

# WRITING (M.F.A.)

<https://cola.unh.edu/english/program/mfa/writing>

## Description

The MFA Program in Writing at the University of New Hampshire has a clear and abiding focus: to help you shape your gifts and passion for the art, and to prepare you for the opportunities and demands that all writers will experience in a long professional career. Over the years, the graduate writing program has launched the careers of hundreds of poets, novelists, storywriters, essayists and memoirists. This is a small, highly-ranked, and selective program. We emphasize one-on-one contact between a nationally recognized faculty and talented students. Students typically complete the program in two to three years.

We are most proud of the supportive community we have created here, one in which cross-genre exploration is strongly encouraged. Six out of ten of our MFA students receive direct financial aid (<http://cola.unh.edu/english/financial-aid>), with most funding taking the form of teaching assistantships, tuition scholarships, and grant awards. Other opportunities (<http://cola.unh.edu/english/program/writing-mfa/opportunities>) include paid internships in local arts organizations, and editorial positions at our on-line journal *Barnstorm*.

We also run an exciting visiting writers' series (<http://cola.unh.edu/english/writers-series>), so that students have a chance to connect with some of the finest contemporary poets, novelists and essayists currently at work. Add to all this the fact that we're located in a stunningly beautiful spot, close to mountains and sea coast, but within an hour of Boston and other cosmopolitan areas. We can't imagine that there is a more energizing and congenial place to pursue your talents and dreams anywhere in the country.

## Fiction

The fiction program centers on your fiction. The one goal of our two years together is to make your fiction stronger, more aesthetically powerful, and yes, more publishable. The small 10-person workshop, intense conferencing with multiple award winning faculty such as Ann Williams and Tom Paine, craft seminars that range from Joyce and Chekhov to novellas and contemporary short story collections, 'special topics' classes on Screenwriting and Children's Book Writing, an esteemed reading series that brings authors such as Dan Chaon and Elissa Schappell to class and campus, our nationally known literary magazine *Barnstorm*: all of this is here simply to advance your fiction. Maybe it is because we are in the Granite State, but what is notable in our program is not just how hard students work on their own fiction, but how much effort goes into their response to the work of their peers. Writers here care deeply about each other as people, and the production of honest work that captures life on the page.

## Nonfiction

Our narrative nonfiction program embraces a wide variety of forms, from memoir to travel writing, literary journalism to the personal essay and all of its permutations. Our focus, however, is not on labels but on nurturing your talent and developing your skills with the goal of helping you craft rich, compelling and publishable essays, stories and books. In short, we toil together to make facts dance. In our workshops and seminars we ask our students to read broadly and push themselves beyond their comfort zone, to experiment and exercise an array of literary muscles, to employ the imagery of a poet, the drama of a novelist and the content drive of a

journalist. Our classes are small (average size is ten) and students meet frequently with instructors in individual conferences. As practical as the state of New Hampshire, our program emphasizes not only the art of writing narrative nonfiction, but also how to sell it. In one course students will learn how to write a book proposal and in others how to pitch travel stories and personal essays. The UNH nonfiction faculty is diverse in its expertise but united in its passion for reading and writing the literature of fact, and for sharing that passion.

## Poetry

We offer poetry workshops limited to 10 students and small seminars in craft and poetics in a dynamic, individual-oriented system that emphasizes intensive conferencing. Students have the chance to work with master teachers like the award-winning poets Mekeel McBride, David Rivard, and Charles Simic (a Pulitzer Prize winner and the former Poet Laureate of the United States). We believe in grounding our students in the widest possible range of poetic technique and approach—with seminars offered in areas such as translation, 20th century poetic movements, and ecstatic poetry—and no preconceived notions as to how anyone should write (other than well!). The poetic tradition of New England—one of the richest and most expansive in the world—serves as a backdrop for all our efforts. This is an area teeming with great poets, with numerous weekly opportunities for students to attend readings and lectures in the art.

## Requirements

Students are required to take four workshops in their major genre. In addition, students take one form and theory course in their major genre, five elective courses that may include additional writing courses or courses from the English department's offerings in other fields (such as literature, linguistics, or composition studies), and **8 credit hours** of the M.F.A. thesis (ENGL 899 Master of Fine Arts in Writing Thesis). Teaching assistants are required to take ENGL 910 Practicum in Teaching College Composition as one of their electives. There is no foreign language requirement.

The M.F.A. thesis is a book-length, publishable manuscript. For fiction writers, the thesis could be a collection of short stories, a story cycle (linked stories), or a novel. For nonfiction writers, the thesis could be a collection of themed essays and/or magazine articles or a book of creative nonfiction. For poets, the thesis would be a book-length collection of poems. The minimum length of the thesis is 150 pages for fiction and nonfiction writers and 45 pages for poets. Students will work closely with a thesis adviser as they write and pass an oral defense of the thesis, a defense conducted by a three-member thesis committee of writing faculty. Students will also conduct a public reading of their thesis in an event organized by the writing faculty.

In addition, the M.F.A. program offers students opportunities to publish in an online journal called *Barnstorm*, as well as intern at arts/cultural organizations and the university research department, as well as teach in community schools. A select number of students are chosen to teach UNH undergraduate writing courses and to work in the University's Writing Center.

The program admits an average of 15 new students a year, which creates a writing community of 45 student writers.