MFA CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

(Updated November 2026)

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1. Program Overview

Description of the MFA Creative Writing Program

The MFA Creative Writing Program aims to prepare students/candidates for professional careers as writers of fiction, poetry, and/or creative nonfiction. In addition, through a combination of studio workshops, craft courses, seminars, literary, rhetorical, and elective courses, the program aims to prepare students for academic careers and/or postgraduate experiences. The MFA Program provides opportunities for developing the student's writing in a collaborative and supportive environment.

Students may be enrolled in full or part-time study for on-campus courses. Full-time students will complete the program in 3 years. Part time students have up to a maximum of 6 years to complete program requirements. International students should confer with the ODU Visa Office for specific requirements.

Application and Admission

Applications are accepted for entrance in the fall semester only, and must be completed and delivered to the MFA program no later than February 6th. Admissions decisions are usually made in the third week of February. Application information is available online on the MFA program website.

2. Program Personnel

MFA Program Faculty

All courses in the program shall be taught primarily by core faculty of the MFA Creative Writing Program, supported by faculty in the Department of English (or affiliated departments) who meet the standards for graduate teaching as established by the College of Arts and Letters. As one of the program tracks offered by the Department of English, the MFA Creative Writing Program works with the department's program and policy structures, and schedules of review as applicable.

MFA Graduate Program Director

The Graduate Program Director (GPD) works to ensure the academic and curricular integrity of the graduate degree program. The GPD coordinates and facilitates faculty engagement around critical program functions including but not limited to recruitment and outreach, admission, retention; curriculum development and/or reform; scheduling; selection and distribution of fellowship and assistantship awards; coordinating student advising and thesis supervision; coordinating professional development and career assistance opportunities; conducting program and student evaluations, as well as career tracking. Furthermore, the GPD ensures that program policies and procedures are established and implemented, are observed by all program members (students and faculty), and align with those outlined in the Graduate Catalog.

3. Program Requirements

All students are required to read University Graduate policies, procedures, and requirements, including but not limited to University Requirements for Graduate Degrees; the Catalog sections describing the MFA program and courses; and the MFA program's website. Students should also consult the Graduate School website for resources and forms and the College of Arts and Letters Resources for Current Graduate Students.

Advising

Students and MFA-certified faculty will follow the Advising Policies as outlined in the University catalog. With the aid of the GPD, students will identify an MFA thesis committee by the end of their second year. (See additional detail in Section 4, MFA Creative Thesis on Page 5). The MFA thesis committee will consist of three professors; at least two must be faculty of the MFA program. One of these professors will serve as the chair of the committee, and as the student's primary Thesis Advisor. Students have the option of selecting one committee member from outside the English Department (and even outside ODU). That committee-member should hold a Masters degree or equivalent. Students selecting

outside committee-member should let the GPD know ahead of time, in case the committee member requires Graduate Certification.

Genre Concentration

Applicants to the program are required to declare their primary or intended genre upon admission. However, the program encourages cross-genre experiences throughout the three years of the MFA. With that in mind, our workshops are designed to encourage cross-genre experiences through themed content and hybrid formats. Each semester, workshops will be offered that are centered on poetry and prose, but those workshops will also have a larger thematic structure that encompasses multiple genres and hybrid forms. Our goal is for students to both deepen their knowledge of their chosen area of focus and to expand their horizons in terms of literary forms.

Planning a Course of Study

Students must complete 54 credit hours: 12-18 hours of graduate (650) writing workshops, 12 hours of literature; 3 hours of craft; and 15 hours of electives (to be determined by the student in consultation with the GPD). Students must maintain a 3.0 GPA.

A minimum of 3 and up to 15 hours of creative thesis direction is required in the third year. Students must produce a manuscript of professional quality in a single genre, and pass an oral defense based on the thesis and critical essays produced in the Thesis Colloquium course. Students must complete all requirements within 3 years (full-time students) or 6 years (part-time students).

