, the *APR/Honickman First Book Prize*, the Arab American Book Award, the Brooklyn Public Library Literary Prize, and the Walt Whitman Award.

Our graduates have published short story collections, poetry collections, chapbooks, novels and novellas in Berkley Books, Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Button Poetry, Kore Press, Black Lawrence Press, University of Massachusetts Press, Ig Publishing, Clarion Books, Cloudbank Books, Fjords Press, Blackstone Publishing, Copper Canyon Press, and Alice James Books.

Post MFA, our students have either gone on to pursue PhD's at Iowa State University, University of Houston, Georgia State University, and the University of Southern California, or work in positions at Dartmouth College, Elon College, UNC Chapel Hill, Texas A&M University-San Antonio, and the University of Michigan. Two of our alums founded the [Redbud Writing Project](#), the Research Triangle's only adult education writing school serving Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, and beyond.

Does the program help students apply for residencies, grants, or contests?

With faculty guidance and support, recent graduate students have been finalists for the [Hurston/Wright Foundation Legacy Award](#), have won the [AWP Intro Journals Project](#), and have been accepted and attended the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, Bread Loaf's Environmental Writers' Conference, Community of Writers Residency in Olympic Valley, Napa Valley Conference, and the Tretmont Writers Conference.

DAILY LIFE IN RALEIGH

Where do most MFA students live? Are there neighborhoods popular with grad students? Is it easy to get around without a car? What do students typically pay for rent? Is it sustainable on the teaching stipend?

Most students choose to live with one or more roommates, which makes housing and overall living expenses manageable. The Research Triangle offers a range of neighborhoods within commuting distance to campus, and students often share recommendations and roommate opportunities within the MFA community.

It's recommended that students begin exploring housing early and we can facilitate connecting with current students for guidance as they prepare to relocate.

Raleigh is a car-oriented city, but there is the [Capital Area Transit](#) (CAT) bus system that serves NC State and much of the Raleigh area.

Is their graduate housing available?

[E.S. King Village Apartments](#) and [Western Manor Apartments](#) are possible options for graduate students.

DECISION QUESTIONS

If accepted, when do I have to make a decision?

NC State's MFA Program adheres to the [April 15 Resolution](#) so applicants have until this deadline to make a decision on their funded offer of acceptance.

If waitlisted, when will I hear back about a decision? Is the waitlist ranked? Can I know where I'm at on the waitlist?

Our waitlist is unranked. As spots open and creative writing faculty make decisions, we try to think about the overall fit for the program in cultivating our future cohorts. We aim to notify students as soon as possible if we end up with a spot opening in the program.

Can I speak with current students?

Please contact Chelsea Krieg, the Administrative Director, for more information about getting in touch with current students of the MFA program.