

The Rise of the Creative Writing Program in Poetry

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Introduction

There are nearly 350 terminal-degree creative writing programs in the world today, and the differences between them are much greater in number and profundity than their one abiding similarity: that nearly all employ the so-called “workshop” pedagogy, which sees a student submit creative work for peer review during a classroom session in which the author is not allowed to speak.¹ Nationally and internationally, creative writing programs range in duration from one to four years; from a total cohort size of less than ten to a total student population of more than 200; from three to 15, as to the enrollment of individual workshops; from a student-faculty ratio of one to one to a ratio of 31 to one; from a curriculum requiring no coursework whatsoever to one dominated by as many as three literary and theory courses per semester; from offering free tuition, with an annual stipend of \$45,000, to foregoing any stipend and instead requiring of students an outlay of more

¹ Throughout this study, the phrase “terminal degree” is used to denote a university degree that is the highest attainable degree in a given academic or professional track within a field of study. Just as, in fields of study within the humanities, the Ph.D. has been considered the “terminal” degree since its introduction to North America during the U.S. Civil War, in the fine arts the Master of Fine Arts (the MFA) has for many decades been considered the terminal degree achievable. In creative writing—a discipline ambiguously situated somewhere between the fine arts and the humanities—the MFA was officially denominated “terminal” by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (“AWP”) in 1979 (see *infra*). Today, the creative writing MFA is considered, paradoxically, “co-terminal” with the newer “Ph.D. in creative writing,” per AWP. As most incoming creative writing Ph.D. students already hold the creative writing MFA, they are in the odd position of working toward a second “terminal” degree in the same field of study. In this chapter, and hereafter in this study, the M.A. in creative writing, never formally denominated a terminal degree in either the humanities or the fine arts and only ambiguously terminal in creative writing until clarification of the issue in 1979, is deemed categorically “non-terminal.” In a certain view, this treatment is anachronistic; after 1936 but before 1979, both a terminal fine arts degree in creative writing (the MFA) as well as a non-terminal humanities degree (the M.A.) whose terminality in the field of creative writing had never been adjudicated were available to aspiring creative writers. As such, students who received M.A. degrees from, for instance, the creative writing programs at Stanford University, Johns Hopkins University, or Cornell University in the 1940s and 1950s might well have gone on the academic job market during that period with an expectation that their master’s degrees would be treated as sufficient preparation for full-time university employment. Without taking a position on the reasonableness of that view at the time, this study nevertheless distinguishes between a historically non-terminal academic degree (the M.A., first available in creative writing in the late 1940s) and a historically terminal fine arts degree (the MFA, first available in creative writing in the mid-1930s). As creative writing is today considered by most a fine art, and therefore the MFA its appropriate terminal degree, this study’s assignment of “non-terminal” status to the M.A. in creative writing is indicative of one of the important historical through-lines this study seeks to establish: decades of rejection of University of Iowa’s 1930s-instituted fine arts (MFA) model of instruction in favor of a humanities-oriented degree terminology (the “creative writing M.A.”), followed by the decline in popularity of the creative writing M.A. and the ascendancy of the MFA—a change formalized and thus hastened by AWP in 1979.

than \$150,000 for tuition, room, and board; from encouraging cross-genre study to categorically forbidding it; and from accepting fewer than 1% of all applicants to accepting nearly all of them.²

It is difficult, therefore, to tell the history of terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs while honoring the different manifestations of a programmatic philosophy that by now has spread across five continents.³ It is particularly difficult to do so without indulging several related topics, such as variations of creative writing pedagogy, which, if permitted to encroach on the historical account that follows, could quite easily swallow up the entire narrative. Likewise, while the utility and mission of creative writing programs have been hotly contested since the earliest years of such instruction in the academy, to get bogged down here in a consideration of whether terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs contribute to or dishonor literary ambition would be unwise. Instead, what follows is a historical survey that uses hard data to trace the growth of creative writing programs in the United States, while broadly outlining landmark events during the discipline's decades of programmatic development at the graduate level. Approaching our topic in this way permits consideration of a single discipline's evolution while leaving it to future scholarship to synthesize these facts into grander theories about the value and influence of formalized creative writing instruction. While some possible conclusions to be drawn from the discipline's narrative arc, and prognostications for its future direction, will inform the conclusion of this study, for the most part our emphasis is on bringing to the fore certain facts and, particularly, hard data that heretofore have received too little attention.

² See Appendices generally.

³ Here, and throughout this text, the term “programmatic” is used to denote creative writing instruction that occurs within the context of an undergraduate or graduate creative writing program. The word “programmatic” therefore should not be read as carrying the pejorative connotation the phrase “programmatic writing”—that is, writing excessively devoted to a specific method of composition—is generally held to have. This history is primarily concerned with institutional infrastructures and the methods of instruction endemic to them, not the thornier question of whether such methods of instruction by their nature produce pejoratively “programmatic” literary art.

In the substantial appendices that close this narrative, scholars will find a wealth of hard data that gives us one view of how, when, where, and why creative writing has been taught in the academy over the last 135 years. While I will direct readers' attention to through-lines in the data as appropriate, it is finally up to the readers of this history and its quantitative marginalia to determine the extent to which creative writing as it is taught today is an evolution or devolution from the original intent of the discipline's pioneers. This original intent is of abiding significance to educators, historians, and artists because it offers a new model for the situation of programmatic creative writing instruction within the history and practice of literary art in America.

The teaching and practice of creative writing on university campuses is, today, discussed and contested within a number of different metanarratives about the literary arts in America. To some, the discipline is a mechanism for homogenizing and commercializing art; to others, the "programmatic" quality of institutionalized creative writing instruction, and the financial barriers to entry that still exist at many graduate creative writing programs, suggests a corporatization and privatization of activities that were once communal and readily accessible to diverse populations.⁴ There remain, too, key questions about the degree to which the normative creative writing workshop is intellectually rigorous, fully mindful of the histories of the genres it discusses, or sufficiently reflexive about its pedagogies.

The confluence of the above concerns has at times seemed to challenge the viability of the discipline's fundamental enterprise. Can creative writing be taught? If it can be, should it ever be attempted in the context of a college English department, or a university setting generally? Understanding that the original purpose of classroom creative writing exercises was to challenge the primacy of literary canons, allow some room for idiosyncrasy in student writing practices, put students in dialogue with one another about political and cultural issues of moment that might

⁴ See Hall, *Poetry and Ambition*; Spahr, "The Program Era and the Mainly White Room."

inflect their *ethoi* as writers, and promulgate on- and off-campus communities of writers, allows us to ask these two questions: has creative writing drifted away from its original habits, tendencies, and designs, and if so, when and how did this occur? If at least some of today's creative writing workshops are, as is argued, ahistorical vehicles for consensus-driven self-expression, what would a return to first principles in such classroom spaces look like?

While the conclusion of this study takes no position on the advisability of such a disciplinary turn, it does consider its feasibility. Moreover, this study's emphasis on creative writing's presence in the academy prior to the institution of the first MFA program, and, in its conclusion, on contemporary conditions that suggest revolutionary developments in literary practice might still arise from within creative writing institutions, returns a dynamism to the conversation surrounding graduate creative writing programs that has been lacking. Because the cornerstone pedagogy of the discipline—the creative writing workshop—appears to so many an immovable set-piece, there is a danger we will forget that, like any discipline, creative writing might still undergo dramatic evolution.

The core principle underlying the creative writing workshop is simple enough: that aspiring creative writers learn best when they with regularity write creatively themselves, and routinely read the writing of their contemporaries alongside work published in their genre of choice in decades or centuries past. While in many creative writing workshops readings of already-published work are assigned, the workshop, as currently constituted, is definitionally a space in which the majority of instructional time is given over to a room of ten to fourteen aspiring writers reading their own work to their classmates, silently receiving feedback on that work, and then, in turn, providing such feedback to their peers when it's their time to be “workshopped.” While the nature and quality of student comments on peer-written work naturally varies from classroom to classroom and individual to individual, in the conventional workshop careful attention is paid to the “craft” of a submitted work; the term, as used here, connotes technical proficiency. Because students in contemporary

creative writing workshops are not permitted to hear directly from an author before their work is discussed, students are commonly called upon to critique others' work on the basis of their own received understanding of what superlative creative writing in a given genre looks like.⁵ However, because creative writing students do not generally receive craft lessons in workshop—though they may, contemporaneously, be asked to take lecture- and discussion-driven “craft classes” as part of their programs' curricula—and because what constitutes superlative craft is in any case a matter of significant disagreement among writers, opinions on the topic will vary dramatically from student to student. Of course, every workshop has a faculty member directing its discussions (a role commonly referred to as “workshop leader”) and it is through this individual that the participants in a workshop receive guidance on how best to discuss new writing.

Having provided this brief introduction to the core experience of students in programmatic creative writing settings, this study will by and large proceed inductively, rather than deductively, in its discussion of both the workshop specifically and, more broadly, creative writing as a discipline. Rather than proceeding from what we already know or believe we know about the strengths and shortcomings of the workshop pedagogy described above, or from what we already know or believe we know about the one graduate creative writing program with a national and even international profile—the Iowa Writers' Workshop at University of Iowa—our aim is to avoid anachronistic application of critical lenses that have elsewhere been applied to this topic. Seen from the vantage-point of the New Criticism, or Language writing, or anti-creative writing sentiment within the academy generally and Literary Studies specifically, the discipline of creative writing may be thought

⁵ The origin of this proscription against author input is unknown, though University of Central Arkansas and Arkansas Writers' Workshop professor Stephanie Vanderslice has referred to the practice of forbidding authors to speak during their workshops as part of a “long held workshop wisdom” that “hasn't changed much in 25 years.” Vanderslice, “Once More to the Workshop,” 30, 33 (internal citations omitted).

to occupy an obvious and perhaps unfortunate position in the history of American letters.⁶ Our job here, therefore, is to consider afresh the people, movements, institutions, and subcultural structures that have brought the discipline of creative writing to its present condition—and to do so aware that the story of programmatic creative writing at the graduate school level has often been told, to its detriment, as part of the larger story of creative writing in undergraduate classrooms and even in elementary and secondary school settings.

In this study, our focus will be on investigating and answering the above questions in the context of the MFA in poetry-writing. While poetry is only one of the four genres of creative writing commonly studied in MFA programs—the three others being fiction, nonfiction, and playwriting—we here give discussion of the poetry-writing MFA its own space as a way of honoring its many historical idiosyncrasies. First, and most notably, unlike playwriting MFAs, which are commonly housed in university Drama or Art departments, MFA degrees in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction are administered by English departments, whose administrative structure, curricular ambitions, and disciplinary history diverge dramatically from that of their peers in the visual and performing arts. Second, whereas the creative nonfiction MFA was first developed in 1986 at the Nonfiction Writers' Workshop in Iowa City and is still a relative rarity—with only a third of creative writing MFA programs in the United States offering the degree—MFA programs in poetry and fiction have been in operation since 1936 and therefore require separate consideration from their far newer peers.⁷ Third, whereas fiction MFAs have been widely discussed in the past decade, perhaps in part because

⁶ See, e.g., Perelman, *The Marginalization of Poetry*; Rasula, *The American Poetry Wax Museum*; Menand, "Show Or Tell: Should Creative Writing Be Taught?"; Hall, *Poetry and Ambition*; Gioia, *Can Poetry Matter?*; Fenza, "Creative Writing and Its Discontents"; Spahr, "The Program Era and the Mainly White Room"; Galchen and Heller, "Can Writing Be Taught?" The purpose in citing these well-known critiques of the discipline is not to interrogate their arguments, rather to observe that the topic of creative writing's viability and advisability as an institutionalized practice is one that has long been contested in books, newspapers, and magazines.

⁷ Abramson, "Foundation Dates." The Nonfiction Writers' Workshop is an entirely different program from the Iowa Writers' Workshop; while both are located in Iowa City and sponsored by University of Iowa, the two programs do not share students, faculty, administrators, curricula, or a physical plant.

some of their graduates have lately become consequential players in the nation's literary marketplace, contemporary poetry is largely noncommercial, and therefore both poets and the MFA programs they frequent have yet to receive the degree of attention their fiction-writing peers have enjoyed.⁸

By keeping our focus on graduate-level creative writing instruction, we discover much about one of the fastest-growing disciplines in America that would otherwise remain hidden. Quite simply, undergraduate creative writing programs—while worth discussing, and at times considered here—are not as closely linked to the disciplinary history of creative writing as are terminal-degree graduate programs. This is because they far less commonly produce graduates with a long-term commitment to writing and publishing in the field. Indeed, as certain mistaken assumptions about the purpose and evolution of programmatic creative writing now inform not only our histories but also the poetry-reading, poetry-writing, poetry-editing, and poetry performance strategies that are generally considered best practices both in and out of the classroom, a history of graduate creative writing programs in poetry can both redress such errors and offer a consequential intervention in American scholarship and American art. Throughout, we will pay particular attention to the ways in which graduate creative writing programs have become, in time, an idiosyncratic proving ground for young poets' burgeoning aesthetic inclinations and, more broadly, their personal poetics. This special emphasis on terminal-degree poetry-writing programs is significant because the only other comprehensive survey of twentieth-century creative writing workshops now in circulation is Mark McGurl's *The Program Era*, which, while thorough, both limits its inquiries to fiction-writing workshops and proceeds primarily through the use of case studies rather than, as here, hard data.

⁸ Important books on the fiction MFA from the past decade include Mark McGurl's *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Harvard University Press, 2011) and Chad Harbach's *MFA v. NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2014).

The Pace of Creative Writing's Expansion in the Academy

The history of creative writing in the academy is the story of two “booms,” one in the final two decades of the nineteenth century, and one in the last decade of the twentieth and the first decade of the present century. Discussing the academic institutionalization of creative writing in terms of these two dramatic expansions of the discipline is critical because it helps establish three key points that must be central to any study of creative writing qua discipline: first, that the original appearance of creative writing in the academy was attributable to its use in advanced composition classrooms; second, that the original appearance of creative writing *programs* in the academy was attributable to a very different impulse, that being the desire to create a community and creative spaces for “solitary genius[es], not . . . the agreeable average”⁹; and third, that prior to the late 1980s, far too few poets had graduated from terminal-degree creative writing programs to make any appreciable impact upon the trajectory of American verse. These presumptions, in turn, do much to shed light on the larger question of how and why creative writing developed as an academic discipline, how and why creative writing pedagogy has evolved as it has over the past 135 years, and how and why the discipline and its pedagogies have by now, in 2016, exerted such a profound influence on American literature in the first few years of the twenty-first century.

The initial appearance of the term “creative writing,” in “The American Scholar,” an address given by Ralph Waldo Emerson to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard on August 31, 1837, suggested more than a modicum of the radicalism that lay beneath it. As Emerson observed at the time,

One must be an inventor to read well. There is, then, creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world. We then see what is

⁹ Dana, 9. These words were used by Iowa Writers' Workshop Director Paul Engle (whose tenure lasted from 1941 to 1965) to describe the mission of the Workshop.

always true, that, as the seer's hour of vision is short and rare among heavy days and months, so is its record, perchance, the lead part of his volume.¹⁰

On its face, Emerson's observation seems to condone the juxtaposition of creative and scholarly instincts that came to animate the poet-scholars of the New Criticism—twentieth century opponents of the discipline of creative writing whose influence in the academy exceeded that of the burgeoning discipline through the beginning of the “Program Era” in 1964. In context, however, Emerson's submission was rather a different one: to propose a utilitarian positioning of texts in America's liberal arts institutions that would be harmonious with the ethos of individualism endemic to the New Humanists.¹¹ This latter academic philosophy was positioned counter to the New Critics' treatment of texts as artifacts to be decoded in the vacuum of undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs. Books, Emerson admonished the Phi Beta Kappas in Cambridge, “are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book, than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system.”¹²

Emerson's imagined “system”—governed in its totality by the free will of the individual—bore little resemblance to the New Criticism's literary analyses, whose almost scientific terminology and highly directed discourse promised to make every student within the New Critics' ambit a satellite of their prescriptions. As Emerson said at Cambridge, “There are creative manners, there are creative actions and creative words: manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or

¹⁰ Emerson, 232.