Sample Program

Year	**Recommended Structure**
1: Fall (9 hours)	workshop / lit class / craft
1: Spring (9 hours)	workshop / lit classes
2: Fall (9 hours)	workshop / lit class / elective
2: Spring (9 hours)	workshop / lit class / Contemporary Classics / elective
3: Fall (9 hours)	thesis colloquium / thesis hours / outstanding elective hours
4: Spring (9 hours)	thesis hours / outstanding elective hours

Mid-Program Review & Continuance

In the Fall of the second year (or of the third semester), full-time students will begin the process of Mid-program review, which is completed by meeting with a professor in the student's genre to discuss and assess progress toward the degree. Recommendations for continuance are made by faculty in the genre, in consultation with other faculty in the program. Mid-program reviews are not punitive or graded, but they are a crucial opportunity to assess student performance and progress toward the degree. MFA students are also subject to the ODU Graduate Policies and Procedures.

4. MFA Creative Thesis

Overview

The MFA Creative Writing Program at ODU is a three-year residential program, with the third year offered as time for the student to work on a creative thesis— a manuscript of publishable quality in fiction, poetry, or nonfiction.

Thesis Defenses are typically scheduled in early to mid-spring of the student's final semester in the program. A student may begin taking thesis hours in the fourth semester, with the approval of the thesis director and GPD. In addition, students must attend a mandatory Thesis Formatting Workshop offered early in the fall semester of their third year. At the one-time workshop, students are made aware of important thesis processing deadlines (set by the Dean's Office) and Guidelines for the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations.

Thesis Panel/ Committee

Students determine their thesis panel, consisting of a primary advisor and two other committee members. Before the end of their second year, students will submit these recommendations to the GPD and MFA Faculty. Preferences will be taken into consideration, but the GPD in consultation with genre faculty may have to make accommodations to take faculty loads and rotation into consideration. Advisers and thesis committee members should all be graduate-certified faculty who will have agreed to serve in these capacities.

Thesis Credits

Students must earn a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 15 thesis hours for credit.

Thesis Process and Preparation

Throughout the program, students will be guided in developing an annotated reading list for their thesis project. This reading list consists of 25 books primarily addressing the student's chosen genre: 5 craft texts, 10 historical works, and 10 contemporary works.

In the fall semester of the third year, students must register for Thesis Colloquium. In this course, students draft their critical/prefatory essays, which allow students to prepare and review material and contextual issues for the thesis defense. This essay will be delivered to a student's panel alongside their thesis prior to the defense.

The recommended page range for MFA creative theses is 100-120 pages for prose (Fiction and Creative Nonfiction) and 40-60 pages for Poetry, although the maximum length may be exceeded with adviser approval.

Thesis Defense

Defenses are scheduled for ninety minutes. During this time, students have the opportunity to discuss their manuscript in detail, and answer relevant questions provided by their full panel.

Thesis Completion

Candidates for December graduation must deliver the first complete draft of their thesis mid-September, and their defense should be scheduled no later than mid-October.

Candidates for May graduation must deliver the first complete draft of their thesis late January, and their defense should be scheduled no later than mid-March.

Students must deliver their revised thesis drafts to their panel two weeks prior to their defense. Five copies of the perfect thesis are due in the Registrar's Office by the last day of classes.

5. Student Matters

Assistantships

In this section, duties and expectations that accompany assistantship and fellowship awards are described.

Graduate Teaching Assistant Institute (GTAI):
All students on Graduate Teaching Assistantships must complete the GTAI training before their first fall semester. The program director will register you for the GTAI. GTAI training is generally held online in late August and covers the following areas: teaching foundations, student support & inclusion, and university policies & systems.

Graduate Teaching Assistant(s):
The MFA in Creative Writing Program designates multiple graduate assistantships for students who wish to gain classroom teaching experience. Students holding GTAs begin by taking the GTAI in late summer, shortly before their first semester begins. In their first year as GTAs, students will work 20 hrs per week as Writing Center Tutors under the supervision of the Writing Center Director. In the spring of their first year, students on GTAs must enroll in ENGL 664: Teaching College Composition, under the supervision of Dr. Kristi Costello, Director of First Year Writing. In their second years, students who have successfully demonstrated readiness for classroom teaching will be assigned one introductory composition course per semester, taught under the supervision of Dr. Kristi Costello. Students continue their mentorship with Dr. Costello into their third year of teaching / study.

