

Monmouth University
Department of English
Master of Fine Arts

CREATIVE WRITING: INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE THESIS SEMINAR

General Information

The MFA Creative Thesis is the capstone to the student's work in the English MFA program, and it should represent the student's strongest writing. Following successful completion of the MA in English, MFA candidates will enroll in the two-semester EN 655 A- B MFA Creative Thesis Seminars.

The MFA Thesis should extend and deepen, both thematically and stylistically, the creative work written in MA-level courses and in the MA Creative Manuscript. Following intensive revision and the writing of new work, a successfully completed MFA Creative Thesis should be able to form the basis of a book-length project and/or to serve as a writing sample in a student's application for subsequent graduate study (i.e., the pursuit of a PhD).

The MFA Creative Thesis will be written under the supervision of a first reader with additional guidance from a qualified second reader. The first reader must be a member of the MFA faculty. During the semester before the student wishes to begin the first Creative Thesis Seminar, the student must consult with the MFA Program Director about the intent to begin, submit requests for first and second readers to the MFA Program Director, who will make the final decision, and, with the student's first and second readers, create a plan for the direction and scope of the thesis.

Before registering for the Creative Thesis Seminars, the student must submit two items to the first reader:

- A 500-word thesis proposal describing the project's nature, aesthetic approach, genre, themes, and goals, as well as a summary, where appropriate
- A syllabus that follows the guidelines below

During the two semesters of Creative Thesis Seminars, the student will submit previously written creative work as well as new creative work to the first reader and will substantially revise that work in consultation with the first reader on a bi-weekly basis. The candidate and readers will develop a schedule for submission of drafts. A final draft of the complete MFA Creative Thesis including the critical paper should be submitted no later than the eleventh week of the second thesis semester to the first and second readers to allow feedback with time for revision before final grading. The first reader will provide regular oral and written feedback on the written work in conjunction with the meetings during both semesters. The student will meet at least once with the second reader, generally near the end of the second semester. As with the first reader, oral or written feedback on drafts is expected.

The MFA Critical Paper

The MFA Creative Thesis must be accompanied by a critical paper of seven to ten pages that will function as an artist's statement. The paper should include a reflection that describes the genesis of the project; a summary of the manuscript, where appropriate, including any sections that are yet to be written if the thesis represents a manuscript-in-progress; the role that completing the manuscript has had on the student's development as a writer; and a craft discussion of literary influences. Students should place their work in conversation with other literary texts. This will require an examination of the genre tradition or traditions from which the thesis emerges as well as an analysis of craft in literary or other artistic works that have helped to give it form. Students may wish to focus their analysis on some specific element of craft to which they have paid particular attention while writing their manuscript (e.g., interiority, point of view, escalation, ekphrasis, poetic sequences, and so on).

The critical paper has multiple functions. First, it enables students to reflect critically on the role that successful completion of their MFA Creative Thesis has played in their development as writers and to consider how it will serve their future ambitions. Second, it allows them to analyze the influences that have acted upon them as artists. Third, it gives them the opportunity to convey the value of their work to others, which they will need to do as practicing artists seeking literary representation, publication, grants, fellowships, and prizes, as well as while communicating with general readers. The critical paper should appear after the creative manuscript in the student's MFA Creative Thesis document.

Guidelines

Thesis Length

The length of a prose thesis must be between 80 and 200 pages, exclusive of critical paper. The length of a poetry thesis must be a minimum of 40 pages and can be as long as the length of a full poetry collection. If your thesis is longer than these guidelines, you must obtain permission from your first reader. You may be permitted to submit a book-length work, or you may be asked to make a selection that meets the page guidelines. The length of the critical paper must be seven to ten pages, exclusive of title page, bibliography, or other materials. A standard bibliography should be included. An annotated bibliography is not required.

At the end of the first thesis semester, the work must be approved by the first reader as consisting of MFA-level creative work and on course to meet the established guidelines for the MFA Creative Thesis. At the end of the second thesis semester, if a thesis is exceptional, the first reader may recommend awarding distinction. Completed theses will be presented as part of the student-run Graduate Thesis Reading.

Once the MFA Creative Thesis and critical paper have been judged as satisfactory by both readers, the student must submit a revised version in digital form. Two bound copies of the MFA Creative Thesis will be produced: one will be archived in the Monmouth University Library and one in the English Department.

Prerequisites: Completion of English MA, 39 credits of graduate English coursework, and a minimum GPA of 3.00.

For additional information, please consult Professor Alena Graedon, Interim MFA Program Director, at agraedon@monmouth.edu.

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