¹¹ See Chapter 3 for more discussion of the New Humanism. As discussed therein, “First developed in 1910, the New Humanism, sometimes styled ‘literary humanism,’ posited free will as a demonstrably higher existential function than either theological or scientific determinism. Literary humanists therefore opposed mechanistic materialism, romanticism, and materialistic naturalism, as each, in their view, bred irresponsibility in men.” These beliefs helped direct New Humanist views on which topics and methods were most appropriate and beneficial to the writing of poetry and fiction.

¹² Emerson, 230.

authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind's own sense of good and fair."¹³ This, then, was the original template for the creative writing workshop: a space in which literary custom would only be studied or acknowledged inasmuch as it served the creative "mind's own sense of good and fair," and in which the only presiding authority—a faculty member who, being merely a fellow author with more experience, was more a guide than a proper pedagogue—would be acknowledged as such only in cursory gestures.¹⁴

Emerson's "creative writing" also laid bare the true purpose of a creative mind's exposure to the words of others, including, presumably, the words of peers as "workshopped" by a student in a creative writing course: to permit such workshopers an opportunity to, through "creative reading," see illuminated in texts produced by another new potentialities for their own work. Howsoever later workshops may have been conducted at colleges and universities large and small, one finds in the foundational ethos of "creative writing," and the concept of creative writing as later institutionalized at the first-ever MFA at University of Iowa, the same expectation of mutual inspiration that artist communities of every stripe have long promised their participants.

But excessive focus on the New Humanism of Emerson and, later, the founders of the program in Iowa City, or even on the New Critics as historical foils for the rapid expansion of creative writing courses in the academy, is misplaced. The two discrete "booms" in programmatic creative writing, one each near the end of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, do not coincide with the apex of either the New Humanism or the New Criticism in American thought generally or academia in particular; therefore, these two philosophies are part of our history but not, finally, its motive engine.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Of course, to say that this was the original template for the creative writing workshop is not to say that these ambitions were fully realized in the classroom writing exercises of the time, nor that they have been fully realized in the innumerable individual workshops and university-housed graduate creative writing programs instituted since.

While the first of these two booms, at Harvard University in the late nineteenth century, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1, the second creative writing boom—a growth in the national roster of terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs from less than fifty in 1990 to over 185 by the end of the 2000s—must be situated in the era of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush rather than, as has been posited in the past, in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁵ This divorces the creative writing phenomenon from the progressive education movements that saw one of their two heydays—the other being in the 1920s—from 1960 to approximately 1975. If “self-expression” was a buzzword in American education during the Johnson and Nixon Administrations, we find a surprising lack of its citation in the literature surrounding creative writing. More pointedly, however, as the so-called “Chicago School” of pragmatic instrumentalism, which endorsed self-expression and experiential learning, achieved saturation in academia in the first decade of the twentieth century—roughly a century before the second creative writing boom and a quarter-century after the first—the widespread belief that theories of self-expressive learning influenced the growth of the discipline are finally unconvincing.¹⁶ Indeed, Burgess Johnson argued, in 1934, that the term “creative” had only entered the educational lexicon in the late 1920s or early 1930s, 25 years after the heyday of the Chicago School.¹⁷

While noted New Critic Allen Tate would write in “What Is Creative Writing?”, much like Emerson, of the benefits of instructional spaces in which writers congregate, noting “the need . . . to remove the young writer, if only temporarily, from the pressures of a commercialized publishing system, and to allow him to consider his art as an end in itself,” this basis for New Critical approval

¹⁵ See generally, McGurl, *The Program Era*. McGurl’s history of fiction-writing workshops in the twentieth century is currently the leading text for American scholars studying the disciplinary history of creative writing. In this it supplants D.G. Myers’ *The Elephants Teach*, which held this position from the time of its first publication in 1996 to the release of McGurl’s treatise in 2012.

¹⁶ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 73.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* The specific date of its first appearance in academia has not been pinpointed with any greater precision than this.

of creative writing courses is easily misunderstood.¹⁸ Tate knew, as Emerson could not have, that in the early twentieth century it was still possible for creative writing to offer “vocational training . . . [so] the Short Story could be mastered by almost anybody to make a pretty good living out of the pulps or at worst to supplement the family income.”¹⁹ Tate’s allusion to a “commercialized publishing system” therefore more likely recalls this earlier epoch in American literary history, rather than the relatively noncommercial university- and small-press publishing scene that has governed American verse since 1960.

Confusion of the origins of “creative writing” with those of The New Humanism and The New Criticism has long plagued histories of the discipline, making possible an alignment of creative writing’s early advocates with entrenched institutional capital that a careful consideration of the historical record does not permit. While the story of programmatic creative writing is indeed a story whose primary setting is the academy, its plot wends confusingly through myriad actors within that setting whose impulses, designs, and methods were remarkably divergent. In much the same way that the New Critics cohabited with creative writing within the academy but did not endorse it, individual undergraduate and graduate creative writing programs would arise in the academy under dramatically different circumstances and with decidedly different ambitions and modes of operation.

Where the Discipline Stands Today

There are presently 332 terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs in the world: 171 full-residency MFA programs; 64 low-residency MFA programs; and 97 doctoral programs in creative writing. Colleges and universities in the United States and Canada sponsor 275 of these

¹⁸ Tate, 181.

¹⁹ Id., at 182.

programs.²⁰ The size, duration, curricula, administration, and other features of these latter institutions' infrastructures are so disparate that few generalizations can be drawn. There are, however, a number of through-lines that can be identified in comparing the promotional materials of North America's 275 terminal-degree graduate creative programs, and these through-lines paint a picture of a discipline that has evolved substantially since its origins in late 1870s New England, a period discussed in more detail in Chapter 1. First, despite the history of creative writing as a form of vocational training, none of the terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs in the United States or Canada that are "full residency" promise applicants, in their promotional materials, that receipt of a terminal degree in creative writing is a guarantee of future employment in any field—and only a handful of the continent's low-residency programs make any suggestion that their curricula can help ensure a career as a professional writer. This caution is warranted; research I conducted for *Poets & Writers* in late 2012 (see Appendix S) suggests that fewer than 1% of creative writing MFA graduates will find a job teaching creative writing full-time at the college level. Though the MFA, considered the terminal degree in the field since its announcement as such by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs in 1979, is necessary for academic employment as a teacher of creative writing, it is by no means, at least in the present day, a sufficient qualification for such employment.²¹ This is a far cry from the vocational training with which the workshop pedagogy

²⁰ As of the writing of this study, there are no terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs in Mexico. Moreover, there are just six such programs in Canada. For this reason, the focus of this study will be on the operation of terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs in the United States. Worldwide, approximately 80% of such programs are in the United States, with another 15% in the United Kingdom (nearly all of these creative writing doctoral programs, rather than creative writing MFA programs).

²¹ See AWP, "Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing." It was this document, published in 1979 by programmatic creative writing's equivalent of a trade union, that firmly established the MFA as the terminal degree in the discipline. The creative writing doctorate is currently considered "co-terminal" with the MFA by both AWP and its member institutions, though increasingly full-time jobs teaching creative writing at the college level have been secured almost exclusively by those who hold a Ph.D. in the field. See generally, "Academic Jobs Wiki: Creative Writing Jobs" (2011 to 2016 editions).

specifically, and the advanced composition studies programs that bred creative writing instruction generally, were once associated.²²

Likewise, contrary to the common perception that creative writing programs often assure matriculants that they will be taught the finer points of literary craft, only a handful of programs in the U.S. or Canada make any substantive mention of their pedagogical approaches in their promotional materials, and none contradict what has long been thought the central tenet of the first-ever creative writing MFA program, the Iowa Writers' Workshop, from the time of its founding: that in fact writers cannot be taught. Yet research reveals little evidence that the mantra "writing cannot be taught" is particular to, or even originated in, the Writers' Workshop. When fiction-writing textbooks began to appear around the turn of the twentieth century—the first fiction-writing textbook is believed to have been written in 1898, the first versification textbook around the beginning of World War I—the idea that writing could not be taught was already encoded into the classroom pedagogy that by the mid-1930s would be known as "creative writing." In his 1914 *Short Stories in the Making*, Robert Neal wrote that "This book . . . is not written with the belief that short story writing, or any other form of literary composition, can be taught. It cannot. Literature is art, and art is not communicable. Theories of its methods and success can be inferred and explained; its practical techniques can frequently be explained and acquired. But neither theory nor technique makes art; the living spirit is not in them."²³ In Esenwein and Roberts' 1920 versification textbook, the duo wrote, "This little treatise does not aim to create poets—Heaven must do that . . . Poetry is first a gift, then an art . . ."²⁴ Years later these same sentiments would be repeated by the leading

²² See generally Adams, 61-98.

²³ Neal, xi.

²⁴ Esenwein and Roberts, ix.

figures of the Program Era; at the dawn of that Era, in 1966, Stanford's Wallace Stegner would say, "We have never pretended that we taught young writers much of anything . . ." ²⁵

Circumspection about the role of pedagogy in producing excellence in the literary arts must be distinguished from the much different question of whether institutional study offers benefits—for instance, time and space to write in a supportive and dynamic community—to which many aspiring literary artists of talent hope to gain access. There is, moreover, the question of whether the acquisition of an academic pedigree in creative writing is an aid to publication; even today, at a time when far more independent presses and literary magazines are in operation than ever before, many of those who do not hold a graduate degree in creative writing contend that programmatic creative writing instruction is the surest path to an active publishing career in the literary arts. ²⁶

Such views were uncommon among the men most responsible for bringing imaginative writing into academia. George Pierce Baker—who from within the academy had decried, in his 1919 book *Dramatic Technique*, the "recent mushroom growth" of undergraduate creative writing courses, believing that only graduate study in creative writing was justifiable—wrote the following: "The dramatist is born, not made.' This common saying grants the dramatist at least one experience of other artists, namely birth, but seeks to deny him the instruction in art granted the architect, the painter, the sculptor, and the musician."²⁷ As implied by Baker, several prominent avant-gardists

²⁵ Scowcroft, x.

²⁶ This view appears to be most common among fiction-writers. See, e.g., Deb and Mathis: "At the highest levels, publishing remains a bit clubby and impenetrable. For students of color especially, networks created at an M.F.A. program can open doors to the hallowed, and strikingly undiverse, halls of publishing houses." Deb and Mathis, 39. In poetry, expectations of assistance from either one's program generally or its faculty specifically tend to be both more modest and less concrete. Only occasionally can articles be found that tie formalized poetry instruction to subsequent publication. See, e.g., Fay-Leblanc: "Let's take it as a given that no one studies poetry for the money and fame, or at least not just for the (pitiful) money and (marginal) fame. You can count the number of poets in the United States who make a living off of their book sales on one hand . . . [yet] many graduates benefit from doors that are opened, even just a bit, by colleagues or teachers during or after their M.F.A. experience." Fay-Leblanc, "An Impractical Degree?". For a listing of current literary magazines and presses, see CLMP, "Directory."

²⁷ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 78. See generally, Baker, *Dramatic Technique*.

whose writing careers spanned the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries indeed attended Continental arts academies for the study of the visual arts, yet would later become fierce critics of academic training for the literary generations succeeding them. We find this hostility to formalized instruction in prose- and poetry-writing in many of the seminal manifestos of the avant-garde—Futurism, Surrealism, Dadaism, and Vorticism, to name just a few—as well as writings by major avant-garde figures of the day, such as Gertrude Stein.²⁸

Part of the reason for this disparate treatment of literary and other breeds of artists, and therefore for the rhetoric of disadvantageous exceptionalism that supposes today’s graduate creative writing programs to be uniquely committed to professionalizing artists and standardizing practices, may arise from the “misinformation masquerading as assumed history” referenced by George Garrett in Joseph Moxley’s 1989 *Creative Writing in America: Theory and Pedagogy*.²⁹ For instance, any general fear that creative writing workshops might aim to replicate the administrative and curricular conventions common to academia—pedagogical hierarchies, classroom lectures, a standardized grading scheme, and predetermined areas of specialization, for instance—would find little encouragement in either the history of the discipline or its contemporary practices, as this historical account will demonstrate.³⁰ As early as 1917, when William Carruth wrote his versification textbook *Versification*, instructors of creative writing were advised to schedule their class meetings for out-of-doors if at all possible—and, if not possible, at a minimum outside any conventional

²⁸ See, e.g., Tzara, *Approximate Man and Other Writings*; Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*; and Stein, *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*.

²⁹ Moxley, 47.

³⁰ Quoting Maureen Freely for the proposition that “university regulations may stifle the imagination,” Heather Beck goes on to observe that such regulations include “having to design courses to ‘factory-like specifications’ and being under-resourced for staff and time to spend reading and giving weekly feedback to young writers. A further constraint centers on having to conform to assessment standards that were designed for a very different kind of teaching than the close one-to-one weekly feedback required in Creative Writing.” Beck, 63.

classroom space.³¹ Wrote Carruth, “[S]o far as may be, the verse-writing class should be like a club of friends gathered for common enjoyment and helpful suggestion and criticism.”³² While we expect to find “criticism”—both the term and its practice—in any sort of academic course, and “suggestion and criticism” in any variety of composition courses, Carruth’s critical inclusion of “enjoyment” harkens back to the creative writing workshop’s roots in an idealized American conception of the French salon and, even before this, Emerson’s sense of creative writing as a liberatory pursuit.³³ Once Carruth’s “enjoyment,” presumably both aesthetic and demonstrative, is added to the mix—along with the contemporary workshop’s practice of encouraging or even requiring live readings and editorial internships from students, just as early twentieth century workshops and academic institution-affiliated literary clubs often expected from their members—it becomes more difficult to distinguish academic-institutional creative writing workshops from workshops conducted outside such spaces.³⁴ While programmatic creative writing instruction naturally confers course credit and, eventually, a formal pedigree, the in-program experience many of today’s graduate creative writing programs provide their aspiring poets would be not unfamiliar to those literary artists living and writing outside the confines of academia. Despite conspicuous differences between their

³¹ Carruth, 54. Carruth wrote, further, that if even this were impossible, any classroom space employed for creative writing instruction should be redesigned to seat students in a non-hierarchical circle, rather than the hierarchy-promulgating rowed formation that was de rigueur at the time. Id.

³² Carruth, 54. Carruth was also the first to suggest an optimal class-size of twelve, a figure still in common usage today.

³³ Grimes, xi. Frank Conroy, the longest-serving Director of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and still its most notoriously curmudgeonly fiction-writing instructor—as I was often told while attending the Workshop from 2007 to 2009, two years after Conroy’s death—had on many occasions compared his program to the French salons he idealized and briefly observed first-hand as a youth visiting Paris in the early 1950s. See also pg. 22 for a discussion of John Gardiner’s analogizing of the writing workshop to a French atelier.

³⁴ Just as Harvard offered editorships at Harvard Monthly to students in Barrett Wendell’s proto-creative writing workshops, at the Writer’s Workshop in Iowa City, *Midlands* and *The Iowa Literary Magazine* were closely associated with that university’s earliest workshops and their participants. A full list of university-affiliated magazines, of which there are well over a hundred, is available annually from the Association of Writers and Writing Programs. While this study does not aim to fully address creative writing’s dramatic influence on literary-magazine and small-press culture in American poetry—itsself a topic worthy of book-length treatment—suffice to say that literary magazines like *Black Mountain Review* and *Jargon* at Black Mountain College, or small presses like Parallel Press at University of Wisconsin-Madison, offered a significant and far too little discussed contribution to American letters during the course of the twentieth century.

environments, both groups of writers are likely to rely on dynamic, real-time communities of fellow writers for encouragement and inspiration.

