Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing  
Assessment Plan  

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT MISSION  
The mission of the English Department is to offer a rigorous and engaging learning experience in the study of English; to facilitate reflective reading informed by a variety of cultural contexts, genre conventions, scholarly inquiry, critical analysis, and creative thinking; to produce innovative scholarly and creative work in a variety of genres that advances our understanding of language, literature, writing and media; to support a collaborative and student-centered learning community that welcomes diverse backgrounds and perspectives, fosters social responsibility, and celebrates life-long learning; and to provide service to the university, state, and global community.

OBJECTIVES OF THE M.F.A. PROGRAM IN CREATIVE WRITING  
Western Washington University's English Department offers a 2-year MFA program in Creative Writing within a community that values creative development and intellectual versatility. We encourage a focus on multigenre or cross-genre writing, based on our view that creative writing graduates need to be versatile in their comprehension of genre conventions and conversant in the way diverse genres inform one another. A variety of courses we offer stress either a multigenre focus or encourage experimental works that blur genre boundaries.

Creative writing practice and literary study are synergistic in our program. Students take seminars in creative writing and literature, as well as courses in rhetorical thinking and composition, digital and technical writing, film studies, and linguistics. We offer Graduate Assistantships that provide quality teacher training, as well as opportunities to gain editorial experience with the award-winning journal Bellingham Review.

Students will attain the following skills:
1. Fluency in multigenre or cross-genre writing and comprehension of genre conventions, as well as the way diverse genres can inform one another
2. Professionalism in creative writing, along with in-depth literary study in areas that might include national and global literatures and cultures, critical and cultural theory, film and media, pedagogy, composition and rhetoric, technical writing, professional writing, editing and publishing, and linguistics
3. Practice in extensive revision of work through multiple drafts in response to critique and response from faculty and M.F.A. peers.

ASSESSMENT  
Objective 2: In their first quarter, all graduate students are required to take English 501, a foundational course that offers students an overview of literary theory and criticism. Specifically, students will gain a working knowledge of such fields as Marxist theory, feminist theory, queer theory, psychoanalytic theory, critical race theory, post colonialism, post structuralism and post humanism. In addition students will develop a sophisticated understanding, specific to the discipline of English studies, of such terms as aesthetics, difference, ideology, essentialism, agency, and mediation. In this course, students should also gain:
Acquisition of literary research skills

Increased sophistication as a writer of literary criticism

Increased agility as a participant in an ongoing theoretical conversation

Student learning will be assessed by shorter writing assignments throughout the quarter and a culminating theoretical essay, 15-25 pages, demonstrating an ability to understand literary theory and engage it with sophistication.

Objectives 1 and 2:

M.F.A. Qualifying Exam. At the end of their first year of graduate study students form a thesis and exam committee consisting of three faculty members to guide both their preparation for and completion of the qualifying exam and to work with them closely in shaping and revising their thesis and its critical preface. During the spring of their first year, M.F.A. students choose two areas of examination (among Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Poetry, and Hybrid Genres). After meeting with each member of their committee to discuss their interests and the works on the lists, students select a personalized list of works from each of their two chosen areas. Over the summer students read extensively. At the beginning of fall quarter, students meet with members of their committee to discuss the readings and their interests. Based on these meetings, the faculty committee formulates two essay questions in each of the two chosen genres. Students choose one question in each genre and, in a take-home exam, write an extended essay in response to each question.

Assessment: Direct evidence. The members of the thesis and exam committee assess student learning as follows:

They assess the exam, with success requiring students demonstrate close and sophisticated reading of the texts and ability to construct an original, cohesive, and informed argument in response to the question; that the students demonstrate a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the conventions and history of genres and the relation of individual works to the constraints and possibilities of the genre tradition in which it is written; that the student writes with clear analysis about the relationship of her or his own creative writing to the traditions and formal techniques of works on the reading list, revealing awareness of his or her relationship to literary models and precursor texts.

Students will receive the results of the exam in a meeting with the committee members, who will offer feedback on the essays and on the students’ development through the reading and exam process.

Indirect Assessment: The chair of the committee will report back to the director of graduate studies on the spring and fall meetings with the student, on the results of the exam, and on the students’ learning process through the reading and exam process.


Throughout the second year students will meet with the chair of their thesis committee regularly for feedback and critique on both individual pieces (stories, poems, essays, hybrid works) and on the coherence and crafting of the entire thesis. During winter and spring quarters students will develop a draft thesis, working with feedback in writing and in meetings with all three members of their committee. The thesis process requires extensive revision through multiple drafts of both individual
pieces and of the thesis as a whole. A 5-10 page critical preface will contextualize the thesis in terms of genre traditions, influences, and formal choices the student made in crafting the thesis. When all three thesis committee members are satisfied that the thesis has reached completion, the student will schedule a defense. During the defense, the three faculty committee members will ask the student a variety of questions about the genre(s) in which the thesis is written, technical aspects of the writing (plot, narration, point of view, metaphor, lineation, form, etc.), and about the process of revising and crafting a coherent thesis.

A successful defense will require extensive and successful revision, awareness of and ability to draw from techniques associated with a particular genre or genres, an ability to articulate convincingly the reason for formal and aesthetic choices the student has made in the writing and revising, and to discuss the work in sophisticated theoretical terms in relation to the traditions of the genre or genres in which he or she is working.

Indirect assessment: The chair of the thesis committee will report back to the director of graduate studies about the thesis defense, the thesis itself, and the process of the students’ writing, revising, and defending the thesis.