

COVER DOCUMENT FOR THE CREATIVE WRITING PROPOSAL

Instruction in the craft of writing fiction, poetry or drama has been a part of American higher education for nearly a century, since the University of Iowa created its Writers' Workshop dedicated to a simple concept: that a poet or novelist with a record of significant publication and critical expertise would conduct interactive workshops in the history, critical theories, current trends, formal and stylistic techniques proper to the genre which the author practiced. These workshops involved peer editing, but they relied primarily on hands-on instruction in matters of craft and editorial advice delivered by authors who were themselves successful writers. Since then, creative writing has become a most popular addition to English departments across the country: forty years ago there were thirteen institutional members of the Associated Writing Programs (AWP, the national professional organization that supports programs in creative writing); today more 500 colleges and universities belong to the AWP and offer classes in creative writing; 159 of these institutions offer a B.A. or B.F.A. in creative writing.

In response to this trend and to increasing requests from students for course work in creative writing, early in 2007 the English Department at Oakland began to draw up a proposal for a degree in creative writing. The Department considered then the creation of a minor in creative writing, but decided that a major would better serve our students and take better advantage of the relative lack of major programs in creative writing in southeast Michigan. In the summer of that year, members of the creative writing staff in the Department—with support from the office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences—began to work on that proposal. In January of 2008, after discussions with Dean Sudol and at his insistence, one of the genres that has been traditionally included in the curriculum of creative writing programs—creative non-fiction—was definitively removed from the English department curriculum and transferred to Writing and Rhetoric. Thus the tracks for the new major had to be re-considered. It was decided then that poetry and fiction, and possibly screen writing, were to be the new program's focus. For the next year, creative writing faculty in the Department of English worked on that new program design, and a completed draft of the proposal for a major in creative writing began to make its way through governance in October, 2009.

Because the active study of technique, form, style, genre and tradition made possible by course work in creative writing provides a natural complement to the critical study of literature; because the AWP encourages program distinctiveness; and because the Department of English has for years maintained the practice of hiring creative writers who hold a Ph.D. and are trained in the teaching of literature as well as writing, the English Department—after reviewing the curricular composition of all the creative writing programs in the country—decided to offer students the B.A. in creative writing, rather than the B.F.A. The latter degree concentrates—sometimes almost exclusively—on courses in writing and the English Department faculty determined that a B.A. program with a good measure of academic requirements would better prepare our students for careers and firmly place the study of creative writing within the literary tradition. To this end, the eventual proposal was modeled after highly-regarded programs in creative

writing, for example those at Purdue and Johns Hopkins, which, as in other distinguished creative writing B.A.'s, insist on sound academic preparation in conjunction with the study of craft. As is the case at these universities, students who major in creative writing at OU will be expected to take roughly half of their credits in academic courses.

A degree program in creative writing is a definite extension of Oakland University's mission, which—according to the 2020 statement—aims to provide opportunities for Oakland students to engage in “creative learning” and experience “creative empowerment.” The current proposal also reflects the fact that, in the last two program assessment cycles, suggestions for more courses or a degree program in creative writing now outnumber any other request to the Department as regards curricular change. Those who teach creative writing at Oakland are convinced that the new major will attract many interested students, and the prospects for community outreach and program expansion in the near future are tremendous. The poets and fiction writers at Oakland are very active: the three tenured members of the Department have published hundreds of poems or short stories and a total of six books. We are each currently circulating book manuscripts for publication. We have long supported and participated in public readings; we have presented workshops at local high schools, senior centers and libraries; we encourage student writers to participate in poetry “slams” (competitive readings) on campus; we sponsor writing contests in poetry and fiction. And there is a world of in-service and extension opportunity that opens with the creation of this new degree. Duke University recently hosted a conference on Poetry and Health Care that could serve as a model for interaction with the new School of Medicine; and the tracks in screen writing and writing for television that are built into the proposal, especially in conjunction with the new major in Cinema Studies, make internships with local film companies a distinct possibility. Workshops in literary editing, the formation of a new literary journal at Oakland, the creation of an annual literary prize judged by nationally-renowned authors, an M.F.A in creative writing offered by the Department in the not too distant future—all of these innovative opportunities relate directly to the creation of the undergraduate degree in creative writing at Oakland University.