This said, the conventional operation of the creative writing workshop—a single student submitting silently to the technical and substantive edits proposed by classmates—does, far more than the workshop’s philosophical inheritance would propose, seem to circumscribe the discourse it produces. Yet as the playwright Eugene O’Neill once wrote of George Pierce Baker’s playwriting workshop, which he attended for a year, “the most vital thing for us, as possible future artists and creators, to learn at that time was to believe in our work and keep on believing. And to hope. He helped us to hope . . .”³⁵ Another student wrote of Baker, “[He was] the least dogmatic of men. He had no Golden Rules of Dramaturgy.”³⁶ Yet another student observed that, for writers whose talent was already evident, Baker’s workshop nevertheless offered both instruction and an audience; for the rest, the critical thinking and writing skills developed through a creative writing workshop would serve them well in many settings; and for the worst writers, wrote the student, Baker and his course offered the discouragement they so desperately needed. Today, the long odds of a poet securing a vibrant and reliable book-publishing career, and the dismal job market for terminal degree-holding poets, create a perpetual risk that the advice offered to workshop students will be geared primarily toward this last end. In this respect, as in many others, charting the early years of imaginative writing pedagogy in undergraduate and graduate classrooms allows us to map, too, the extent to which current practice reflects—or deflects—the original ambitions of such curricular innovations.

³⁵ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 81.

³⁶ *Id.*, 82.

Chapter 1: A Sudden Literary Revival in Cambridge

The educators of the nineteenth century whose pedagogies first introduced imaginative writing to the academy were considered radicals within their own community, that being the community of writing instructors responsible for developing the discipline of “composition” in higher education. In the late 1870s, “advanced” writing courses in the academy were largely a form of vocational training intended to prepare students for careers in journalism.³⁷ At the time, the nation’s vibrant magazine and newspaper culture was of sufficient breadth and depth that a college graduate with experience in advanced composition techniques could expect to earn a comfortable—if modest—living writing for the weeklies. The idea of writing instruction as concurrent to the expansion of students’ imaginative faculties was largely unknown.

Late nineteenth-century instruction in poetry-writing was typified by two phenomena particular to the time: an institutional ambition at universities like Harvard to legitimize American verse, hampered by a strikingly thin American canon (indeed classroom discussion of such verse was, at the time, largely circumscribed by consideration of the “Fireside Poets,” sometimes called the “Schoolroom” or “Household” poets, a group comprising only five authors: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russell Lowell, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.); and a classroom pedagogy that saw students of poetry almost exclusively tasked with writing essays divining major themes in the works under review. Because the Fireside Poets wrote primarily on domestic themes, it was easy for college students of the era to regard poetry’s ambit as the quaint and cloistered spheres of American life, despite the broad popular

³⁷ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 36. See, generally, Chapter 3 of Katherine Adams’ excellent *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, “At Harvard and Beyond,” upon which research much of the present history relies.

appeal verse enjoyed at the time.³⁸ As one Harvard professor saddled with this curriculum, A.S. Hill, opined about advanced writing courses in 1879, “[T]he professor, absorbed in a specialty, contented himself with requiring at recitations and examinations knowledge of the subject-matter, however ill-digested and ill-expressed.”³⁹ Of particular concern to Hill was that freshman composition instruction at Harvard was too brief, and composition instruction for upperclassmen almost nonexistent—with these latter students receiving little such training during their in-major coursework, despite the fact that their professors often complained about the quality of their compositions.⁴⁰

Hill, a Harvard-educated attorney and journalist, had begun teaching at Harvard two years earlier, in 1877. By 1879, the unorthodox English 5 course he and fellow faculty member Barrett Wendell had developed had already become a topic of conversation on campus. Hill’s English 5 was treated as an “advanced” composition course, and was designed especially for upperclassmen who had already taken preliminary composition courses as underclassmen. In the interest of challenging these advanced writers, Hill permitted them to turn in two to three assignments per semester in which their response to assigned texts was offered through imaginative rather than analytical writing.⁴¹ While fiction was the only genre of such writing permitted by Hill, and while students’ assignments were by no means “workshopped” in groups, Hill’s determination that there was educational value in encouraging creativity in writing instruction was historically important.

In 1882, Hill’s faculty peer Wendell, who, unlike Hill, was himself an inveterate poet and fiction-writer, became the primary instructor for Harvard’s English 5. Wendell had graduated from

³⁸ See, generally, Joan Shelly Rubin, *Songs of Ourselves: The Uses of Poetry in America*.

³⁹ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 36 (internal citations omitted).

⁴⁰ *Id.*, 37.

⁴¹ Note that the term “creative writing,” as noted above introduced by Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1837, would not become common in academia until the 1920s.

the university's undergraduate program in the mid-1870s—the pre-English 5 days—and gone to on Harvard Law School, where he earned a *juris doctorate* in 1879. Wendell found law school pedagogy sufficiently stifling that he wrote poetry and fiction in his off-hours, a fact he hid from classmates on account of it being highly unusual behavior in a law student at the time. Perhaps owing in part to this divided attention, the fiercely intelligent Wendell failed the bar exam in 1880 and so, as a back-up plan, took a position as an instructor of English at Harvard. He soon became known as an “eccentric” by his peers, and indeed no less an august personage than the then-President of the University, Charles William Eliot, called him a “scratch appointment”—meaning, in context, that Wendell's hire had been hastily arranged and, in the view of Eliot, possibly indiscriminate.⁴²

The curriculum Wendell developed for English 5 permitted students to respond to course readings not only with fiction but with what we might now term “creative nonfiction,” this being essays in which students were encouraged to connect course texts with their own experiences. As importantly, Wendell's course also featured regular class discussion of student work. This early iteration of the creative writing workshop required each student to weekly critique one assignment turned in by a classmate, with Wendell and the entire class then discussing and expanding upon that critique after its presentation in class. This exercise usually included, too, an oral recitation of a part or the whole of the assignment under review.

Wendell's English 5 curriculum was a success among the Harvard student body, and became an integral part of the literary renaissance that enveloped Harvard in the 1880s. The course—as well as the on-campus literary environment it helped foster—was popular enough that it received rave reviews in the pages of the *Harvard Crimson*, the undergraduate newspaper.⁴³ In 1886, the *Crimson*

⁴² Wendell's eccentricity is only underscored by the fact that, in addition to his faculty work with *The Harvard Monthly*, he had also, as a student, been one of the founders of the *Harvard Lampoon*, an infamously irreverent rag that would later be headed by no less an eccentric literary man than e.e. cummings.

⁴³ Cohen, 483.

noted that “during the past two years the college has been going through a literary revival,” attributing this revival to both Wendell’s English 5 course and to the first half year of publication of *Harvard Monthly*, a student journal Wendell had founded and for which he served as editor.⁴⁴ Then-student Robert Herrick, who not only studied with Wendell but would later teach, in 1893, the first-ever writing workshop at University of Chicago, noted that “[s]ome sort of yeast was stirring at Harvard . . .”⁴⁵ Paul Cohen, author of “Barrett Wendell and the Harvard Literary Revival,” notes that, by 1885, Wendell was indeed “on his way to becoming one of the most popular—and eccentric—members of the faculty. According to Herrick, who once compared Wendell’s classes to an atelier, [Wendell] had a greater influence upon the craftsmanship of the writer than any other American man-of-letters.”⁴⁶ Wendell, adds Cohen, had “introduced at Harvard an advanced, noncredit course . . . to train undergraduates in the art he was practicing in his free moments . . . [he] promoted the systematic practice of English composition in a manner never before attempted.”⁴⁷

By 1885, less than a year before the *Harvard Crimson* would write of the “literary revival” at Harvard, Wendell’s newly established, full-credit English 12 elective had become the best-attended course at the university.⁴⁸ Indeed, its popularity was such that the *Crimson* began publishing a supplement “filled with matter furnished by the English instructors, taken from the best themes and specimens of compositions done in the regular college work.”⁴⁹ It was a dramatic turnaround from the creative lull at Harvard in the 1870s. As Cohen notes, “[Wendell’s] students sensed the threshold

⁴⁴ Cohen, 483.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

of a *movement* in which they could be participants, a feeling Wendell had inspired in his class” (emphasis added).⁵⁰ The depth and breadth of the movement was given its full voice in editorials appearing in the *Crimson* throughout 1886, one of which remarked that instead of athletic heroes, Harvard’s class of 1886 now had “literary celebrities.”⁵¹ For the first time, campus culture was distinguishing between written work notable for the technical superiority of its composition and writing distinguished by its subjective approach and, as to the most superlative exemplars on offer, its innate artistry.

While their backgrounds and classroom pedagogies were by no means identical, Hill and Wendell shared a set of core beliefs about composition instruction that would be central, too, to the discipline of creative writing as it later developed in Iowa City. For instance, both believed that college freshman composition courses were too limited in scope, topically; that they encouraged students toward the employment of an unnatural, pretentious writing style; that, broadly speaking, they restricted imaginative thinking; that they unduly enforced adherence to outdated rhetorical conventions; and that they bred disinterested and uncritical readers of literature.⁵²

Wendell’s particular motivation in converting a conventional composition course into a proto-creative writing course was at least partly a personal one. The young English instructor was distraught and aggrieved by the way his department partitioned creative and scholarly work; the latter, relative to the former, was unquestionably afforded greater dignity. As Wendell wrote of his own poetry and fiction, “It is maddening to have to do one’s best work . . . on the sly—at the risk of

⁵⁰ Ibid. “‘Unless the lively interest with which the courses in English composition are regarded is indicative of something else than their growing popularity,’ [as poet and future U.S. Ambassador to Germany] Alanson Houghton asserted in one of his rare optimistic statements, ‘we are strongly inclined to think that we are at the beginning of one of those recurring periods when literary tendencies are especially marked and distinct.’” Ibid.

⁵¹ Cohen, 484.

⁵² See, generally, Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, Chapter 3.

having fingers pointed at you if you are found out.”⁵³ Wendell’s English 5 course thus brought his own—as well as his students’—creative writing into the light. It also permitted Wendell to expand discussion of published fiction and poetry to include topics in civics previously not condoned by the Fireside Poets. Finally, it aided his student-writers in their development of a broad aesthetic sense and sociocultural awareness, as the themes students were asked to tackle in Wendell’s courses were hardly staid. One student of George Pierce Baker’s playwriting workshop noted that “all our villains were recruited from the upper classes . . . [and there was not] a single word of toleration, let alone praise, for marriage.”⁵⁴ Wendell was adamant, too, that students not write about themselves, but rather go out into the world and look for “a fresh whiff of real human life.”⁵⁵

In 1884, Wendell began teaching English 12, a course that quickly became one of the most popular at Harvard.⁵⁶ As with English 5, student enrollment was still capped at thirty, but in English 12 Harvard’s most advanced writers were offered greater freedom than ever before to choose their own topics for assignments and to experiment in multiple genres. One student wrote of Wendell’s new elective, “What Wendell did for Harvard was actually to make a place there—for a time, at least—in which an artist could find encouragement and counsel.”⁵⁷ Among the roster of Wendell students who would go on to literary fame one finds, for instance, W.E.B. DuBois; according to documents of the time, the name Robert Frost would also have appeared on the list had Frost not failed to place out of introductory freshman composition.⁵⁸ Other Wendell protégés would become

⁵³ Id., 43.

⁵⁴ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 83.

⁵⁵ Adams, *A Group of Their Own*, 45.

⁵⁶ Id., 47.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

central figures in the development of creative writing in America, among them George Pierce Baker—a man who many have come to consider the father of the contemporary graduate creative writing program.⁵⁹

In 1892, LaBaron Russell Briggs became the primary instructor for English 5 at Harvard, and his tenure in that position would be marked by several additional developments in imaginative writing's place in the academy. Unlike Hill's English 5, and to a far greater degree than Wendell's, Briggs' iteration of the course featured enrollment rosters dominated by graduate students rather than undergraduates. The average age of the students in Briggs' course was twenty-five or twenty-six—almost exactly the same average age of a matriculating creative writing MFA student as of 2012.⁶⁰ Many of Briggs' students already had substantial writing experience; some arrived at Harvard with poetry collections or novels already half-finished.⁶¹ While each class period was only an hour long, students were required to turn in work for class discussion at least once every two weeks. By this time, most English 5 assignments were in the nature of Wendell's "daily themes"—a course requirement offering a degree of license then considered radical, with students permitted to choose their own daily writing topics without guidance or restriction. Students wrote, for instance, fables inspired by the aphorisms of Samuel Johnson, and short stories inspired by following a particular stranger around town.⁶² Everything turned in by students, rather than merely selected pieces, received a hearing in what had come to look more and more like a contemporary creative writing

⁵⁹ This is discussed in more detail *infra*, see pg. 28.

⁶⁰ Abramson, "Average Age of Matriculants" (Surveys 1-3). By 1888, the average age of incoming freshman at Harvard was 18 years and ten months. Chudacoff, 60. Other Ivy League institutions saw similar trends among their own matriculants; by the mid-1880s, the average age of an incoming freshman at Princeton was likewise 18. Geiger, 102.

⁶¹ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 47.

⁶² Simmons, 336, 343. Simmons notes, of Wendell's pedagogy, that he "modeled a writer's identity for students, using techniques such as student-chosen writing topics, regular conferences, frequent informal writings, and in-class workshops." Simmons, at 327. "In Wendell's pedagogy," Simmons observes, "voice was central." *Id.*, 328. This is yet another feature of the Harvard professor's pedagogy that is still common in writing workshops today.

workshop. Briggs even encouraged interdisciplinary peer reviews, inasmuch as students were asked to consider both the aesthetics of the works under review as well as their adherence to the principles of style found in the textbook then commonly in use at Harvard, *English Composition*.⁶³

In 1898, John Gardiner began teaching English 12, whose admissions were by this time highly selective. Gardiner's ambitions for English 12 were entirely practical. As he wrote, his aim was to turn out men with something like a *professional* command of the art in which they are to practice" (emphasis added).⁶⁴ This use of the term "professional" in relation to imaginative writing in the academy is among the first on record; however, while the purpose and consequences of "professionalizing" writers of poetry and prose is today hotly contested, at the time the term was one Gardiner aligned solely with art rather than vocation. To Gardiner, the professionalization of English 12 students implied only that a student of Gardiner could be expected to know more about the art of poetry-writing than peers who had not been exposed to such instruction.⁶⁵

Gardiner used the term "professional" mindful that many of his students would indeed become careered professionals of one kind or another, though certainly not in poetry-writing, a prospect that was unthinkable at the time—and still. But as had been the case with Briggs, Gardiner's awareness that some percentage of his students were likely to earn a living by writing did not mean that he transformed English 12 into a didactic, hermetic, hierarchical space in which future

⁶³ Simmons, 333. Barrett Wendell was the editor of *English Composition*, which was published by Scribner in 1891 and again, in a second edition, in 1894.

⁶⁴ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 52.

⁶⁵ Ibid. "In general," wrote Gardiner at the time, "the purpose of such a course as English 12 is analogous to that of an atelier—to turn out men with something like a *professional* command of the art in which they are to practice" (emphasis in original; internal citation omitted). Because the *ateliers libres* of nineteenth century France, upon which example Gardiner predicated his own pedagogy, did no more than provide their students with a mentor, close study of contemporary models, and expert criticism of their work, it is not clear that Gardiner's sense of the "professional" included either an education in the history of writing or any close instruction in technique. This view of Gardiner's ambitions as an educator is underscored by language of the English 12 syllabus indicating that only men with "some native equipment" and "the promise of showing. . .special capacity" as writers were admitted to the course. Basic writing instruction was thus not a component of Gardiner's English 12. Ibid.

professionals were drilled on their business acumen. Far from it, as students of both Gardiner and Briggs were treated not as pupils but as budding writing professionals in journalism or literary reviewing and, therefore, something approaching the peers of their instructors. For Gardiner, the purpose of the creative writing workshop was not determinative of its form. He compared his English 12 course to an “atelier” on the order of the *ateliers libres* of France, in which avant-garde artists worked together and with a mentor, which mentor provided models and criticism but little if any formal instruction.⁶⁶

A similar attitude would eventually be on display in another creative writing-oriented composition course at Harvard, English 22 (“Sophomore Composition”), which was originally initiated in 1882 by Lewis Edwards Gates. As one student of Gates would describe his English 22 experience, “The literary student at Cambridge has but little to do with lectures, almost nothing at all with textbooks. He is sent away from the lecture room and told to look about him and think a little.”⁶⁷ This distinction between the scholarly study of literature and an aspiring author merely taking, for once, adequate time and space to think about writing and to write, would return, decades later, in the founding philosophy of a fully realized “creative writing” curriculum in Iowa City.

