

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Academic Affairs

NO.: AAC 14-05

COMMITTEE DATE: October 22, 2013

BOARD DATE: October 29, 2013

**APPLICATION OF BAY PATH COLLEGE TO OFFER THE MASTER OF FINE ARTS
IN CREATIVE NON-FICTION WRITING**

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the Articles of Amendment of **Bay Path College** to offer the **Master of Fine Arts in Creative Non-Fiction Writing**

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 69, Section 30 et seq.

Contact: Dr. Shelley Tinkham, Assistant Commissioner for Academic, P-16 and Veterans Policy

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

October 2013

Bay Path College Master of Fine Arts in Creative Non-Fiction Writing

INTENT

Bay Path College, a non-profit, NEASC-accredited institution located in Longmeadow, Massachusetts, requests approval to offer the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Non-Fiction Writing. Bay Path College's proposed 39 credit MFA will be delivered entirely online and will have no residency requirement. The proposed program is unique and will be one of only a few MFA writing programs currently available in the United States without a residency requirement.

The no-residency MFA in Creative Non-Fiction Writing enables busy adults to pursue their passion for creative writing. The proposed program intends to prepare graduates for careers as writers, freelancers, biographers, autobiographers, screenwriters, editors and writing teachers. The program helps students learn to write quality nonfiction, including works that could reach and impact a wide audience via publication.

The proposed program was approved by the College's Board of Trustees on March 4, 2013.

INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

The College was founded in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1897 as Bay Path Institute, a coeducational business school. In 1944, the institute was purchased by Thomas G. Carr who renamed it Bay Path Secretarial School and restricted its enrollment to women. During this time, the College moved to its present location in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. The school was chartered by the Commonwealth as Bay Path Junior College in 1949 and was authorized to grant the Associate in Science degree. Authorization to grant the Associate in Arts degree was awarded in 1963. In November of 1988, the Board of Regents approved the two-year institution's request to change the name to Bay Path College: A Two-year College for Women. In 1991, the College was granted authorization to award its first baccalaureate degrees: Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Bachelor of Science in Legal Studies, and Bachelor of Science in Business. The institution was also approved to offer the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters in 1991. The College was granted authorization to award the degree Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies in 1995, the Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice and the Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy in 1997, and the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology in 1998.

The institution was approved to offer its first master degree in 2000: the Master of Science in Communications and Information Management. The Master of Occupational Therapy and Master of Science in Advanced Practice Occupational Therapy were approved in 2002. The Master of Business Administration in Entrepreneurial Thinking and Innovative Practices was approved in 2004. The Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies and the Master of Science in Cybersecurity Management were both approved in 2012. The College enrolls women in its undergraduate program and both women and men in its graduate programs.

The institution now requests approval for the Master of Fine Arts in Non-Fiction Creative Writing.

ACADEMIC AND RELATED MATTERS

Curriculum (Appendix A)

This 39 credit program will be delivered entirely online over two academic years. Though participants may choose to write about any topic of interest to them, contemporary women's issues, travel, and spiritual and physical nourishment will be a focus on the proposed program. One-on-one mentoring by faculty and authors will enable students to hone their writing and projects in a semester tailored to their particular goals. Online contact with other participants, in workshops and discussions, will ensure that students complete their courses, become part of a writing community, and receive peer input and support. Semester-long online courses, including those on craft elements, issues in nonfiction, and teaching writing will provide a background for a writing career.

An essential element of the curriculum is the three-semester mentorship seminar and lab through which students are paired with published mentors and small groups of peers for writing practice and critique. Well-known authors will be scheduled for periodic online "chats" in both the mentorship seminars and content courses. Finally, students have the opportunity to travel with other students and faculty on an optional creative writing field seminar.

All students regardless of geographical location who are enrolled in the "Teaching to Learn" course will have the opportunity to teach a creative writing class. Those who do not live near the College will receive guidance and support in arranging a teaching workshop through a facility, agency, or school near the student. Venues can include after-school programs, community and senior centers, rehabilitation facilities, and shelters. The advantage of placements in non-traditional venues is that students gain experience in a variety of environments, which is good preparation for a career that may involve teaching for a community organization or nonprofit, running writing workshops, or coaching private students.

Upon completion of the program, graduates will possess a comprehensive foundation of creative nonfiction writing and will be able to demonstrate the following knowledge base and skill set:

- Develop and hone skills in writing, editing, and revision in creative nonfiction.
- Recognize and write within literary genres of creative nonfiction including specific emphases of women's stories, travel and food, and spiritual nourishment.
- Demonstrate a good reading knowledge of modern and contemporary nonfiction literature and how the student's own work fits within that literary tradition.
- Analyze and write with care about literary texts of considerable difficulty.
- Recognize critical positions and literary arguments, including the student's own critical and aesthetic position.
- Demonstrate the ability to read and respond thoughtfully and critically to work by other MFA students.
- Demonstrate knowledge of how to effectively perform in the online classroom setting.
- Demonstrate understanding of the theory and practice of literary publishing, including the practice of submitting work to literary journals and/or publishing houses.

