

DATE: July 25, 2013

SUBJECT: University of Tennessee – Knoxville, Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

ACTION RECOMMENDED: Approval

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: The University of Tennessee Knoxville has developed a curriculum proposal for the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing. The MFA degree will advance the university’s institutional imperatives toward discovery, innovation and creative activities. The likely publication of novels and books of poems created by MFA students and alumni will garner national and international attention for the university and enrich the literary community.

The proposed program will transition from offering a Masters of Arts (MA) in English (creative writing concentration). The enhancement of the MA in creative writing to an MFA will further the institutional goal of positioning UTK as a Top 25 public research university. Additionally, the MFA in Creative Writing is recognized as the terminal degree for teachers of creative writing.

PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION DATE: Fall 2014

1.1.20A MISSION: The proposed program supports UT Knoxville’s mission of “enriching and elevating the citizens of the state, the nation, and the world.” UTK’s 2015 vision calls for “original ideas that advance society through discovery, inquiry, innovation, research, scholarship and creative activities.” As a degree whose primary function is the creation of art, the MFA degree will better advance UTK in fulfilling this vision.

The THEC 2010-15 Public Agenda for Higher Education calls for strengthening the quality of academic programs. The current MA program in Creative Writing is outmoded and no longer meets the standards established by the professional writing association.

1.1.20B CURRICULUM: The MFA degree program will require completion of 30 semester credit hours, including 12 hours of writing workshops, 12 hours in literature, rhetoric, and writing courses and 6 hours in supervised thesis instruction. The thesis, typically a novel, collection of poems or short stories will be defended in an oral presentation consisting of a public reading from the thesis followed by a question and answer session.

The program will be delivered on-ground to facilitate the writing workshop requirement which presupposes a community of writers in residence and allows students to discuss each other’s work in real time.

The Association of Writers and Writing Program (AWP) is the national professional organization for MFA programs. The curriculum requirements of the proposed MFA program are aligned with AWP Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing. The two-year MFA degree requires a balance between writing workshops and courses in literature as well as a culminating thesis.

1.1.20C ACADEMIC STANDARDS: Program admission requires a bachelor’s degree; a minimum 2.75 overall undergraduate GPA; competitive scores on the Graduate Record Examination; and solid recommendations from professors familiar with their work. Additionally, students must have a minimum GPA of 3.33 in English courses.

Students must meet progression and graduation standards as required by the UT Graduate School.

Projected Program Enrollment and Productivity

Five students will be admitted annually to the proposed Creative Writing, MFA program. All students will attend full-time and receive funding and expect to complete the program in two years.

For the first year, the Creative Writing program, projects that five students who are currently enrolled in the English (Creative Writing concentration) MA program will elect to switch into the new MFA degree. This accounts for the anomaly of the projection of five graduates during the first year of the program’s existence.

Year	Students Admitted	Students Enrolled	Graduates
2014	5	10	5
2015	5	10	5
2016	5	10	5
2017	5	10	5
2018	5	10	5

1.1.20D FACULTY: The current five full-time Creative Writing faculty in the English Department are adequate to support the program. Additionally, other faculty in the English Department are able to teach graduate courses in literature and rhetoric, writing, and linguistics.

1.1.20E LIBRARY RESOURCES: Existing library and information technology resources are adequate for program implementation.

1.1.20F ADMINISTRATION/ORGANIZATION: This program will be offered through the English Department in the College of Arts and Sciences. A departmental faculty member will receive course reassignment to serve as the graduate program director for the proposed MFA program.

1.1.20G SUPPORT RESOURCES: Students will have access to a wide range of support resources, including advising support from the Director of Creative Writing. The English Department publishes *Grist*, which will offer its MFA students internship experience in running a literary magazine.

1.1.20H FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT: Current facilities and instructional equipment are adequate to support the program. Classrooms in the Humanities and Social Science Building have recently been renovated to use a wider variety of classroom configurations and uses of technology.

1.1.20I NEED AND DEMAND: The Bureau of Labor Statistics projected that the employment of writers and authors will increase by six percent from 2010 to 2020. Graduates with an MFA degree pursue career opportunities primarily in higher education and non-profit agencies.

Nationally, the Master of Art degree in Creative Writing is outmoded and no longer meets the standards set by the Association of Writers and Writing Program (AWP). Over the last two decades the field of creative writing has become more professionalized and most creative writing jobs listed by the AWP and the Modern Language Association require a terminal degree. The AWP recognizes the MFA as the appropriate terminal degree for professors of creative writing. Over the last decade, the number of MA programs in creative writing has declined by 25 percent while the number of MFA programs has increased by 93 percent.

The MFA will contribute toward the training of the next generations of professionals in the teaching of English, as its graduates will hold the appropriate credential to teach creative writing and literature in community colleges and universities.

1.1.20J NO UNNECESSARY DUPLICATION: The University of Memphis is the only public institution in Tennessee that currently offers the MFA program. Students in Memphis' MFA program attend part-time, with many students attending without funding support. While the MFA program at Memphis begins to address perceived need, the demand for the MFA degree is high. The proposed MFA program will assist UTK in achieving excellence as a Top 25 public research institution and be able to place its graduates in tenure-track creative writing faculty positions and other writing jobs.

1.1.20K COOPERATING INSTITUTIONS: N/A

1.120L DIVERSITY AND ACCESS: The English Department, as well as the College of Arts and Sciences and the University at large, has a solid commitment to increasing diversity. The Graduate School and Hodges Better English fund offer Graduate Diversity Enhancement Fellowships as well as the W.E.B. DuBois Fellowship for African American students.

1.1.20M ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION: The MFA program will be evaluated on faculty teaching and student success. Student success indicators will also include their success on the academic job market and the quantity and

quality of their publications and the prestige of the venues in which these publications appear. Additionally, the program will be evaluated externally every 10 years.

1.1.200 EXTERNAL JUDGEMENT: External review of the proposed program was conducted during an institution site visit on March 21, 2013. Dr. Sidney Ellen Wade, Professor of Creative Writing at University of Florida and former president of AWP served as the external reviewer. She stated that the proposed program had several strengths that included distinguished and nationally recognized faculty and campus commitment at all levels.

Dr. Wade stated that “at the levels of Chancellor, Provost, College Deans, and Department, there appears to be universal enthusiasm, and they have good reason. This is the right time, as the University commits itself to the Top 25 initiative, to undertake the promotion of an already well-established program and to invest in its improvement. The possibilities for future funding are also evident – if funding efforts coalesce, and endowed professorship, and/or series of endowed graduate fellowships will certainly add to the profile of the prospective UTK MFA in Creative Writing program.”

1.1.20P COST/BENEFIT: The proposed MFA program will be funded through existing funding and tuition waivers that are now used to fund students in the English MA program.

1.1.30 POST APPROVAL MONITORING: An annual performance review of the proposed program will be conducted for the first five years following program approval. The review will be based on benchmarks established in the approved proposal. At the end of this period, the campus, governing board, and Commission staff will perform a summative evaluation. The benchmarks include, but are not limited to, enrollment and graduation, program cost; progress toward accreditation and other metrics set by the institution and agreed upon by governing board and Commission staff. If benchmarks are not met during the monitoring period, the Commission may recommend that the governing board terminate the program. If additional time is needed and requested by the governing board, the Commission may choose to extend the monitoring period.