Even as English 12 retained the atelier-like format developed by Gardiner, its pragmatic components remained thoroughly engaged. In 1908, when Charles Townsend Copeland was teaching English 12, he wrote on one student’s work that “such writing won’t get you far as a professional author in America.”⁶⁸ Like Gardiner, Copeland was aware that those students who hoped to continue writing regularly upon graduation were likely to do so in a newsroom or as

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Id., 54.

⁶⁸ Copeland’s name, along with that of Briggs, is now known primarily through the Briggs-Copeland lectureship at Harvard University, a five-year creative writing fellowship considered among the most coveted by creative writers who hope to teach full-time at the university level.

freelancers for magazines; this conflation of what we now know as “creative writing” with vocational writing was typical of the time, and helps explain how and why the term “professional” was used interchangeably, around the turn of the century, to mean writing that was both superlative artistically and viable financially—not merely one or the other. The idea that English composition courses at Harvard in the 1890s were, for many, vocational training was thus very much in keeping with the professional landscape of the period.

Creative Writing at Harvard in Context

To better understand the environment within which Wendell initiated the practice of imaginative writing at Harvard, it is useful to consider the “anthology wars” that molded the literary landscape of late nineteenth-century America—as it was the resultant anthologies that dominated the undergraduate curricula of the time, and therefore the conventional forms of literary study Wendell and his peers rebelled against even as, at other times, they participated in their practice.

While anthologies of English verse were readily available in the 1870s—and indeed some, like Francis Turner Palgrave’s *Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics* (1861), were nearly ubiquitous in American classrooms—an educator, like Barrett Wendell, with an interest not just in legitimizing American writing for his students but encouraging them to develop a distinctly American writing voice, found far less material to work with than he might have hoped. While American poetry received its first proper anthology in 1793, the poets anthologized therein had fallen out of favor by Wendell’s day, and therefore played little role in the English curriculum at Harvard in the 1870s.⁶⁹ In 1822, just ten years removed from the War of 1812, English anthologists had issued what they styled a comprehensive compilation of American verse; however, the 283-page volume contained work by

⁶⁹ Golding, 5. This information, as with much of the rest of the history in this section, comes from Golding’s *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry* (1995).

only eight poets, and thus was received as the cultural affront it was perhaps in part intended to be.⁷⁰ In response, American anthologists published, in 1829, a three-volume anthology that featured scores of U.S. poets. Considered excessive even at the time, this anthology too had a short shelf-life. In 1842 America received the domestically edited anthology it had long deserved: Rufus Griswold's *The Poets and Poetry of America*.⁷¹ A great success in the classrooms of the nation, Griswold's anthology was still receiving revised editions and new editorial treatment as late as thirty years later.

In hindsight, a flaw in Griswold's anthology—one whose dogmatic use in English classrooms Wendell and his peers specifically opposed—was its editorial ethos. Griswold insisted that every poem appearing in the volume be of “pure moral character”; in practice, this meant a prohibition on political, licentious, humorous, female-authored, and Southern verse.⁷² The result was an anthology of white male poets from New England, and not just any such poets but the most cautious and deliberative ones Griswold could find. Even the last edition of Griswold's anthology, published in 1872, featured just seven poets: the five “Fireside Poets,” Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Edgar Allan Poe. Today, two of the Fireside Poets, Bryant and Lowell, are best known—respectively—as an editor and plagiarist and the third-most-accomplished author of his surname; Poe is read largely as a fiction-writer, and Emerson as an essayist. Other than the work of Longfellow and Whittier, and to a lesser extent Holmes, the poems of these seven men, so prized in their day, have not been received as favorably by subsequent generations. And as Walt Whitman would not enter the American canon until several years after Wendell failed the bar exam in 1880 and began teaching English at Harvard—and would, at that point, be celebrated primarily for his

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Id., 6.

⁷² Ibid.

Civil War poems—the limitations of the verse canon of 1880s America were substantial indeed.⁷³

Notably, Emily Dickinson, considered by many America's greatest poet from the second half of the nineteenth century, did not receive publication of her work until four years after her death, in 1890.⁷⁴

In the ten years immediately preceding Wendell's hiring at Harvard, the three most significant American anthologists were themselves poets: "Fireside Poets" Bryant, Whittier, and Emerson. It's not difficult to imagine the conflicts of interest that resulted from these professional intersections, nor the curious editorial elections that governed the anthologies the three men helmed. As Alan Golding notes, "Because their own status was so great, the judgments about the 'best' that Bryant, Emerson, and Whittier made in their anthologies had great influence. And those anthologies kept the canon stable, self-perpetuating. Bryant, Emerson, and Whittier all agree[d] that the six most important poets in America [were] themselves, Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes. They rank[ed] Poe below even minor, now-forgotten figures, and all exclude[d] Whitman and Melville . . ."⁷⁵ What Wendell and his peers therefore faced in the 1880s and 1890s was not only the prospect of teaching exclusively from such anthologies in both their composition and literature courses, but also being limited in the themes upon which they could ask their students to write—as neither these poets nor their anthologies were catholic on that point, either.

Even in 1885, toward the end of Wendell's tenure as primary English 5 instructor at Harvard, the American verse canon remained largely unchanged. A vote conducted by *Critic* in that year placed Walt Whitman as only the twentieth-best American poet, confirming the influence of the Fireside Poets' 1870s anthologies.⁷⁶ Jay Martin observes that Bryant, Emerson, and Whittier

⁷³ Golding, 6.

⁷⁴ This omission was finally remedied with *Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas Wentworth Higginson. See "The Publication Question" (The Emily Dickinson Museum).

⁷⁵ Golding, 16-17.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

“refused to threaten their culture with the new in literature, since Americans were, as they believed, too distracted by the new in life.”⁷⁷ While certain English editors—William Rossetti most notable among them—were willing to acknowledge Whitman’s genius, their volumes were published in Europe and much less read, therefore much less influential, in the States.

In view of the foregoing, it is unsurprising that aspiring writers at Harvard felt some despondence around the time Barrett Wendell began teaching English 5 and overseeing *Harvard Monthly*. As one of the student editors of the *Monthly* once wrote, defending the magazine’s identification with Oxford University specifically and with English literature generally—as compared to, as he wrote, “University of Michigan or Nebraska”—“[artistic] development is all but impossible in *this* country” (emphasis added).⁷⁸ Indeed, the editors of the *Monthly* were sufficiently exhausted by the American literary canon of the mid-1800s that one such editor who would later become notable nationally, George Santayana, told an admirer of Longfellow that “we poets at Harvard never read anything except our own compositions.”⁷⁹

There were exceptions to the cloistering and insular reading habits of the Harvard poets, however. As *Monthly* writer Charles Sempers wrote in 1888, “Walt Whitman is a poet whom we cannot as a people afford to ignore any longer.”⁸⁰ A student who had studied with both Briggs and

⁷⁷ Id., 18.

⁷⁸ Cohen, 489.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Cohen, 489. To be clear, Sempers’ enthusiasm for Whitman appeared to be humanistic rather than Americanist. Initial attempts to bring American Studies into the academy as a discrete sphere of inquiry would not be made until the 1920s, and while Harvard would create a degree program in “American Civilization” in the 1930s, the self-described “movement” to make “American Studies” a formal academic discipline did not begin until after World War II. Dubrow, 304. To date, no study has been made of whether the rise of creative writing as an academic discipline (at least, one practiced outside Iowa City) in the 1960s was linked to an Americanist impulse in the academy generally. Certainly, veterans studying creative writing under the G.I. Bill were often encouraged to write about their experiences fighting for their country overseas, and, as we see elsewhere in this history, early creative writing students were often urged to write about the places in America where they’d been born and raised rather than more abstract topics. See generally Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

Copeland noted that the two men were “citizens of the world. They hate pedantry and love the human appeal. They are humanists.”⁸¹ A student of Wendell and Briggs, Rollo Brown, wrote,

[W]hen someone sits down to explain why in the early years of the twentieth century the younger readers and writers of America began to concern themselves with something less hollow, less conventionally formed than much of the literature conventionally styled ‘New England,’ he cannot leave Briggs and Wendell out of consideration. They trained men to look at the world with their own eyes, and to write directly and honestly about what they saw, without regard for traditional ways of looking at things.⁸²

These tendencies among the young writers at Harvard—to celebrate poets who were “worldly” rather than domestic; to oppose pedantry; and to see the world, not the classroom, as their primary instructional space—would also be evident among the first matriculants at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop.⁸³

Critics of Wendell’s *Harvard Monthly*—many of whom were associated with the magazine’s bitter campus rival, the *Harvard Advocate*—were particularly incensed by the magazine’s embrace of the new in literature. One mid-1880s *Advocate* editor wrote, of the *Monthly*, “[they] accept[] with reluctance all matter which . . . [i]s not imaginative after the latest literary fad.”⁸⁴ Certainly, the editorial ethos of the magazine was unconventional. George Santayana, explaining years later why not just English editors but *Monthly* editors like himself might have valued Whitman more than most American editors, observed that “[such an editor] is looking for what may have arisen in America to express, *not* the polite and conventional American mind, but the spirit and the inarticulate principles

⁸¹ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 53.

⁸² Adams, *A Group of Their Own*, 44.

⁸³ See Chapter 3.

⁸⁴ Cohen, 489.

that animate the Community” (emphasis added).⁸⁵ Santayana, himself a poet, could clearly identify with such an editor.⁸⁶

This emphasis on the idiosyncrasies of community over literary convention was a through-line in the history of Wendell’s *Monthly*. Wendell at one point noted approvingly the extent to which his student-editors were “tinged with precocity.”⁸⁷ Eventually even the editors of *The Harvard Crimson*—once supportive of the *Monthly*—took to calling the work published therein “weird” and “somber.”⁸⁸ Just as it looked like the magazine was going to fold under the pressure of persistent criticism, the outgoing editors elected a successor by the name of George Pierce Baker.

Under Baker, the *Monthly* thrived, regained its on-campus popularity, and, according to many, was at its best when publishing original works of poetry, so much so that when Edward Arlington Robinson arrived at Harvard in 1891, he said of the *Monthly* editors that if he could “succeed in getting in with fellows at that, College life would prove most agreeable.”⁸⁹ Robinson’s enthusiasm for the writing course-enabled literary climate at Harvard—a climate constructed, from the outset, out of a position of canonical and pedagogical dissent—would soon be mirrored in the enthusiasm of other aspiring writers at university campuses across the country.

⁸⁵ Golding, 19.

⁸⁶ Ibid. In this case, William Rosetti, the English anthologist whose anthologies of American verse competed directly with those edited by the Fireside Poets.

⁸⁷ Cohen, 489.

⁸⁸ Id., 490.

⁸⁹ Cohen, 496. Unfortunately, Robinson did not ultimately “get in” with these peers, and left Harvard in disappointment the following year. He would later, influenced by his workshop experiences at Harvard, form a literary group with Marianne Moore, which group was modeled on the academic writing workshops he had earlier participated in. Once Robinson had achieved substantial critical success as a poet, he would return to Harvard and be “received like a lord,” have his poems published in the *Monthly*, and be told by Wendell himself that it was good he had left Harvard when he did, as a number of the early editors of the *Monthly*—fellows Robinson might have worked with—had either quit poetry or, in at least two instance, *not* quit poetry and instead killed themselves.

Chapter 2: Bridge Years: Creative Writing in Transition

The 1890s saw a massive publishing boom, and by 1900 the *New York Times* estimated that there were more than 20,000 professional writers in the United States.⁹⁰ Whereas in 1885, during Wendell's English 5 tenure, there were only four magazines in the United States with a circulation of over 100,000, and their combined circulation was a mere 600,000, in 1905 twenty general magazines had a circulation over 100,000, with a total circulation of 5.5 million.⁹¹ This nearly 1000% increase in the circulation of the nation's top magazines over a twenty-year period meant more work for graduates with strong writing skills. Likewise, the fact that smaller magazines boomed during the same period—1,000 new periodicals were founded between 1885 and 1890, for instance—meant more paying markets for young creative writers.⁹² One reason for the dramatic expansion in American magazine culture in the 1890s was that domestic magazines began following the model first set by American newspapers in the 1830s: a low cost (ten or fifteen cents per magazine edition, rather than the thirty-five that had previously been common) and a publishing culture driven largely by business considerations—for instance, a preference for consumer-driven content and a focus on circulation figures—rather than literary merit.⁹³

⁹⁰ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 71. Given the population of the United States at the time, this figure suggests that one out of every 3,750 citizens was a professional writer at the turn of the twentieth century; for that percentage to hold true today, the nation would need to boast a class of professional writers more than 86,500 strong.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² For instance, as reported by Adams, “*Collier's* offered serial novels, fiction, poetry, and humor writing as well as articles on women's issues, theater, and sports. *McClure's* published Kipling's *Kim* in serial, stories by Willa Cather, Jack London, O' Henry, and Alice Brown, and poems by A.E. Housman and William Butler Yeats. *Century* paid \$50,000 for a serialized life of Lincoln; *McClure's* paid \$25,000 for *Kim*. Literary magazines like the *10 Story Book* and *Wayside Monthly* offered prizes to encourage new writers. *Argosy*. . . featured adventure, mystery, and action stories. . .” Ibid.

⁹³ Schudson, 204. Whereas in the 1870s and 1880s, magazine editors had viewed the book as the proper analogue for the magazine, by the 1890s the model for the form and function of the American magazine had undoubtedly become the newspaper. Ibid.

While, as is still the case today, there was not in the late nineteenth century much paid work requiring fiction-writing and poetry-writing skills, and most of the magazines that might irregularly publish a fiction-writer's output didn't pay a livable wage, Katherine Adams nevertheless notes that "during this time [between 1885 and 1890] there was a dramatic increase in the amount of fiction published in magazines—stories reprinted from anthologies, commissioned from established writers, as well as novels appearing as serials."⁹⁴ More importantly, however, the novelists and poets of the late 1880s and 1890s could with some alacrity find work writing features for magazines or articles for newspapers. Whereas between 1776 and 1840 the number of newspapers in America rose from 37 to 1,403, even this substantial increase in the popularity of newspapers over the course of 65 years was dwarfed, in sheer numbers, by the explosion in the number of newspaper publications in the decade between the mid-1880s and the mid-1890s. During this brief span, the number of U.S. newspapers rose from 4,400 to over 13,000.⁹⁵

One explanation for this sudden and significant increase in the number of newspapers operating in the United States was the creation of the American Newspaper Publishers Association in 1887. The newly formed Association moved quickly to standardize advertising rates and create comprehensive lists of approved advertising agencies. Coupled with Joseph Pulitzer's concurrent popularization of so-called "sensationalistic" journalism through his *New York World*—a paper typified by its focus on crime, scandal, and high society, three topics previously relegated to the American "penny press"—the increasingly lucrative advertising culture associated with the

⁹⁴ Adams, 71.

⁹⁵ Tucher, 391. Owing, perhaps, to the popularization of the internet over the last 20 years, the same number of newspapers are in circulation today as was the case in 1890—despite a national population in 1890 that was roughly one-fifth the current one. Myers, "U.S. Has Same Number of Newspapers Now As in 1890s." Per U.S. Census data, the population of the United States in 1890 was approximately 60 million; by 2000, the national population had swelled to approximately 285 million. "Measuring America," Appendix A (A-1).

newspaper industry led not just to soaring circulations but thousands of new journalistic ventures.⁹⁶ As a result, imaginative writers in the late nineteenth century willing to ply their trade amidst the mundanity of newspaper culture could readily supplement the intermittent paydays they received for their literary art.