Admission Requirements

Students will be admitted by the program director in cooperation with graduate admissions according to current practice with the other graduate programs at Bay Path College. In order to be admitted, prospective students must (as a minimum standard) meet the criteria set forth below:

- Completion of an undergraduate degree from an accredited post-secondary institution of learning – any discipline can apply;
- 3.00 GPA;
- Admission essay;
- Writing samples; and
- Two letters of recommendation.

Tuition and Fees

The per credit charge of the program in 2014 is \$695, representing a total approximate cost of \$27,105 for the full program from beginning to end based upon two years of enrollment.

Projected Enrollment

In FY'15 a total enrollment of 25 students is estimated, all of whom will be full-time and will finish in two calendar years. Twenty-five students are estimated to enroll in FY'16 and 30 students in FY'17. Estimates are for a 10% student attrition rate year-on-year for continuing students. Up to 55 students (first year and continuing students) will be enrolled in the program at any one time.

RESOURCES AND BUDGET

Faculty and Staff

The College hired a full-time program director with a terminal degree in writing (the MFA) to oversee all administrative and curricular aspects of the program effective September 3, 2013. This individual will also teach undergraduate students. The College intends to hire a second part-time position, the assistant director, who will serve as the primary student liaison for the program in addition to overseeing the creative writing teaching track.

Bay Path College has identified 16 adjunct faculty members who have expressed interest in teaching in the proposed MFA. All of these individuals are professors at other institutions or are experienced writers. Of these 16, five have the MFA. The eleven interested faculty without the terminal MFA or PhD in writing hold various graduate degrees and several of these individuals have experience in food writing, travel writing, and political journalism.

Library Resources

Hatch Library, along with its electronic counterpart - the Hatch Virtual Library - serves as the central learning resource center for students at Bay Path College. The library's print and multimedia collections include more than 145,000 items in all media formats, including over 85,000 electronic books. Today, students can access the catalog, read eBooks, use licensed research databases with full-text materials, and find library-recommended Internet resources from any computer with Web access on or off campus. The library's online catalog also provides on-campus and remote access to the collection of over 8,000 electronic books. In addition to the online catalog listing of print materials for course reserves, the library offers access to electronic course reserves through Canvas, the college's course management software system. Remote authentication through EZproxy offers all Bay Path College students and faculty 24/7 off-campus access to 95 subscription research databases, most of which include full-text materials. A journal access and management service, offered by EBSCO, helps students use the library's electronic and print journal holdings more effectively.

Physical and Information Technology Resources

The proposed program will be delivered entirely online. The institution utilizes Canvas LMS, a platform that fully integrates Web 2.0 communication technologies along with multimedia and assessment tools into a streamlined interface. Users (both faculty and students) interact with the environment and with one another by integrating the power of streaming video and/or audio throughout the system. This integration facilitates the ability of users to post video-comments in places such as the discussion board, course mail, assignments and the grade book – all without the need for special software or file uploads. Additionally, the integration and availability of rubrics to support assignment, course, and program-level assessment will help standardize and streamline assessment practices campus-wide.

The Canvas LMS is that it is an entirely cloud-based, hosted platform with no pre-set storage quotas. The Canvas system runs on the Amazon.com S3 network backbone and the contracted SLA guarantees 99.9% system uptime. Bay Path College officially completed the transition of all courses and users to the Canvas platform in August 2012. Support for using the Canvas LMS is provided through the Center for Distributed Learning – a group dedicated to providing end-user training and orientation for both faculty and students through nationally recognized training programs that combine coursework, mentoring and proactive ongoing support.

Real-time communications and “face-to-face” mentorship are embedded in the MFA programmatic curricular design and facilitated through Canvas. Canvas offers multiple, dynamic real-time options, including live video presentations, synchronous online discussions with visiting writers and guest speakers, live peer group chats, and instant feedback. These features demonstrate what that College believes to be a unique strength of the program: its ability to transcend the limitations of geography and facilitate meaningful “thought-to-thought” communications.

Budget (Appendix B)

A multi-year budget projection has been developed for the proposed program.

EVALUATION

External Review

The proposed program was evaluated by an external visiting committee composed of Richard Duggin, Program Director, University of Nebraska MFA in Writing and Kenneth Daley Chair, Department of English, Columbia College Chicago. The evaluators reviewed the petition and appendices and the institution’s online delivery platform beginning in August 2013. There was no site visit to the institution. The criteria that guided the review were the standards currently utilized by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, supplemented by the criteria of the Independent Institutions of Higher Education Standards, 610 C.M.R. 2.08 (3) (b) through (g).

The evaluators requested that the institution provide further evidence of how it would provide MFA students with a “virtual” residency that would serve as an alternative to standard MFA residency requirements which are designed to be intensive.

- The institution responded that it is breaking new ground with its proposal to offer a ‘no-residency’ model for a creative writing MFA degree program. It claims that the proposed program has specific and rigorous learning outcomes built into its pedagogical design, which correspond to learning outcomes associated with the typical on-site residency and

reiterated that the curriculum is designed as a “virtual residency” with a structured curriculum that includes real time lectures, readings, and weekly faculty-to-student and student-to-student interaction. The institution maintains that the seminars and thesis experience will provide an intense, structured and ongoing mentorship experience consistent with expectations of a MFA program in writing.

