

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

NO.: BHE 06-12

BOARD DATE: April 20, 2006

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the expedited application of the **University of Massachusetts Boston** to award the **Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing**.

One year after graduating the program's first class, the University shall submit to the Board a status report addressing its success in reaching program goals as stated in the application and in the areas of enrollment, curriculum, faculty, resources, and program effectiveness.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(b)

Contact: Aundrea Kelley, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Policy

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April 2006

University of Massachusetts Boston

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

INTENT

The University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB) has submitted an expedited proposal to offer a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. The proposed program is designed for students committed to careers as writers and editors, as well as for students aspiring to teach at the college or university level. The proposed MFA program is designed to serve students who have already achieved a high level of mastery in the craft of fiction or poetry, as demonstrated in the body of their creative work, and who wish to develop their craft further. Some students may enter the program with the goal of obtaining a terminal degree and becoming teachers of creative writing at the university level. The program, however, is meant primarily to serve and nurture literary writers who wish to contribute to the arts through their poetry and fiction.

The proposal has obtained all necessary governance approvals on campus and was approved by the University Board of Trustees on February 15, 2006. The letter of intent was circulated on February 16, 2006. No comments were received.

MISSION

UMB reports that more than half of the nation's public universities in urban centers offer the MFA degree. An MFA degree at UMB would help fulfill the University's "urban mission" by providing students from underserved communities with access to opportunities available at comparable institutions elsewhere in the country. UMB would particularly encourage applications from students in the greater Boston area who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to leave the region.

The proposed MFA program emerges from a strong creative writing tradition within the English Department at UMB. An undergraduate concentration in creative writing was created in 1978, and its graduates have since published with numerous high-caliber presses such as Penguin, Doubleday, and Yale University Press and have won many awards including two National Poetry awards and the Grolier Poetry Award as well as grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. (The current Poet Laureate of Texas is a UMB graduate.) UMB also offers a concentration in creative writing within the existing Master of Arts in English. The M.A. program is for students who want to learn more about the process of writing in various genres in preparation to enter a doctoral program or teach in secondary schools, while the proposed MFA program is designed for students who want to make writing the center of their professional lives.

NEED and DEMAND

According to UMB, enrollment in its undergraduate creative writing courses continues to rise, and demand exceeds supply causing students to be turned away from advanced courses. Students completing the creative writing concentration in the English Department have regularly

asked for the opportunity to pursue an MFA at UMB for years. Most cannot afford to pursue the degree at Emerson College, the one private institution in the state offering a residency-based program. Similarly, while UMass Amherst supports a nationally recognized program leading to the MFA, many UMB students have said that their circumstances make it impossible for them to leave the greater Boston area.

Admissions statistics from nearby institutions indicate that a pool of interested applicants exists. UMB reports that the University of Massachusetts Amherst (the only public institution in the state offering the degree at this time) receives over 300 applications for an average of 20 spaces. Boston University (M.A. degree) processes nearly 400 applications for 10 spaces in fiction alone. The low-residency Bennington Graduate Writing Seminars program receives over 100 applications in fiction, offering admission to 16. The ratio of applicants to available spaces demonstrates significant unmet demand for the proposed MFA program.

UMB acknowledges that while few literary writers today can support themselves solely on their writing, most writers who actively publish have attended MFA programs. Moreover, writers hoping to teach creative writing at the college or university level generally must possess an MFA or a Ph.D. in English with a creative dissertation. Finally, many writers find the MFA to be helpful in securing professional work as writers and teachers or writing inside and outside the academy.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Internal self-assessment will be ongoing and will take the form of student evaluations and regular annual reports from the Program Director to the Chair of the English Department and the Graduate Dean describing the progress and achievements of both students and faculty. Additionally, the proposed program's success will be measured in part by how its graduates commit to the vocation of writing. While the most obvious evidence of this will take the form of publications, another measure will be how graduates contribute to the field in new ways, such as developing literary programs in local community centers and libraries.

ADMISSIONS

Each year the proposed program plans to admit five students into its poetry concentration and five students into its fiction concentration, thereby growing from 10 to 30 students over three years. Admission will be based primarily on the manuscript submitted in the candidate's proposed field of specialization (15-20 pages of poetry; 25 pages of fiction). Candidates will be expected to have a baccalaureate degree and to have maintained a minimum of a 3.0 average in their undergraduate major. The Graduate Record Examination will be encouraged but not required.

CURRICULUM (Attachment A)

Students in the proposed MFA will spend three years in residence as full-time students, completing 48 credits of graduate-level course work that includes 24 credits of creative writing workshops, 18 credits of literature courses, and 6 credits of thesis work.