Given the role Harvard had played in the encouragement of imaginative writing in academic settings, it may seem odd that, more than a century later, the university still has no graduate creative writing program.⁹⁷ Arguably, the decline of creative writing at Harvard began in 1924, when the university lost Baker, its star creative writing professor and a noted playwright, to its bitter rival, Yale. Given Baker's well-documented belief that creative writing instruction should only be available to graduate students, and the fact that Harvard lost his services less than twenty-four months after University of Iowa Dean Carl Seashore's historic 1922 announcement that that university would begin accepting Master's (M.A.) theses in fiction and poetry, it seems possible that Harvard would have ended up with the first MFA program rather than Iowa had Baker remained on its faculty. As it was, a dispute over theatre space—Baker wanted to add more square footage to Harvard's student theater, while the university did not—ensured the instructor's departure from Cambridge.

While what we now think of as “creative writing” achieved its first major expansion at Harvard in the 1880s and 1890s, it could not be said that success in the academy for the discipline's first principles was an overnight one. In 1890, only seven colleges offered courses like Harvard's English 5 and English 12; though it took a generation, by 1920 nearly 80% of East Coast colleges and universities offered advanced composition courses modeled after Harvard's.⁹⁸ Nor was Harvard's influence upon creative writing as a discipline limited to the pedagogical innovations in

⁹⁶ Schudson, 95.

⁹⁷ While Harvard's 2009 Task Force for the Arts recommended the creation of such a program “in the middle-term,” in fact no action has yet been taken on this front.

⁹⁸ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 55.

advanced composition studies spearheaded by the likes of Hill, Wendell, Briggs, Gardiner, Copeland, and Baker. The students of these six men were responsible for initiating many of the early creative writing courses that appeared on college campuses across America in the first two decades of the twentieth century. By 1893, Robert Herrick, a Wendell pupil, had started an English 5 course at University of Chicago. Similar courses were founded in the 1890s, in several instances by former Harvard students, at nine other elite private colleges and universities: Amherst College, Colgate University, Hamilton College, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, Dartmouth College, Princeton University, Bowdoin College, and Mount Holyoke College.⁹⁹

While the second “boom” in creative writing’s disciplinary history would be, a hundred years hence, almost entirely driven by public universities, the first was largely a private affair.¹⁰⁰ Where the ranks of the most popular graduate creative writing programs are now dominated by large, land-grant public universities with commensurately generous, tuition-waiving teaching assistantship programs, the early creative writing classrooms were hosted largely by undergraduate composition departments in private institutions. It would take many decades for creative writing to thrive as a discipline in its own right; as late as 1975, only three universities in the United States offered an

⁹⁹ Adams, 55.

¹⁰⁰ Nor can this conspicuous distinction be attributed to the lack of public universities in the 1890s. By 1895, the flagship universities of all 48 contiguous U.S. states had already been founded: New Jersey (Rutgers, 1766), Georgia (1785), Vermont (1791), North Carolina (1793), Tennessee (1794), South Carolina (1801), Maryland (1807), New York (SUNY-Potsdam, 1816), Michigan (1817), Virginia (1819), Indiana (1820), Alabama (1831), Delaware (1833), Missouri (1839), Iowa (1847), Mississippi (1848), Wisconsin (1849), Utah (1850), Minnesota (1851), Florida (1853), Pennsylvania (Penn State, 1855), Louisiana (1860), Washington (1861), South Dakota (1862), Massachusetts (1863), Maine (1863), Kansas (1865), Kentucky (1865), New Hampshire (1866), Illinois (1867), West Virginia (1867), California (1869), Nebraska (1869), Ohio (Ohio State, 1870), Arkansas (1871), Nevada (1874), Colorado (1876), Oregon (1878), Connecticut (1881), North Dakota (1883), Texas (1883), Arizona (1885), Wyoming (1886), Idaho (1889), New Mexico (1889), Oklahoma (1890), Rhode Island (1892), and Montana (1893). In addition, at least 60 smaller or non-flagship public institutions had been founded by 1895. While the number of public universities in operation by the mid-1890s was dwarfed by the number of private colleges and universities, and while many of the public universities founded in the nineteenth century were land-grant (or agricultural or technical) universities focused primary on research than the arts, the degree to which creative writing was associated with private institutions in its early decades is nevertheless noteworthy. See “Founding Dates of States, Colleges, and Universities in America By Region.”

undergraduate degree in creative writing, and only two dozen offered even a minor in the subject.¹⁰¹ So while the poetry-writing courses first developed at Harvard and popularized in the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century did indeed spread nationwide as the twentieth century wore on—leading to steady jobs by the 1960s for a few nationally renowned poets, such as Robert Lowell (Harvard University), John Berryman (University of Minnesota), Theodore Roethke (University of Washington-Seattle), and Richard Hugo (University of Montana)—it cannot be said that there was a substantial job market for working poets until programmatic creative writing at the undergraduate level expanded dramatically in the 1990s and 2000s. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s only scattered creative writing courses were available for undergraduates, and virtually none for graduate students, between 1975 and 1994 the number of undergraduate minors in creative writing increased by 1000%, from 24 to 287.¹⁰² By comparison, even during this period of growth for creative writing minors the number of undergraduate *majors* in creative writing increased at only a glacial pace, with just seven new B.A.-granting programs in creative writing being founded between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s.¹⁰³ The real growth in undergraduate creative writing majors—and thus the first sustained, dramatic expansion in the number of undergraduate creative writing courses available at most American universities—would come between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s, when the number of such major programs increasing by 860%.¹⁰⁴ Not coincidentally, this is the same period during which an extensive job market for creative writers without a long-standing national reputation (or, alternately, a Writers' Workshop pedigree) arose.

¹⁰¹ Fenza, "Growth of Creative Writing Programs."

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

While not as sudden or dramatic as the localized expansion, at Harvard, of advanced composition courses with an imaginative writing element, the nationwide expansion of courses explicitly focused on the writing of imaginative poetry and prose was nevertheless notable in the two decades following Wendell's most active years at Harvard. By 1910, there were courses on "versification" at Fordham University, Middlebury College, University of Iowa, and University of Missouri; on the writing of the short story at University of Chicago, University of Michigan, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Wesleyan University; and on playwriting at University of Pennsylvania, Hamilton College, and Harvard.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, by 1910 there were several colleges and universities offering writing-only courses in not just one but multiple genres: for instance, at University of Iowa, University of Illinois, University of Michigan, and University of Chicago.¹⁰⁶ These courses were generally taught by academics with advanced literature degrees who wrote creatively in their off-hours; the era of self-identified "working writers" teaching their prospective successors had not yet properly begun.

Whereas between 10% and 15% of U.S. colleges and universities offered at least one course in "versification," "verse writing," or "poetry writing" in 1910, by 1930 45% of U.S. colleges and universities offered at least one such course.¹⁰⁷ It was during this twenty-year span that use of the term "creative writing" became ubiquitous to describe courses modeled on Harvard's English 12, though it is still difficult to pinpoint the first such usage of the term that would eventually spawn an academic discipline. Nevertheless, while the term "creative writing" was never in use at Harvard in the 1880s and 1890s, the fact that by the 1920s the need for such a shorthand for Harvard-inspired pedagogies was evident says much about the breadth and depth of Harvard's nearly sixty-year period

¹⁰⁵ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 73.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Id., 74.

of influence (1877-1936) on the burgeoning discipline of creative writing—and offers a point of comparison to the influence on the discipline the founding of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop would have in 1936.¹⁰⁸ Whereas Harvard oversaw the expansion of academic-institutional instruction in imaginative writing from a single course to scores of courses at nearly half of all American universities, from the time of University of Iowa Dean Carl Seashore’s 1922 announcement that creative theses would be permitted for the English M.A. to the founding of the second-ever terminal-degree graduate creative writing program—at University of Massachusetts in Amherst, in 1964—was a period of more than forty years.¹⁰⁹

While there is little data charting the growth of individual undergraduate courses in creative writing—that is, those not associated with any degree program—the data available suggest that, as late as 1970, approximately two-thirds of all institutions of higher learning in the United States did not offer even a single course in the subject.¹¹⁰ Moreover, in 1970 only 534 full-time jobs were available teaching creative writing at the college or graduate school level, suggesting that the annual job market for such positions was miniscule: perhaps as few as four or five open positions per year.¹¹¹ As Robert Dana, a student of Robert Lowell’s at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop in the early

¹⁰⁸ While the founding of the Workshop was not in itself an influential inflection of the discipline’s core pedagogies, it was nevertheless—given that the program offered the first graduate degree in the discipline—a historic event for programmatic instruction in creative writing. Still, most of the Workshop’s influence on the discipline has been felt due to its ongoing operations. For instance, between 2002 and 2012 (for fellowships) and 2009 and 2013 (for job placements), more Writers’ Workshop graduates received post-graduation fellowships and full-time university teaching appointments, as a percentage of total program graduates, than any graduate creative writing program in the United States. See Abramson, “2012 Fellowship Placement Survey for Full-Res Programs” and “2014 Job Placement Data.” This is the most recent and most comprehensive data available as to these two measures; aggregate job placement data is not available for university hires in creative writing prior to 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Abramson, “Foundation Dates.”

¹¹⁰ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 98. Data provided by Adams has been cross-indexed with data from the National Center for Education Statistics (<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84>) to produce this estimate.

¹¹¹ This estimate is based on current job market figures. For instance, despite the fact that today there are more than 330 terminal-degree programs, more than 100 M.A. programs, nearly 200 B.A. or BFA programs, and many hundreds of minor programs in creative writing, in 2016 there were only 36 full-time teaching positions open nationally in poetry. See generally, “The Creative Writing Jobs Wiki 2016.” The reason for the lack of hard data on individual creative writing courses prior to 1970 is that the Association of Writers and Writing programs, the discipline’s leading national

1950s, recalls, Lowell's class of thirteen students in 1953—which included such future poetry luminaries as W.D. Snodgrass, Donald Justice, Jane Cooper, Philip Levine, William Dickey, and Henri Coulette—did indeed hope, after graduation, “to find a job somewhere,” but all presumed that any such job would be spent teaching literature, not creative writing.¹¹² “We didn’t,” writes Dana, “like later generations of Workshop students, expect to go out and teach courses in creative writing. And we certainly didn’t expect to be employed at prestigious and powerful universities [as] our degree field was highly suspect.”¹¹³

Katherine Adams, author of the 1993 disciplinary history *A History of Professional Writing instruction in American Colleges: Years of Acceptance, Growth, and Doubt*, observes that, because the earliest writing workshops were part of “general advanced composition courses” with no standardized curriculum, professors at the colleges and universities listed above never agreed—nor were they administratively obliged to agree—on how such courses should be taught. Therefore, Harvard’s English 5 and English 12 models, while widely influential, were never firmly institutionalized.

Adams’ contention emphasizes the contingent space occupied by Harvard-inspired pedagogies between their peak years in Cambridge and the founding of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop in 1936. Still, from the curricula of Hill, Wendell, Briggs, Gardiner, Copeland, and Baker we can readily trace the development of the writing workshop to the state it inhabited in 1921, just a few months before University of Iowa would take the first tentative steps towards developing a graduate program in the discipline.

The primary features of Harvard—and Harvard-inspired—advanced composition workshops, as of the beginning of the 1920s, were these: course enrollment was commonly thirty;

organization, did not begin keeping records of the discipline’s growth until the mid-1970s—and then only as to the development of new programs, rather than the availability of individual courses.

¹¹² Dana, 147-148.

¹¹³ Id., 148.

textbook use was virtually unheard of; three hours a week were spent in all-class critiquing sessions, which sessions comprised critiques of student-written analyses of published literature as well as critiques of students' own creative work; critiques were expected to be hand-written, and when delivered to the class were delivered anonymously; students at times developed their own topics, and at times were assigned them; students were sometimes asked to emulate the generic forms being studied, and sometimes asked to respond to them in essay form; premium value was placed on experimentation in all compositional efforts; students were encouraged to work in multiple genres; achievement of individuality in written expression, rather than reliance on a "school voice," was specifically prized; course readings were developed with an eye toward introducing students to "voices, subjects, genres, and audiences"¹¹⁴ to which they had not previously been exposed; students were encouraged to "let their content shape their organization and style"¹¹⁵; and the courses' regular, one-on-one student-faculty conferences were both more popular among students and faculty—and considered more instructive—than any element of the in-class pedagogy.

Much of the above would have sounded familiar to any poet or writer who matriculated at the Iowa Writers' Workshop in the late 1930s. Even today, certain of the writing philosophies evident at Harvard between the 1880s and the 1920s are active in graduate poetics and creative writing programs. Yet as a discrete pedagogy, Harvard's advanced composition studies model has now been abandoned, with composition and creative writing having developed, as disciplines, along dramatically different tracks over the last century.

¹¹⁴ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 37.

¹¹⁵ Id., 40. We hear, in this admonition, a precursor to poet Robert Creeley's now-famous pronouncement that "form is never more than an extension of content," a claim prominently repeated in—and therefore widely disseminated by—poet Charles Olson's influential 1950 essay on poetics, "Projectivism."

The Cultural Implications of Disciplinary Expansion

One important trend in the early years of creative writing was its relative presence and popularity at women's colleges as compared to men's. Indeed, creative writing instruction was one of the few areas in academia in which women's colleges were given preferential treatment as compared to their male-only peers. In the early 1900s, a higher percentage of women's colleges offered creative writing workshops than men's colleges.¹¹⁶ Katherine Adams provides one particularly stark example of the preferential treatment granted women creative writers versus male peers in one of the nation's more culturally conservative regions: whereas Newcomb College in New Orleans, a women's college, began offering creative writing courses in 1908, its affiliated men's university, Tulane, took thirty-one more years to offer its first creative writing course.¹¹⁷

As discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, creative writing's unique relationship with female authorship manifests differently—yet still dramatically—in the present day. Women now apply to MFA programs at a higher rate than men, are admitted at a higher rate, get more post-MFA fellowships than men, and, once on the post-MFA job market, perform better than men in getting hired for full-time positions.¹¹⁸ Burgeoning research suggests that women also publish more regularly than men in small to midsize literary magazines. It is only at the highest echelons of creative writing—critical review by the largest media outlets, and critical acknowledgment by the most prestigious prize committees—that a gender gap disfavoring women is still observable.¹¹⁹ In the particular availability and popularity of poetry- and fiction-writing courses at women's colleges and universities in the early twentieth century one finds the germination of these later phenomena.

¹¹⁶ See, generally, Adams, *A Group of Their Own*.

¹¹⁷ Adams, *A Group of Their Own*, 51.

¹¹⁸ Abramson, "The Widening Gender Gap in American Poetry."

¹¹⁹ Ibid. This last category of gender disparity has been the focus of much hard-data research by VIDA over the past few years. See, generally, www.vidaweb.com.

Adams' analysis of creative writing course offerings and enrollments establishes, too, that creative writing may have begun to lose its vocational component sometime in the late 1910s and 1920s. Not only did America's once-robust magazine culture begin its decline during these years, making professional employment as a writer increasingly a distant ambition, but discrepancies such as those at Newcomb College would seem to suggest—given the cultural mores of the early twentieth century—that creative writing was deemphasized among male student populations due to its lack of vocational utility, and was consequently emphasized among the female student population for, tellingly, the same reason.

