

# Creative Writing M.F.A.

## *Expanded Statement of Institutional Purpose*

### **Institutional Mission Reference**

The Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, widely considered as a terminal degree, prepares students for careers as writers of poetry, prose, and drama. Our program, at present, offers the only terminal degree in the English Department. It provides our students with the opportunity to launch their professional lives -- to produce work of a publishable quality in one of four different genres. Our program should develop writers who have a sense of the traditions within which they work and the skills and determination to produce something singular with that knowledge. Our students should graduate from the program with the potential to be professional writers, high school or college teachers, editors, book reviewers, or creative writers who share their sense of the value and importance of literature and language with their communities.

### **Institutional Goal(s) Supported**

The MFA in Creative Writing Program is central to the mission of the ODU and the College of Arts and Letters. The university strives for the national prominence and the CW Program has already gone a long way toward achieving that goal -- both in terms of faculty and student accomplishments. In more general terms, the CW Program participates fully and dramatically in the goals of a liberal arts education, striving always to create a learning situation that is unique, to offer a genuine understanding of traditions, and to shape an educational environment that not only permits but compels all of its students to challenge themselves to reach beyond their initial expectations.

## *Intended Educational (Student) Outcomes, Methods for Assessment, Criteria for Success, Assessment Results, and Use of Results*

### **Intended Outcome 1**

Students will write a thesis which demonstrates work of a professional and publishable quality.

**Method for Assessing Outcome 1 and Criterion for Success:** Thesis defense and Creative Writing Program faculty evaluation of the student's work.

**Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 1:** Twelve theses were produced by Creative Writing students and accepted by Creative Writing faculty members.

**Alternate Method for Assessing Outcome 1 and Criterion for Success:** Yearly record of student publications.

**Summary of Assessment Data Collected, Alternate Method for Outcome 1:** Judy Mercier's non-fiction narrative thesis, "Duck, An Outer Banks Village," was published this year by John F. Blair. Lenore Hart's thesis, "Waterwoman" was sold to Putnam and has been given to Amy Asbury at ICM Los Angeles for representation for filming. A portion of Julie Hale's thesis was published in the non-fiction magazine "River Teeth." Current and former students continue to be published on a regular basis in local magazines, such as Port Folio Weekly and others.

**Intended Outcome 2**

Student writers will engage with the community in outreach programs.

**Method for Assessing Outcome 2 and Criterion for Success:** Keep a file on the number of students who work in the Writers-in-Community Internship and a record of the various ways they interact and influence the community in local schools, nursing homes, recreational centers, and other venues in Hampton Roads.

**Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 2:** Five students completed Writers-in-Community placements this year. Placements included Children's Hospital of the Kings Daughters, Friends School, Chesapeake Public Library, the Norfolk Naval Museum, and a Virginia Beach nursing home. The nursing home project included an outreach program to connect nursing home residents with pen pals at a school for deaf children. Other projects included oral history projects to collect stories from residents of Chesapeake and from military personnel who served on the USS Wisconsin.

**Alternate Method for Assessing Outcome 2 and Criterion for Success:** Keep a record of the student evaluations done by community participants and by facilities' supervisors.

**Summary of Assessment Data Collected, Alternate Method for Outcome 2:** Each student is required to submit a portfolio with a letter from his or her supervisor assessing his or her contribution. All students received excellent evaluations from their supervisors.

**Intended Outcome 3**

As our program gains an even higher reputation, we expect to see the quality and experience level of our MFA students raised to a higher level, as well.

**Method for Assessing Outcome 3 and Criterion for Success:** Check record of GRE scores, undergraduate GPA=s, and the quality of the submitted portfolios.

**Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 3:** The number of applications for the program increased from 25 last year to 31 this year. One writer, Rick Swiot, had two novels published when he was accepted into the program. He is currently working on

a memoir. Another person who applied for the program and was accepted is an assistant professor of math at another university.

The average undergraduate GPA of applicants was 3.47. The average GRE scores of applicants were as follows: Verbal-620; Quantitative-480; Analytical-570. These numbers can be compared to the previous year in which average undergraduate GPA was 3.57; average GRE scores were 589, 594, and 510 for Verbal, Quantitative and Analytical respectively.

Our former students have accepted positions of high quality. For example, Julie Hale is an editor at Book Notes. Bekki Hurst and Judy Mercier are teaching in the English Department at Christopher Newport University. Lenore Hart is a full-time writer with a book under contract at a New York publisher. Other students have a variety of full-time and part-time teaching positions.