Graduate Program Department Assistant (GPDA):
In this assistantship role, the GPDA assists the Graduate Program Director with organizational, communication, event management, and administrative tasks related to the program, including recruitment, admissions, and application review processes, sending weekly program newsletters and coordinating social media sites, managing the MFA reading series, assisting in organizing ODU's annual Literary Festival (October) and its participation in the AWP Conference (March), and other tasks as needed.

Writers in Community (WinC) Coordinator:
As part of this assistantship, the WinC Coordinator works to connect ODU creative writing students to the wider Hampton Roads community (and beyond) through in-person and online literary events like open mics, readings, features, interactive workshops, and classes. The Coordinator also serves as editor of *Constellate*, the ODU student literary journal.

Barely South Review (BSR) Managing Editor:
In this assistantship, the BSR Managing Editor is responsible for organizing BSR creative writing submissions and overseeing their selection for final publication in two BSR issues per year – one in fall and one in spring. They manage a team of 40+ senior editors, student editors, and readers while maintaining a strong brand vision for the BSR magazine. As part of this role, the editor works to share

BSR with the greater Norfolk community, fostering new and existing vendor relationships and faculty partnerships.

Virginia Poetry Database Coordinator:
The MFA Creative Writing Program has designated one of its graduate assistantships for a student to assist in expanding and updating the Virginia Poets Database, as well as a few other program needs. The student in this role:

- assist in reviewing submissions to the database, sorting them by region, and approving them for publishing on the database;
- create social media posts and campaigns for submission, designed to create awareness of the database and encourage more entries;
- create email communication/awareness campaigns to schools, writing organizations, etc. across the state (for instance, to encourage schoolteachers to use the database for content they might include in their curriculum and lesson planning);
- work with faculty and designated Library staff to update, design, create, and carry out special features like poet interviews or spotlights.

Other Assistantships:
The MFA in Creative Writing Program has developed partnerships with several departments across campus which offer specific graduate assistantships to MFA students. These opportunities vary by year.

Fellowships & Scholarships

Darden Fellowship for Virginia Writers:
The MFA in Creative Writing Program offers several Darden Fellowships for incoming and current students. These fellowships, limited to Virginia residents, offer full tuition remission and a $15,000 stipend for the entire period of study.

Perry Morgan Fellowship
The program also awards two Perry Morgan Fellowships annually to admitted students, which provide a full tuition waiver and $15,000 stipend with no work requirements. These are offered to first-year MFA students only; students transition into a traditional assistantship in year 2 of the program.

David Sutelan Memorial Scholarship
This annual award offers additional financial support to MFA students during their period of study.

Friends of the ODU MFA Scholarship
This annual award offers additional financial support to MFA students during their period of study.

Edith & Forrest P. White Literary Festival Fellows & Scholars
These annual awards are given to students who work to assist in the planning and implementation of Old Dominion University's annual Literary Festival.

Creative Writing Competitions

The Dickseski Fiction Prize is an annual writing award in ODU's English Department, established by alumna Jerri Dickseski. It awards $500 each to one undergraduate and one graduate fiction writer, with recognition at the ODU Literary Festival annually in the fall.

The Diane Zinna Creative Nonfiction Prize is an annual $250 writing award in ODU's English Department given to one undergraduate and one graduate level winner. Established in 2025, in collaboration with author Diane Zinna and MFA graduate student Megan A. Pastore. Winning students are recognized during the ODU Literary Festival annually in the fall.

The ODU College Poetry Prizes (an Academy of American Poets Prize) are awarded annually each spring by ODU's MFA Creative Writing Program in undergraduate and graduate categories. Established in 2006 with sponsorship from former Virginia Poet Laureate Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, entries are judged blindly each year by a poet of national reputation.

ODU Literary Festival

Every year in the fall, ODU hosts a week-long literary festival showcasing a range of nationally and internationally-renowned writers across the genres. The annual ODU Literary Festival, now approaching its 50th year, has become a highlight in the local cultural scene, at the same time that it provides numerous opportunities for students to engage with guest authors and learn more about the writing life.