As undergraduate writing workshops gradually spread in the early twentieth century, they found homes not only in the nation's top private colleges but in public universities as well. Arguably, University of Nebraska in Lincoln played as significant a role in the development of creative writing in the United States during the discipline's "bridge years" as did University of Iowa, and an even more critical role in helping creative writing make the leap from the Ivy League to the land-grant public universities of the Midwest. The educational and professional career of Edwin Ford Piper offers a particularly vivid exemplar of Nebraska's role as an institutional bridge between Harvard and Iowa. Piper, unofficially the first director of the Writers' Workshop, received his A.B. at University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1897, and his M.A. in English from Nebraska in 1900. From 1899 to 1903, he was an Instructor in English at Nebraska; he took several writing courses at Harvard between 1903 and 1905, but received no degree; and he then returned to Nebraska to teach at the University for two more years. In 1907, he became an Instructor in English at University of Iowa, where he remained for the rest of his career. While studying at Nebraska between 1893 and 1900, Piper took advanced composition courses with Clarke Fisher Ansley, who had himself graduated from Nebraska in 1890 (having helped launch the first literary magazine there, *Kiote*) and who, along with Herbert Bates—a writer who had graduated from Harvard in 1890—directed the

writing program in Lincoln. By the early 1910s, Ansley, like Piper, had moved on to University of Iowa, where he was a Dean by 1913.¹²⁰

Immediately upon his arrival in Iowa, Piper, himself a poet as well as a fiction-writer—his *Barbed Wire and Other Poems* would be published in 1917—began teaching a course entitled “Poetics,” which, like the courses he had taken at Harvard, required that students produce original imaginative work and have it regularly critiqued not just in classroom discussions but in one-on-one meetings with Piper himself. Piper’s “Poetics” course, along with an “Advanced Writing” course taught by Ansley beginning in 1907, were the course models most influential to Wilbur Schramm when he began building the “Iowa Writers’ Workshop” as a formal degree-granting program in 1935.¹²¹

In 1935, Schramm was primarily interested in the discipline then known as “communication studies”—not the one by then commonly termed “creative writing.” In fact, by all accounts Schramm only attended University of Iowa because it was cheaper than Harvard and had a nationally-renowned speech clinic, a feature of interest to Schramm due to his habitual stammering. Iowa’s place in the history of creative writing was in this respect as much a product of providence as design; had Schramm not come to Iowa to pursue communication studies and speech therapy in the 1930s, University of Iowa Dean Carl Seashore’s 1922 edict—that a fiction or poetry thesis would suffice for a Master’s in English Literature at the university—might have continued to be the order of the day indefinitely. In the event, it nevertheless took fourteen years for this edict to produce a fully programmatic, degree-granting course of creative writing instruction in Iowa City.

¹²⁰ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 87. According to Charlton Laird, “Ansley came from Nebraska, where he had associated with Louise Pound, Willa Cather, and other critical and creative people, including Edwin Ford Piper, whom he brought to Iowa. He built a department devoted to good teaching and to critical and creative work. At Nebraska Ansley had helped launch the new literary magazine, *Kiote*, and at Iowa he was involved in floating *The Midland*, later edited by John T. Frederick. I have been in his summer home near Glennie, Michigan; it was stuffed with evidence of one who knew writers and loved writing.” Laird, 17.

¹²¹ Dana, 226.

Piper’s fiction-writing workshops at University of Iowa are worth noting not only because they were among the earliest workshops to exclusively feature original fiction by course participants, but also for their format. Piper took no attendance in his advanced writing classes, and all meetings were in his basement office, not a classroom.¹²² Whereas Harvard’s English 5 and English 12 workshops had offered at least an intermittent academic air, Piper’s Midwestern workshops hardly seemed like academic endeavors at all. This evolution—from a highly flexible yet still identifiably academic program at Harvard to a far more impromptu, almost bohemian endeavor at Iowa—would map the difference, too, between the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and the individual creative writing courses in the Midwest, both at University of Nebraska-Lincoln and elsewhere, that had preceded it.

Verse-making courses were an even older tradition at University of Iowa than were story-writing workshops. The first verse-making course in Iowa City—at which, as with Piper’s course, no attendance was taken—was taught in 1897 by George Cram Cook.¹²³ For the purposes of identifying a through-line from creative writing at Harvard to creative writing at Iowa, Cook is, like Piper, the pivotal figure. A former student of Barrett Wendell, Cook, like his mentor, was said to have a “hearty instinct against authority” and was by no means a prototypical academic: he went off to fight the Spaniards with the Iowa Volunteer Infantry just a year after he began teaching poetry in Iowa City; thereafter traveled around Mexico accruing stories and information for his novels; and was a truck farmer in Iowa and a journalist in Chicago (writing for the *Chicago Evening Post*) before moving to Provincetown—with his wife, acclaimed playwright Susan Glaspell—to found the Provincetown Players. His founding of a theater troupe in Provincetown was fortunate, as it allowed him to freely stage his own plays, one of which had been rejected by the New York City-based Washington

¹²² Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 88. It’s worth noting that Piper taught the most popular and influential, but not the first, course in story-writing at Iowa. That class was taught in 1900—while Piper was still in Lincoln—by an unknown instructor.

¹²³ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 86.

Square Players as “too radical.”¹²⁴ Given the imagination and colorfulness of Cook, and the invitingly nonacademic writing atmosphere fostered by Piper, it is perhaps no surprise that, inspired by these two men, Wilbur Schramm would seek to give creative writing a more permanent place on the Iowa campus in 1936.

And yet the most influential student of Barrett Wendell’s “educational experiment” at Harvard—so popular that, despite requiring daily writing exercises of its students, it was routinely over-enrolled—may well have been William Hughes Mearns, a poet and author of *Creative Youth* (1925) and *Creative Power* (1929).¹²⁵ Inspired by John Dewey’s progressive vision for American education, which favored individualistic self-expression over group memorization exercises, Mearns put forth a philosophy for instruction in writing that is held by many to have finally popularized the term “creative writing.”¹²⁶ Yet the research and writing of Mearns and Dewey, while critical to the popularization and expansion of certain writing pedagogies at elementary and secondary schools across America, was not of much interest to the founders and first faculty members of the Writers’ Workshop in Iowa City—as these men were animated by a different philosophy altogether.

¹²⁴ Id., 87.

¹²⁵ Fenza, “Creative Writing and Its Discontents.”

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 3: The Iowa Writers' Workshop¹²⁷

As late as 1964, there was still but one terminal-degree graduate creative writing program in the United States or Canada: the Iowa Writers' Workshop, founded by Paul Engle in 1942.¹²⁸ The Workshop was designed to be an institutional adjunct to the New Humanism, an approach to higher education then popular at the university. First developed in 1910, the New Humanism, sometimes styled "literary humanism," posited free will as a demonstrably higher existential function than either theological or scientific determinism.¹²⁹ Literary humanists therefore opposed mechanistic materialism, romanticism, and materialistic naturalism, as each, in their view, bred irresponsibility in men.¹³⁰ That creative writing workshops at University of Iowa were "closely aligned with an influential intellectual movement centered in the Iowa English Department" gave the University ample grounds to distinguish its creative writing pedagogy from the composition studies pedagogies that had been developed at Harvard in the late nineteenth century.¹³¹ Moreover, as then-president of University of Iowa Mary Sue Coleman would write in 1998, unlike Harvard, as a public university Iowa could "go out on a limb in establishing the writer's workshop to fill an unmet need"—given, by comparison to Harvard at least, its differential relation with national renown. While the

¹²⁷ This chapter focuses exclusively on the very early years of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. For a more robust discussion of the Workshop's evolution between the 1950s and the present day, see such admirably thorough treatises as Steve Wilbur's *The Iowa Writers' Workshop* (1980), Tom Grimes' *The Workshop* (1999), and Robert Dana's *A Community of Writers* (1999).

¹²⁸ Abramson, "Foundation Dates." The foundation date for the graduate creative writing program in Iowa City is variously given, by University of Iowa, as 1936 and 1942. The discrepancy is understandable; in 1936, the University began non-programmatically offering an MFA for graduate work meeting the then-extant university requirements for completion of a Master's degree, while in 1942 the "Iowa Writers' Workshop" was officially born as a discrete, MFA-granting degree program. As noted *infra* in this chapter, between 1932 and 1936 the University offered a creative writing MA; for this reason, the founding of the school's "graduate program in creative writing" is sometimes erroneously dated at 1932.

¹²⁹ Mittapalli, 10.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* Romanticism, it was thought, elevated a man above his society; naturalism, mechanical or material, debased men to the level of (alternately) machines or animals.

¹³¹ Dana, 13.

reactionary quality of the literary humanists' philosophy would in short order encourage significant opposition both within and without the academy—even some of its earliest adherents finally repudiated it—what it produced in Iowa City was not what anyone would have anticipated.

When seminal New Humanist and University of Iowa professor Norman Foerster convinced the university's administration to permit a creative dissertation in fulfillment of the English department's doctorate in English Literature, it not only initiated the first formal graduate creative writing program in higher education—albeit one whose master's degree study was largely in the conventional academic mode, and led to an M.A. in English rather than an arts degree—it also represented a significant achievement for literary humanism.¹³² If the men at Harvard were writing poems, plays, and stories in advanced composition courses whose instructors were enthusiastic first adopters of the new in civic thought and technology, the men and women of Iowa's new program would favor that form of quiet self-contemplation that provided “an antidote to twentieth century industrialization.”¹³³

The resulting graduate program was not, however, the staid parlor its philosophical origins might have proposed. It was not, as Foerster hastened to make clear, a “vocational school for authors and critics,” though it did contain many of the programmatic elements we now associate with an academic pedigree in creative writing: most notably, a graduate degree granted on the basis of a thesis comprising creative writing and, in addition to writing workshops, completion of seminars for writers on the topics of craft and form.¹³⁴ By 1942, Foerster's graduate program would

¹³² Grimes, 20.

¹³³ Ibid. It is here that we find an intersection, albeit a somewhat attenuated one, with the New Critical agrarians. While most of the New Critics rejected the insertion of creative writing (qua discipline) into programmatic English instruction—as discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, *infra*—a small number of Southern agrarians within the movement, for instance John Crowe Ransom, intermittently saw its merits on the grounds of its implicitly ruralist, anti-industrial bent—at least as the discipline would manifest in Iowa City and certain other non-coastal university enclaves, such as Missoula (see also Chapter 6).

¹³⁴ Fenza, “Creative Writing and Its Discontents.”

formally be titled the “Iowa Writers’ Workshop,” with its first official director, Paul Engle, overseeing the first awarding of MFA degrees in the discipline of creative writing in 1944. In the words of Workshop icon and professor Frank Conroy, the program that developed in Iowa City in the 1940s and thereafter was, much like the Parisian literary salons Conroy had longed to join in the 1950s, “a place to read, write, and talk, a place to test ideas and to experiment. A literary community of some sophistication.”¹³⁵

Notably absent from Conroy’s itemization of Workshop privileges and ambitions was either scholarly textual analysis or the development of a literary lexicon as was then *en vogue* among the New Critics. Indeed, despite the institutionalization of the New Critics’ pseudo-scientific classification system for literary works at the time of the Workshop’s founding—a compendium of specialized terms and phrases like “the intentional fallacy,” “the affective fallacy,” “the heresy of paraphrase,” “organic unity,” and “ambiguity”¹³⁶—the graduate creative writing program in Iowa City would not, finally, be a proving ground for such investigations. It would, instead, emerge as a democratic society of literati whose students’ individual ambitions, and not a critical lexicon imposed from without, were its governing first principle. This model would be readily distinguishable not only from the one in place at Harvard and its immediate successors—such as Nebraska and University of Chicago—but also from those of the hundreds of graduate creative writing programs founded between 1964 and 2014, few of which wished for the level of detachment from conventional literary study that was evident in both the founders of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and their successors. Iowa would differ from the many programs that followed it, too, in having been populated, in its early years, in substantial part by former soldiers studying under the G.I. Bill; the particular relationship Iowa developed with veterans seeking to tell their war stories, or else to

¹³⁵ Grimes, xi.

¹³⁶ See, e.g., Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930).

describe with particularity the home-front they'd missed so desperately while in combat, did much to solidify the Workshop's reputation as a place at which descriptive narration, whether in verse or in fiction, was especially prized.

In view of the above, the founding of the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1942, while in its own way historic, was not per se the influential event it is often held to be in the history of creative writing. The notion of wholly divorcing creative writing from scholarship was largely an invention of the "studio-only" writing instruction that began at the Workshop in 1942, but was not much emulated by the graduate creative writing programs to follow—many of which retained significant academic prerequisites in their core curricula. Likewise, the eventual decision of the Workshop to segregate itself from the university's English Department both administratively and as to its physical plant would not thereafter be adopted by many other colleges or universities. While the rise of the creative writing program in America would often lead to the segregation of creative writers from their scholarly peers in university English departments, such segregation has since 1942 most commonly been reflected in pedagogy and curriculum rather than administrative services and physical plant. In postwar America, as discussed in more detail in the following chapter, most English departments would continue to carefully guard their bureaucratic control over the personnel and curricula of their creative writing courses.

Yet the program in Iowa City was distinct from its predecessors for other reasons as well. From the start, the Workshop's curriculum represented a break from the "advanced composition" roots of graduate creative writing courses, in large part because of the degree it conferred: a "fine arts" degree. This radical divergence from the history of imaginative writing instruction in the academy may in part explain why it took more than a quarter-century after the founding of the Workshop for any other American college or university to offer the creative writing Master of Fine Arts degree.

Another innovation native to the “Iowa Model” was its approach to admissions. As Workshop student James B. Hall has written of the admissions process used by Engle in the 1940s, “admission to the program was informal: a manuscript or two, a publication, a telephone call, G.I. papers, and any past transcripts might well come along later.”¹³⁷ In Hall’s case, he merely telephoned Engle, mentioned a recent published story and the recommendation of a friend of Engle’s from Miami University of Ohio, and the famously charitable Engle replied, “Sounds interesting. Why don’t you just come on out [to Iowa]?”¹³⁸ Stories like these abound; James Tate and Donald Hall were both admitted to the Workshop just minutes after their arrival, unannounced, in Iowa City, though the latter had to sit through a brief bowling tournament—in which he was invited to participate—before receiving the good news.¹³⁹ What these and other accounts emphasize is the limited degree of formalization in the academic-institutional development of creative writing at Iowa. For decades admission to the Workshop was, in many instances, subject only to a recommendation from a past associate of a Workshop faculty member or else the appearance of a poet in Iowa City and his or her subsequent production of a reasonably promising manuscript.

Historians associated with University of Iowa have long been adamant, though the claim is finally unprovable, that the University was the first to advertise itself using the term “creative writing.”¹⁴⁰ This contention may owe as much to the fact that Iowa’s creative writing community has been more prolific in recording its history than have others involved in the development of creative writing as it does to a disinterested historical record.

¹³⁷ Dana, 14.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Grimes, 19. In Cook’s 1897 (or 1896, according to University of Iowa) verse-making course. There is rather more evidence that the course was called “verse-making,” however, than anything using the phrase “creative writing” as an identifier.

From Steve Wilburs' *The Iowa Writers' Workshop* to Tom Grimes' *The Workshop*, from Robert Dana's *A Community of Writers* to numerous memoirs written by the Workshop's most illustrious graduates, no graduate creative writing program has written or published more words about itself than the Writers' Workshop. Many of these texts tend to minimize the pedagogical innovations of other universities. Grimes' nearly eight hundred-page tome appears contains but one reference to Harvard: "Harvard did make a minor move in the direction of accepting creative writing. Wendell Barrett [sic] proposed it as a way to enrich the study of literature. But by taking the risk first and continuing to capitalize on it . . . Iowa's creative writing program became the model for university-sponsored workshops at public and private universities all over the country."¹⁴¹ While this boast misconstrues the nature and trajectory of Wendell's teaching career, more importantly its classification of the Workshop as both a standalone pioneer and a working model for future institutions appears to be—at least in substantial part—ahistorical.

Despite its idiosyncrasies, in several respects writing instruction at Iowa followed a model similar to that used, albeit less programmatically, at Harvard in the 1880s. Instructors at both universities evinced little interest in approaching writing either as a form of self-expression or a form of therapy, but rather as a craft whose core skill-sets could be guided if not directly instilled. As the novelist Philip Roth, a Workshop instructor in the early 1960s, once famously said, "A lot of people come [to the Workshop] for self-expression or therapy. We try to put a stop to that."¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Grimes, 19-20 (internal citations omitted).