The reviewers also expressed concern over the institution’s claim that the proposed program would prepare prospective students for jobs in teaching. They noted that securing jobs in teaching writing is very competitive and applicants from full residency programs will likely have greater possibilities obtaining classroom teaching experience than those enrolled in low or no residency programs. The reviewers advised that the institution should be aware of such distinctions and should be clear in its communication to students about employment prospects.

- The institution stated that it will be clear in its promotional materials and in its discussions with prospective students that the proposed program two-course teaching sequence (which includes a one-semester teaching practicum) is, in and of itself, insufficient preparation for a teaching position.

The reviewers also expressed concerns over faculty qualification and advised the institution to hire qualified and experienced faculty members with the requisite professional degree (M.F.A., PhD) and publication record.

- Effective on September 3, 2013, the institution hired an appropriately qualified program chair who will also teach at the undergraduate level.

After reviewing the institution’s response, the evaluators felt that the institution had responded adequately to its recommendations and the program demonstrated meeting minimal standards for Board approval.

PUBLIC HEARING

The required public hearing was held on October 21, 2013 at the Department of Higher Education, located at One Ashburton Place in Boston, Massachusetts. No objections to the petition were presented.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION

After a thorough evaluation of all documentation submitted, staff is satisfied that Bay Path College’s proposal to offer the **Master of Fine Arts in Creative Non-Fiction Writing** meets the requirements for NEASC-accredited institutions outlined in 610 CMR 2.08. Recommendation is for approval.

Appendix A: Curriculum

Graduate Program Curriculum Outline

Major Required (Core) Courses (Total # of courses required =17)		
Course Number	Course Title	Credit Hours
MFA 600	Mentorship Seminar I	2
MFA 601	Mentorship Seminar II	2
MFA 602	Mentorship Seminar III	2
MFA 603	Mentorship Lab I	1
MFA 604	Mentorship Lab II	1
MFA 605	Mentorship Lab III	1
MFA 610	Creative Writing Field Seminar	3
MFA 620	Writing the Personal and Memoir Essay	2
MFA 621	Writing Contemporary Women's Stories	2
MFA 622	Eat, Drink, Get Paid	2
MFA 623	Women's Spiritual Writing Through the Ages	2
MFA 624	Travel Writing	3
MFA 625	Creative Nonfiction Writing I: Form and Theory	3
MFA 630	Creative Nonfiction Writing II: Form and Theory	3
MFA 640	The Power of the Pen	3
MFA 644	Getting Inside Lives	3
MFA 670	Learning to Teach	3
MFA 675	Teaching to Learn	3
MFA 680	Introduction to Publishing	3
MFA 685	Immersion in Publishing	3
MFA 690	Thesis I	3
MFA 691	Thesis II	3
Curriculum Summary		
Craft and Reflection Workshops (MFA 620, MFA 621, MFA 622, MFA 623, MFA 624) (Must take 3); Professional Track Courses (MFA 670, MFA 675, MFA 680, MFA 685) (Must take 2); Electives (MFA 610, MFA 640, MFA 644) (Must take 2)		
Total number of courses required for the degree		17
Total credit hours required for degree		39
Prerequisite, Concentration, Dissertation, or Other Requirements: None		

Appendix B: Budget

All amounts represented in USD.

		FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017
Assumptions					
	Full-time students				
	New		25	25	30
	Continuing		0	23	25
	Part-time Students		0	0	0
	Per credit rate		695	730	765
Revenues					
Student revenues					
	Tuition		329,430	735,445	800,630
Expenses					
Compensation and benefits					
	Program Director	35,000	36,050	37,132	38,246
	Assistant Director		20,085	20,687	21,308
	Adjunct Faculty Wages		113,000	191,000	191,000
	Benefits	8,750	25,334	33,555	33,988
	Sub-total comp & benefits	43,750	194,469	282,373	284,542
	BPC Overhead Charge (10%)		32,943	73,545	80,063
	Bookstore		500	500	500
	Postage		500	500	500
	Printing and duplicating		1,000	1,000	1,000
	Honorarium (guest author lectures)		5,000	10,000	10,000
Course Development Stipends					
Purchased Services					
	Instructional Design	20,000	15,000		
	Digital Resources	10,000	12,000	5,000	5,000
	Library		10,000	5,000	5,000
	Creative Consultation		10,000	10,000	10,000
	Marketing	75,000	75,000	75,000	75,000

	Lease				
	Memberships		2,000	2,000	2,000
	Events		5,000	5,000	5,000
	Meetings		2,000	2,000	2,000
	<u>Travel (e.g. Field Seminar)</u>		<u>3,000</u>	<u>4,000</u>	<u>4,000</u>
	Total Expenses	148,750	368,412	475,918	484,605
	Surplus (Deficit)	(148,750)	(38,982)	259,527	316,025
	Credit for Program Dir Salary	(35,000)	(36,050)	(37,132)	(38,246)
	Net Surplus (Deficit)	(113,750)	(2,932)	296,659	354,271