Each workshop will meet once a week for three hours, offering guided study and practice in the writing of poetry, short stories, and novels. The literature courses will be primarily offered with the M.A. in English program. The capstone project for the proposed MFA is the completion of a thesis aspiring to publishable quality in either poetry or fiction.

Students interested in teaching will follow a specific sequence, beginning with a course on the Teaching of Creative Writing, followed by an apprenticeship to a full-time faculty member and an internship semester during which they will have the opportunity to teach an undergraduate writing course (either En 210, 211, or 212).

RESOURCES AND BUDGET (Attachment B)

There are currently four full-time faculty who will provide instruction in the proposed MFA. Undergraduate courses now taught by these faculty will be staffed by other faculty, adjuncts, or graduate students. There will be a need by the time of full implementation to hire a new full-time faculty member and to provide administrative support staff. A writer with a national reputation will be hired on an annual basis to offer special workshops and seminars open to both MFA and M.A. students. A number of graduate students will receive stipends as well.

The campus administration has committed to support the increased resource needs of the program.

EXTERNAL REVIEW

The UMB proposal was reviewed by Dr. Penelope Pelizzon, Director of the Creative Writing Program, University of Connecticut; Dr. Judith Baumel, Director of Creative Writing, Adelphi University; and Dr. Sven Birkerts, Core Faculty Member, Bennington MFA program. The report was submitted on January 20, 2006.

The review team identified numerous strengths of the proposed program, including an energetic, accomplished, and well-connected faculty; experienced program administrators; and the backing of a strong English department. The team also found the content and sequencing of the proposed curriculum to be considered and practical, affording flexibility as well as structure. Commenting on the high caliber of the UMB's creative writing faculty, the team noted that "as a group, their writing has garnered honors, including a Pulitzer Prize—the country's premier literary award—as well as the ASCAP Deems Taylor Award, two National Endowment for the Arts grants, and a Pushcart Prize." The reviewers made several thoughtful suggestions regarding curriculum options and additional faculty and library resources. The campus prepared a response replying to each suggestion and made minor modifications.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION

Board staff thoroughly reviewed all documentation submitted by the Boston campus, the external reviewers, and the President's Office of the University. The staff recommendation is for approval of the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Upon graduating the first class for this program, the University shall submit to the Board a status report addressing its success in reaching program goals as stated in the application and in the areas of enrollment, curriculum, faculty resources, and program effectiveness.

Attachment A

Curriculum Outline

Major Required (Core) Courses (Total courses required = 6)		
Course Number	Course Title	Credit Hours
CRWR 601 or CRWR 603	Fiction Workshop (6 credits each, to be taken 3 times) Poetry Workshop	18
CRWR 610 or CRWR 612	Problems in Fiction Workshop: Craft Problems in Poetry Workshop: Poetics	6
CRWR 699	Thesis (3 credits each, to be taken 2 times)	6
	Subtotal # Core Credits Required	30
Other/Elective Course Choices (Total courses required = 6)		
CRWR 650	Teaching Creative Writing	3
CRWR 660	Seminar on Editing and Publishing	3
CRWR 640	Creative Non-Fiction	3
ENGL 6xx	3 literature electives from the attached list	9
	Subtotal # Elective Credits Required	18
Curriculum Summary		
Total number of courses required for the degree		12
Total credit hours required for degree		48

Note: Literature Electives may be drawn from a list of existing M.A. courses in literature, including any of the following:

- Engl 601: Studies in Poetry
- Engl 602: Studies in Fiction
- Engl 618: Life Writing
- Engl 623: The Nature of Narrative
- Engl 633: Shakespeare
- Engl 635: Metaphysical Poetry
- Engl 640: The Rise of the Novel
- Engl 645: Modern Poetry
- Engl 646: Literature and Society
- Engl 653: Major American Novelists
- Engl 654: Modern American Fiction
- Engl 656: Contemporary American Fiction
- Engl 660: Multi-Ethnic Literature in the United States
- Engl 662: Modern Black Writers
- Engl 697: Special Topics in Literature

Attachment B

Budget

Item	FY 07	FY 08	FY 09
0.5 FTE Grade 13 Staff	18,199	18,199	18,199
Speaker Series	6,000	6,000	6,000
Operating	10,000	10,000	10,000
Visiting Writer		88,900 (1)	88,900 (1)
0.5 FTE Grade 17 Staff		22,260	22,260
FTE Graduate Asst Stipend		21,000 (1)	63,000 (3)
Tenure Track Faculty			72,390
Total	34,199	166,359	280,749

Assumptions

Visiting writer costs = \$70,000 plus fringe at 27%

Tenure track faculty costs = \$57,000 plus fringe at 27%

Graduate asst stipend costs = \$13,000 plus health insurance and ed ops fee

Staff, speaker, and operations remain constant from year to year