¹⁴² Id., 4. To a degree, this attitude may be contrasted to that of the Confessionalist poet Robert Lowell, who taught at the Workshop in the early 1950s. In their memorializations of the Workshop, students of Lowell recall his brief stint in Iowa City as an unhappy one for the poet. Philip Levine has written that Lowell seemed bored in class, while Robert Dana notes that he played favorites, was obsessed with revision, and, somewhat out of step for the times, encouraged all of his students to write in form. More notably, there was little evidence that Lowell's opposition to writing as therapy was matched with the degree of scholarly concentration one might have expected from his New Critical roots; as Dana notes, quoting a classmate, "Lowell praised what he could in our poems and diffidently suggested we consult other poets' works, to see how it was done this or that way. He seldom suggested any specific revisions . . . [his] classroom demeanor was . . . marked by irony, offhandedness, and occasionally, dogmatism distilled to arrogance." Dana, 150-152. While the presence of a "Confessional" poet like Lowell on the faculty at Iowa certainly drew attention for the University and, indeed, may have played a role—especially given the later work of his student, W.D. Snodgrass—in

Likewise, as both were directly informed by a composition-oriented pedagogy, Harvard's English 5 and English 12 curricula were distinctly craft-oriented. In the writing workshops of both Harvard and Iowa, "close reading"—a term not formally introduced to academia until F.R. Leavis did so in the 1930s—may have been the order of the day, but not in a way Leavis or his American successors in the New Criticism would have identified as such.¹⁴³ Creative writing students at Harvard and Iowa may have carefully analyzed assigned and peer-authored texts as a matter of both curriculum and habit, but they had no training in the sort of close reading strategies that would later be developed by Leavis and the New Critics. Nor did their workshopping practices encourage them to hew closely to Leavis' subsequent prescription that "the student must be equipped against the snares of technique."¹⁴⁴ In fact, quite the opposite was true: at both schools, technique was almost the sole focus of instruction. While both New Critical close readings and workshop critiques aimed to remove authorial intent from the analytic equation, the latter, at both Iowa and Harvard, did so only in gesture—as the writing workshops at both institutions put writers in such close proximity with one another that the notion of ignoring the identity, history, and ambitions of one's peers was necessarily suppositional. More importantly, neither the pedagogy employed at Harvard in the last years of the nineteenth century, nor the pedagogy employed at Iowa in the middle decades of the twentieth century, would much resemble either the more academically oriented—or, in other

associating Iowa with a certain strand of Confessionalism, nothing in the available histories suggests Lowell was particularly inclined to or particularly successful at making a strong mark on his young charges. This may in part be due to the fact that, in 1953, Lowell was still very early on in his teaching career; also, as noted, the poet was not very fond of living in Iowa.

¹⁴³ Our focus here remains on programmatic creative writing instruction; university students of the time may well have encountered New Critical reading technologies in other courses and venues either on- or off-campus.

¹⁴⁴ Leavis, Appx. II.

instances, the more experimental—writing instruction models that would flourish at other colleges and universities in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ These other models are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Alternative Models of Writing Instruction

Black Mountain College was founded 1933 in North Carolina, and for twenty-four years would offer its students a non-selective, grade-free, non-degree-granting art-school model of instruction for aspiring artists who desired, too, a progressive liberal arts education.¹⁴⁶ While certain cultural elements of the curriculum at Black Mountain were unfortunate byproducts of their historical environment—at least one course, the poet Charles Olson’s, separated men from women—others were revolutionary, inasmuch as the sort of interdisciplinary arts curriculum used at Black Mountain is reflected in a number of graduate creative writing programs still in operation today.¹⁴⁷

The strain of creative writing instruction initiated at Black Mountain College would find, in the 1990s and in this century, fertile soil in two corners of the discipline: the low-residency model and the art-school model. While today there are approximately three full-residency terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs to every one such program using the low-residency model, since 2000 nearly half of the new MFA programs in the United States and abroad (see Appendix A) have adopted the low-residency model, suggesting a resurgence in the sort of non-administrative artist communities Black Mountain’s open-ended curriculum permitted.¹⁴⁸ While the emphasis at Black Mountain was on the development of an intimate, self-sustaining community, rather than, as with the low-residency MFA program, a far-flung and long-distance one, low-residency programs’ focus on highly tailored mentoring relationships, students’ development of an idiosyncratic daily writing

¹⁴⁶ While grades were not awarded, the College did have the ability to produce transcripts for students. See “Black Mountain College.”

¹⁴⁷ Davidson, 36-37. While there is no evidence to suggest that professors other than Olson physically separated male students from their female counterparts, Michael Davidson’s *Gays Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics* details a pervasively homosocial atmosphere at the College.

¹⁴⁸ Abramson, “Foundation Dates.”

practice, and radical curricular flexibility call to mind at least the spirit of the community in North Carolina—one notable for its simultaneous celebration of personalized social interactions and democratized artistry. At Black Mountain, as in today’s low-residency programs, the ability of an educator to mentor was prized more than the ability to lecture; meanwhile, a willingness to be exposed to and experiment with many different genres of art was especially valued in both current and prospective students.¹⁴⁹

In certain respects, however, the Black Mountain model must be seen as fundamentally at odds with the realities of programmatic creative writing instruction—if not its ambitions. Students at the College, much like students at other colleges and universities in the 1930s and 1940s, received much of their education through extracurricular events such as exhibits, concerts, plays, and visiting lectures; and yet Black Mountain graduates seem unusually prone to describe their interactions with the arts as seamlessly integrated with the rest of their studies. Harold Raymond (Class of ‘42) recalls that there was “considerable contact with artwork through the general atmosphere of the college”; Robert Bliss (‘42) notes that “the arts were integrated [into] and a natural element” of the College’s academics; Renate Benfey Williams (‘43) tellingly observes that the arts were so integrated into the school’s curriculum that, perhaps counter-intuitively, Black Mountain “seemed. . .in no way at art school.”¹⁵⁰ While this is clearly the sort of experience low-residency programs aim to offer students during their twice-a-year on-campus residencies, full-residency MFA programs at colleges and universities without an explicit arts focus struggle to reproduce a learning environment as fully

¹⁴⁹ Sunley, “The Artistic Process As a Major Goal.” As noted by Black Mountain College graduate Will Hamlin (class of ‘43), “Black Mountain helped students learn through asking them to read, discuss and write about what they had read; and through helping them in what [Professor] Josef Albers called ‘a making and a doing’ in the art studios, in the print shop, on the farm, and in the designing process and construction of needed buildings. . .Black Mountain’s major experiment, firmly based in progressive education theory, had to do with making learning active: ‘Learning by doing’ whenever possible.” It’s worth noting that this latter mantra—“learning by doing”—has necessarily been central to the discipline of creative writing from its earliest inception. See Sunley, “Brief Biographies of Contributors.”

¹⁵⁰ Sunley, “The Arts Were Diffused Throughout the Education, Not Segregated into Separate Courses Entirely, Influencing Also Those Who Did Not Take Specific Courses” and “Brief Biographies of Contributors.”

integrated as the one described by Raymond, Bliss, and Williams. Just so, while approximately half of the nation’s graduate creative writing students receive teaching assistantships as part of their financial aid—thus beginning, upon matriculation, a form of employment that knits them into the fabric of an English department’s intellectual life—the manual-labor work details that helped sustain the physical plant of Black Mountain College, and were a mandatory element of the curriculum, offered students a different form of investment in and association with their alma mater than does the conventional teaching post.¹⁵¹

Today, the majority of full-residency MFA programs feature an academic or “studio-academic” curriculum—meaning that studio and academic credit prerequisites are either divided equally or divided with preference to academic credits—though a number of studio-only graduate creative writing programs still operate at art schools around the United States, and these do employ a model similar to that seen at Black Mountain College.¹⁵² The terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs at California College of the Arts, California Institute of the Arts, Columbia College Chicago, Otis College of Art & Design (CA), Savannah College of Art & Design (GA), the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the School of the Visual Arts (NY) all follow the art-school model of creative writing instruction, one which encourages interdisciplinarity and deemphasizes letter grades and literature courses. Among non-art-school MFA programs, only the Iowa Writers’ Workshop has adopted a significant number of art-school administrative indicators—or negative indicators—such as optional class attendance, the abolition of letter grades, and the freedom to take a substantial portion of one’s credits as independent studies. Still, the Writers’ Workshop retains

¹⁵¹ Abramson, “2014 Funding Survey.”

¹⁵² For more information on the “studio” and “academic” models of creative writing instruction, see Chapter 6 and Appendix C.

some markers of the departmentalized rigidity many associate with academia, with students in the program's fiction and poetry "tracks" forbidden from taking workshops in the other genre.

While the 1940s and 1950s saw the heyday of Black Mountain College, and a gradual expansion, nationwide, in the number of non-programmatic creative writing courses available to undergraduates, at the graduate-school level creative writing languished.¹⁵³ No new terminal-degree creative writing programs were created, and few undergraduate programs.¹⁵⁴ Tentative steps in a direction away from the Iowa model were taken, though most of these proved, in time, to be abortive investigations. During the war years and their immediate aftermath, many creative writers in the academy still believed their courses should act as vocational preparation, an ambition that may have seemed feasible for the small spate of M.A. programs that arose in the 1940s—such as those instituted at Johns Hopkins in 1946¹⁵⁵, University of Denver in 1947¹⁵⁶, and Cornell University,

¹⁵³ As noted supra, this gradual increase in the number of undergraduate courses in creative writing was not matched, at least in the 1940s and 1950s, by the creation of new undergraduate majors or minors in the discipline. Programmatic creative writing at the undergraduate level would not be popularized until the 1980s.

¹⁵⁴ Abramson, "Foundation Dates"; see also "2012 Annual Report."

¹⁵⁵ Per the University's *Records of the Department of the Writing Seminars*, "The Department of the Writing Seminars began as the Department of Writing, Speech and Drama in the fall of 1946, when President Isaiah Bowman asked Elliott Coleman, who was teaching composition and creative writing courses, to head the new department. As it evolved, the department offered the opportunity to obtain a liberal arts education, read contemporary literature and engage in creative writing. The official terminal degree was the one year Master of Arts; however, there existed an interdepartmental Ph.D. program in literary aesthetics for those writers with, as John Barth put it, 'a scholarly string to their bow.' Elliott Coleman broadened the scope of literary studies at Hopkins to include contemporary literature and sought to minimize emphasis on those areas of writing with money-making potential. This was an almost revolutionary idea; with the exception of the writing program at University of Iowa, the Writing, Speech and Drama Department at Hopkins was unique. The notion of having writers study in an academic program was without precedent..." Limbrick, 1.

¹⁵⁶ See generally, Nelson, *The Imprint of Alan Swallow*. The program in Denver began as a summer writing course. When it became a degree program, it maintained an equal commitment to critical and creative work; its founder, Alan Swallow, himself an inveterate poet, appears to have spent as much time teaching "contemporary literature, Shakespeare, [and] the early English Romantic poets" as creative writing, and his own literary work was, for many years, almost exclusively scholarly. Nelson, 98-99. According to the current program website, at its founding "the program was traditional in its tastes. The early faculty—including Swallow, National Book Award-winning novelist John Williams, and prolific writer/translator Burton Raffel—had deep roots in New Criticism and applied the intellectual tools they had acquired from such figures as Robert Penn Warren and Yvor Winters in creating a serious literary environment . . ." University of Denver, "History of the Creative Writing Program."

Indiana University, and University of Florida in 1948.¹⁵⁷ These degrees nominally acted as preparation for doctoral study in English Literature and thus, too, a career in teaching.¹⁵⁸ The creative writing M.A. programs of the mid-twentieth century offered few or no teaching assistantships, emphasized scholarly literary study as integral to the study of writing, and often required hybrid critical-creative theses from their students. Yet while such non-terminal M.A. programs in creative writing grew in popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, their heyday lasted only from 1975 to 1984, when sixty-seven such programs were founded. After 1984, the pace of program creation began to decrease markedly: forty creative writing M.A. programs were founded between 1984 and 1994; only fifteen from 1994 to 2004; and, from 2004 to 2014, the net change in the roster of such programs in the United States was minus-ten.

From the outset, the structure and pedagogy of creative writing M.A. programs differed substantially from what Foerster, Schramm, and the other men who founded the Writers' Workshop had had in mind. At Indiana University and University of Florida, graduate students were given the opportunity to study novels and poetry in a manner the poet-scholar New Critics, noted creative writing opponent Allen Tate among them, would have found not entirely unacceptable.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the first of these two programs was founded by Peter Taylor, “who was associated . . . with the New Critics.”¹⁶⁰ At Indiana University, the creative writing M.A. was “merely a modified M.A. in

¹⁵⁷ It is certain that the program at Johns Hopkins self-identified, at its founding, as a degree in “Writing”; as for the others listed here, all available materials identify these early degree-granting programs as being “creative writing programs,” but it is unclear whether this is merely an anachronistic usage of the phrase or the actual designation that was employed by these institutions at the time.

¹⁵⁸ By way of contrast, the creative writing Master of Fine Arts degree would not be officially declared a “terminal degree” for the purposes of university hiring until forty-three years after the founding of the Workshop, when in 1979 the recently established Association of Writers and Writing Programs published its “Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing.” AWP, “Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing.”

¹⁵⁹ Abramson, “Foundation Dates.”

¹⁶⁰ Bryant, 3.

literature,” with the opportunity to take only two creative writing workshops for credit.¹⁶¹ Indeed, while it is often credited as one of the first graduate creative writing programs, the program initiated at Indiana in the 1940s was merely a “concentration in Creative Writing” within the university’s existing M.A. in English program.¹⁶² At Indiana, much like in Allen Tate’s undergraduate courses at Princeton, taking a concentration in “creative writing”—a term Tate found so odious he’d attempted to popularize its predecessor, “imaginative writing,” as a permanent replacement in 1939—still meant spending most of one’s coursework reading the Western Canon and discussing it in groups.¹⁶³ While students at Indiana had the option of writing a creative thesis with a critical introduction, Tate’s students never handed in creative work. In authoring “What Is Creative Writing?,” a jeremiad against the discipline, Tate hoped, as did many of his New Critic colleagues, to keep it that way. While today’s M.A. programs are quite different from their predecessors of a half-century ago—in all but their terminality and the frequency with which they are fully funded for their matriculants, they are almost indistinguishable from MFA programs—the declining popularity of such programs suggests that Tate’s activism was successful in at least this much: MA programs have retained their place in graduate English study, while largely fading from influence in the sphere of creative writing.

In 1964, at a time when there was but one creative writing MFA program and a handful of creative writing M.A. programs, Tate, along with fellow New Critics and opponents of creative writing, had some reason to believe that the still-burgeoning discipline of creative writing might yet be stopped in its tracks—though there’s no evidence that any were convinced such optimism would

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² See “Indiana University.” The University would not initiate its graduate program in Creative Writing, a Master of Fine Arts program, until 1980; the M.A. in English that was offered at the school prior to 1980 is often erroneously referenced, even in university documents, as a “Master of Arts in Creative Writing.” See, e.g., IU News Room, “The Habit of Art,” Ibid. In the years immediately preceding Taylor’s development of the English department’s concentration in Creative Writing, eminent New Critics, including John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren, taught several literature courses at the university. Ibid.

¹⁶³ Tate, 181.

be rewarded.¹⁶⁴ As Tate began writing “What Is Creative Writing?” in 1964, twenty-eight years had passed since the first aspiring poet arrived in Iowa City, and still the notion that a young poet might receive a terminal degree in the writing of poetry was a quaint one primarily associated with oddball bohemians in Iowa City. So it was that when Tate wrote, in “What Is Creative Writing?”, that it was “indefensible to let undergraduates [take creative writing courses],” he did so not merely as a matter of dogma but emboldened activism.¹⁶⁵ He considered the discipline of creative writing “a risk for the university and a risk for the student,” an “anomaly” that produced graduates whose very existence was an “academic scandal.”¹⁶⁶ Tate’s disapproval of creative writing was both imperious and unwavering, and touched upon not only undergraduate education in the discipline but also graduate-level certification under its sign. “Nobody can be academically certified in an art which, in its very essence, is not subject to the objective discipline that the scholar passes on from one generation to another,” wrote Tate.¹⁶⁷ And in perhaps his most famous pronouncement on the subject, the poet-scholar wrote that, as to M.A. and MFA and Ph.D. students studying creative writing, “the academically certified Creative Writer goes out to teach Creative Writing, and produces other Creative Writers who are not writers, but who produce still other Creative Writers who are not writers.”¹⁶⁸

Though it seems counterintuitive to count the evisceration of the discipline of creative writing—and a return to the purely scholarly study of literature in English departments—as among the “alternative models” to the MFA posited between 1937 and 1963, given the ascendancy of New

¹⁶⁴ Tate even wrote, in “What Is Creative Writing?”, that “Creative Writing is here to stay, at least for a long time.” Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Tate, 181.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Id., 183.