Barely South Review

Barely South Review (BSR) is the student-led literary journal of the MFA Creative Writing Program. The magazine is published biannually, online and in print. The journal provides important opportunities for students in literary publishing and editing, thus also fulfilling one of the benchmarks of an effective MFA program, as set by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP). Students officially admitted to the MFA program are eligible for the Managing Editor and other staff positions.

Constellate

Constellate is an annual anthology of student work featuring poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction from the MFA program. It is edited and published by a volunteer team of MFA students. Submissions of original fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction are invited from currently enrolled Old Dominion University students at all levels and across disciplines.

Writers in Community (WinC)

Writers in Community was created to provide MFA students with opportunities to develop, create, and carry out short-term community-facing programs related to creative writing. In the past, some programs have taken the form of public readings, writing workshops led at libraries, public schools and high schools, writing workshops for veterans, and more. Writers in Community provides important opportunities for service to the greater Hampton Roads community, while also showcasing student talent, increasing program visibility, and impacting recruitment.

Virginia Poets Database

The Virginia Poets Database is a project that started in 2022 as part of an Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellowship focused on public-facing poetry initiatives. It is a digital archive of Virginia poets meant to serve as a literary and educational resource. This archive is structured using eight Virginia regions, for the use of students, teachers, and the general public. The database aims to feature information on Virginia-born poets, poets who are current residents, and poets who have spent significant time doing literary work in Virginia. The goal is to feature historically recognized or established poets alongside emerging poets, and spotlight those from underrepresented communities. Further, it aims to gather information showing the richness and diversity of poetry and poets in the commonwealth.

Public Readings

MFA students have various opportunities for sharing their work in a more public setting, primarily through the First and Second Year (Spring) Reading Series, and the Third Year "Thesis" Reading for graduating students. Other reading opportunities might come through Writers in Community, and other department and university events. At these events, MFA students are strongly urged to —

- Mind the time limit in order to respect the venue hosting the events, fellow participants, and audience.
- Be mindful of the audience. While the imagination may be limitless, writers also have a responsibility to consider whether what they read is appropriate for the event and their audience.
- Participate. Readings are a low stakes, supportive environment for students to get experience reading their work. It’s a great way for new students to get comfortable reading publicly, and along with other classmates and professors, helps to encourage and build community.

Student Conduct & Community Standards

When work that prominently features challenging elements is presented to an audience without context or consent, the audience is left to determine the intentions of the writer on their own. These are serious subjects, and if the writer has not shown sufficient care or consideration in their presentation of these subjects, the audience might very well infer that the writer does not recognize the seriousness of the

subject matter and that the work was written with the intention purely to shock or cause discomfort. This is a position that neither the audience nor the writer wish to find themselves in.

As writers, we hope that others will treat our work with great care and consideration, but that is not possible if we do not show great care and consideration to those with whom we share our work. Each of us, faculty as well as students, must take shared responsibility for making our classrooms safe spaces.

Similarly, our classrooms are spaces of support, experimentation, and engagement. If your classroom conduct violates the ODU Code of Student Conduct, you will be held accountable, up to and including removal from the program.

Title IX and Non-Discrimination

As part of its commitment to providing an educational environment free from discrimination, Old Dominion University complies with Title IX of the Education Amendments, which prohibits discrimination and harassment based upon sex in an institution's education programs and activities.

Title IX prohibits sexual harassment, including sexual violence, of students at Old Dominion University-sponsored activities and programs whether occurring on-campus or off-campus. Title IX also protects employees from sexual harassment and discrimination. Prohibited harassment includes acts of verbal, nonverbal, or physical aggression, intimidation, or hostility based on sex, even if those acts do not involve conduct of a sexual nature; sex-based harassment by those of the same sex; and discriminatory sex stereotyping.

Old Dominion University will take prompt action to investigate and resolve reports of sexual harassment or sexual violence in accordance with Title IX. Retaliation against any person who initiates an inquiry or complaint or participates in the investigation of a complaint is prohibited. Such conduct will be further cause for disciplinary action.

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AI Policy

Unless stated otherwise in a professor’s class syllabus, AI generated work is not tolerated. Since this program aims to develop and strengthen students’ original writing, Generative AI would run counter to these goals.