Critical hostility to creative writing during this period the assessment is a necessary one. The place of the creative writing MFA in 1963, at a time when only one such program existed in the United States, was a precarious one, even as the place of the New Critics in the academy was not. Indeed, the opposition of the New Critics to formalized creative writing instruction ran so deep and was so politically leveraged that it would continue well beyond the 1960s. Even by 2000, none of the universities at which the ten most well-known and academically prolific New Critics had held a tenured professorship would offer a terminal-degree MFA program in creative writing.¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, we do see the detritus of the New Critics' opposition to creative writing in the curricula of a handful of fully-fledged MFA programs. Tate particularly had been a proponent of a language requirement in such courses—if they were to exist at all—and envisioned curricula emphasizing “literary study” and filling “the void left by the disappearance of the old discipline of ‘rhetoric.’”¹⁷⁰ This idea that creative writing could be made safe for the university only if it became something else altogether still finds expression in graduate creative writing programs with rigorous prerequisites in literature and foreign languages. While such requirements have long been common among doctoral programs in English, only a small minority of graduate programs in creative writing require foreign-language study or substantial credit-hours in courses focused on literary analysis and literary theory (see Appendix W).

Of the 78 terminal-degree master's programs in creative writing that are presently most popular among applicants, nine require that students exhibit fluency in a foreign language¹⁷¹; of the fifty most popular programs, twenty-seven are considered to have adopted an “academic” curriculum by virtue of requiring that students earn at least half of their credits in traditional (that is,

¹⁶⁹ Abramson, “Foundation Dates.”

¹⁷⁰ Tate, 181.

¹⁷¹ See Appendix C.

non-workshop) academic study.¹⁷² Moreover, programs that provide few or no teaching assistantships for their graduate students, or require of students that they carry a full course load at all times, honor New Critical hopes for the evolution of creative writing by ensuring that, by and large, “the student’s own writing [will be] left to him and the interested cooperation of the instructor.”¹⁷³ Such programs minimize a student’s free time either directly—by virtue of a time-consuming course load—or indirectly, by increasing the likelihood matriculants will need to maintain outside employment. As a result, these curricula and administrative structures require students to carefully schedule their writing time rather than have it be assured them by programmatic fiat.

In at least one respect, however, we find synchronicity between the early creative writers and the poet-professors of The New Criticism. In much the same way that the largely Southern-born New Critics felt strongly that conventional scholarship had for too long favored the Old World mystique of New England-born literature, creative writing workshopping at the graduate level was intended, in its earliest iteration, to promote Art as a national rather than regional inheritance. While today it is easy to think of literature as a practice endemic to every region of the United States—every town, city, and state—in Emerson’s time, as in the time of the Harvard professors who would later introduce the academy to creative writing, and indeed even in the throes of the Beat Generation, the overwhelming bulk of literary capital in America was held on the East and West coasts of the nation.¹⁷⁴ Creative writing’s aim of nationalizing literary production was much more than an ambition of seeking, and encouraging *in situ*, literary talent in the vast middle of America, but also a commitment to overleaping the barriers of convention with respect to which topics and

¹⁷² See Appendix V. See also Abramson, “2014 MFA Index: An Introduction,” 72; Abramson, “The MFA Revolution,” 74.

¹⁷³ Tate, 182.

¹⁷⁴ Even this account is too expansive; arguably, the bulk of all literary capital in the United States, prior to the Program Era, was held by artists in just three cities: Boston, New York, and (only belatedly) San Francisco.

themes literature could address, and who was permitted to address them. As a student of Harvard's LaBaron Russell Briggs once wrote, "Sometimes a country youth from some more or less rural college, after having long feared that he should never be able to find good story material, discovered here [in his private meetings with Briggs] that he had lived all his life in a region made of the stuff of romance."¹⁷⁵

If the Iowans sought to nationalize literature, and the students and faculty of Black Mountain College to democratize it, and the administrators of creative writing M.A. programs to entwine it firmly with literary scholarship, the popularity of non-degree-granting, workshop-oriented programs and conferences in programmatic creative writing's mid-century lull suggested a desire to remove writing from programmatic spaces entirely. The first such conference, the Breadloaf Writers' Conference, was founded in 1926, while the most storied, the Stegner Fellowship Program at Stanford University, was founded in 1946. The non-degree-granting Writers' Program at University of California at Los Angeles was founded in 1964. Earlier than all of these, however, was a New Criticism-influenced workshop established on the campus of Vanderbilt University in 1920; though Vanderbilt wouldn't initiate a graduate creative writing program until the twenty-first century, it played host to the loosely university-affiliated "Fugitives" workshopping group from 1920 to 1940.¹⁷⁶ Other notable non-affiliated workshops include the Black Arts Movement's Umbra Workshop, founded in 1962, and the annual Sewanee Writers' Conference, founded at the University of the South in 1985. In addition to these, innumerable one- or two-week summer programs housed at colleges and universities, and longer-term workshops unaffiliated with any institution, flourished in the period before programmatic creative writing's second boom in the 1990s. While some of these, like Sewanee, required an application for admission and featured a

¹⁷⁵ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 45 (internal citations omitted).

¹⁷⁶ Abramson, "Foundation Dates."

rigorous selection process, many required only a fee or, failing that, mere attendance. Other than the Breadloaf Conference at Middlebury, the most notable programs of the former sort, pre-World War II, could be found at Hollins University, Kenyon College, and Wesleyan University, while soon after the war such programs—as well as private, unaffiliated workshops convened in locales across the country—were readily available.¹⁷⁷

Many reasons have been advanced for why programmatic creative writing at both the undergraduate and graduate levels languished for nearly three decades following the founding of the Iowa Writer's Workshop. Katherine Adams' account of creative writing suggests two compelling explanations: first, that by mid-century composition studies had advanced to the point at which the discipline's now-standardized curricula had pushed creative writing exercises out of the picture, even as newly minted undergraduate and graduate programs in journalism made a stronger case than creative writing could for vocational utility; and second, that as college class sizes got larger and larger—due to more and more Americans attending college—there were fewer and fewer human resources available for the sort of individualized attention creative writing workshops invariably demanded.¹⁷⁸ Adams hints, too, that the death of Latin instruction in the Academy may have played a role in creative writing instruction's mid-century lull, as Latin had long been the primary point of contact with poetry—via translation exercises—for both high school and college students.¹⁷⁹

Tracing the length of the mid-century lull referred to here is difficult work. Recently, Stanford professor Mark McGurl identified what he termed the “Program Era” (see Chapter 6) as beginning immediately after World War II, though only seventeen terminal-degree, full-residency MFA programs were founded in the thirty-five years between the cessation of hostilities in the

¹⁷⁷ Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction*, 97.

¹⁷⁸ Adams, 3.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

European and Pacific theaters in 1945 and Ronald Reagan's election as President.¹⁸⁰ This rate of program creation—less than one terminal-degree, full-residency MFA program being founded every two years—does not seem to bespeak the institutionalized fascination with creative writing one might understandably associate with the phrase “the Program Era.” Rather, the 1940s, 1950s, and much of the 1960s were typified by institutions that sought alternatives to the New Humanist, terminal degree-granting approach to writing instruction favored in Iowa City, whether that approach was institutional yet ad hoc (Black Mountain College), institutional and academically oriented (the creative writing M.A.), quasi-institutional (as in university-affiliated, non-degree-granting workshops), or entirely non-institutional (as with the Umbra and other off-campus groups).

¹⁸⁰ See, generally, McGurl, *The Program Era*.

Chapter 5: Poetics in Buffalo

Relative to Black Mountain College, whose chapter in American academia concluded with the school's closure in 1957, the Poetics Program at the State University of New York at Buffalo has thus far received only light attention from literary historians. This owes in part, perhaps, to the fact that the program and the university are still extant and conspicuously influential, and thus not quite as readily historicized.¹⁸¹ Only recently has the Program itself set about remedying this deficit in the historical record by publishing its own institutional history, upon which account this chapter is partially based. While the literary historian justifiably fears over-reliance on self-reporting, in the case of Buffalo such fears are mollified by the unusual character of the program itself—a character so uniquely interdisciplinary that one imagines its professors and students are indeed best positioned to describe its operations.

What we know from “Poetry and Poetics at Buffalo: A Timeline, 1960-1999,” written by Cynthia Kimball and Taylor Brady—one-time graduate students in the Poetics Program—and first published in 1997 in *chloroform: an aesthetics of creative writing*, is that the vibrant poetry scene in Buffalo in the mid-1960s was of such scale and scope that it comfortably housed at least ten, and possibly fifteen or more, independent poetry presses.¹⁸² This is notable not only because the Program Era had not yet properly begun, or because of Buffalo's relatively modest population at the time (at about half a million people, it was in 1965 less than a fifteenth the size of its cross-state neighbor,

¹⁸¹ It is worth noting, too, that in addition to the many poets long associated with the Poetics Program who are still alive and writing and therefore not yet the subject of substantial biographies (e.g., Charles Bernstein), several others, most notably Robert Creeley, passed away recently enough that even those biographies that detail their literary work and teaching do not include consideration of their subjects' intersection with the Poetics Program at SUNY-Buffalo. See, e.g., Ekbert Faas and Maria Trombacco's *Robert Creeley: A Biography*, which focuses only on the poets endeavors between 1926 and 1966. Creeley did not begin his tenure at Buffalo until 1966. John Wilson's *Robert Creeley's Life and Work* (1987) ceases its own consideration of the man with a discussion of his “later poems” from the 1970s, though Creeley was still producing new work until his death in 2005.

¹⁸² Kimball and Brady, 235, citing Fiedler, 104.

New York City) but also because, according to Leslie Fiedler, these little magazines were in most instances pioneered by, populated with, and published for poets working or studying in and around SUNY-Buffalo.¹⁸³ Readings in Buffalo were likewise with great frequency associated with literary activity and activists at the university.¹⁸⁴ Mac Hammond, a professor of English at SUNY-Buffalo from 1963 to 1993, went so far as to contend that “the explosion of poetry that took place in Buffalo [in the sixties] centered around the Poetry Collection [at SUNY-Buffalo] . . .”¹⁸⁵

The story of the Poetics Program, and, more broadly, the study of contemporary poetry at SUNY-Buffalo, predates the sixties by several decades, however. In fact, it predates even the founding of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. In 1935, a year before Norman Foerster created the first graduate creative writing program at University of Iowa—and seven years before the Workshop formally opened its doors—Charles Abbott, chief librarian at SUNY-Buffalo, decided to use his administrative and financial resources to develop at the university a collection of contemporary poetry unrivalled in its breadth anywhere else in the United States.¹⁸⁶ He was assisted in this task, beginning in 1939, by a designated curator for the collection, Mary Barnard, and by a substantial grant from the Carnegie Foundation.¹⁸⁷ The task of building a collection of the sort Abbott envisioned indeed required several hands, as the Poetry Collection at Buffalo was to house not only published poetry collections but also letters, notebooks, diaries, worksheets, variant editions, and limited-run publications, from contemporary poets as varied in their aesthetics, poetics, and politics

¹⁸³ Fiedler, 104.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Kimball and Brady, 235. See also “Obituaries: Mac S. Hammond, 71, poet, English professor emeritus.”

¹⁸⁶ Kimball and Brady, 236.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

as W.H. Auden and Louis Zukofsky.¹⁸⁸ Kimball and Brady observe that the effort spearheaded by Abbott and Barnard was notable for the esteem in which it held literary marginalia; certainly, it was notable as well for its valuation of literary detritus *in situ* rather than merely in retrospect.¹⁸⁹ It provided those poets with whom it communicated, some of whom had not yet achieved widespread recognition, a contemporaneous sense of their magnitude in their own time, and to the students who soon began scouring it for research and inspiration a certitude in the importance of minutely historicizing not just poetry but the poets behind the poems. As Barnard would write in her 1984 book *Assault on Mt. Helicon*, “the idea that it was part of a university’s business to collect materials for research into the work of modern poets was . . . strange (not to say scandalous) to most American professors. . . . No self-respecting scholar would think of wasting his time on living writers.”¹⁹⁰

This last observation hints at the differential utility of the sort of archive Abbott and Barnard were creating in Buffalo. While the detritus of largely unknown contemporary writers might still escape the notice of historicist scholars in the academy, it was less likely to do so if the young scholars and not-so-young faculty admitted to its wonders were working writers themselves. Still, in the mid-1930s such uses were not yet imaginable, even in Iowa City, where self-expressive artisanship rather than literary scholarship or research was the order of the day. Thus neither Abbott nor Barnard believed the collection they’d compiled would draw the attention of graduate students or even graduate faculty for many decades.

By 1962, University of Buffalo had joined the state university system and become the State University of New York at Buffalo, provisioning the campus’s four-person English department with

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Id., citing Barnard, 176.

such substantial state monies that throughout the sixties it enjoyed a hiring wave which, by the end of the decade, would supply its Poetics Program with a large faculty.¹⁹¹

One of those hired in the university's flurry of expansion was Albert Cook, who by 1966 had developed a vision for the teaching study of creative writing that was idiosyncratic in its time. Cook believed that poetry and "poetics"—broadly speaking, the study of *why* we write, not merely *how*—could be taught as effectively at the doctoral level by non-academic poets as by scholars.¹⁹²

Appointed as a Comparative Literature professor, Cook also wrote poetry; according to Katka Hammond, Cook "acted on his strong feeling that poets should be considered, and respected, as scholars. For all his scholarly publications, he would [have] rather [been] known as a poet than anything else."¹⁹³ Cook's vision is distinguishable from that of Wilbur Schramm and Norman Foerster at Iowa, whose efforts to see working poets treated as credible teachers of poetry-writing and the craft of poetry did not include such artists taking over, too, the teaching of poetry as literature. What Cook wanted, according to faculty peer Mac Hammond—hired in 1963, a year after the then-department chair—was "to attract poets not to teach writing, but to teach literature. His interest in a faculty made up of literary artists put [SUNY-Buffalo] on the map..."¹⁹⁴

The timing of Cook's revelation is significant because of its concurrence with the development of the creative writing MFA degree as the presumptive gold standard for terminal creative writing degrees. In 1964, at the time Cook began hiring poets as literature professors, there was only a single creative writing MFA program in the United States—the one in Iowa City—and its founding more than two decades earlier had not, in the event, caused other universities to follow

¹⁹¹ Id., 238.

¹⁹² See "A Brief History of the Poetics Program."

¹⁹³ Kimball and Brady, 239.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

suit. As discussed in Chapter 3, in fact the more promising degree for aspiring creative writers in 1964 was the creative writing M.A.—a degree which, in its academic and Ph.D.-preparatory dimensions, was more analogous to Cook’s line of thinking regarding creative writing than was that of the poetry and fiction faculties in Iowa City.

In addition to Cook and Hammond, SUNY-Buffalo’s mid-sixties hiring wave included a literary artist whose name still reverberates in scholarship and literary circles alike: Charles Olson.¹⁹⁵ Brought on board as a Visiting Professor, Olson oversaw classes at Buffalo which, while not as focused on the act of literary authorship as those at the Writers’ Workshop, nevertheless bore little resemblance to literary studies as it had previously been practiced elsewhere. According to a 1986 interview with American poet Stephen Rodefer, who studied with Olson in the mid-sixties,

I was in his classes for two years. A few of us took them a second time because it was slightly difficult to figure out what was up the first time around He’d spend two hours talking about parataxis or the pre-Socratics or the Sumerians, [Alfred North] Whitehead or [Claude] Lévi-Strauss or [Maurice] Merleau-Ponty. Or he’d talk about [Ed] Dorn or [John] Wieners or [Gary] Snyder, people you had never heard of then. You must remember it was 1963. I had gone to Amherst, where Robert Frost was the visiting canon, and modern poetry courses ended with [W.H.] Auden and [Wallace] Stevens—William Carlos Williams was hardly mentioned.¹⁹⁶

Outside of class, the poetry offerings at Buffalo were nothing if not eclectic. In one five-week span in 1963, the university hosted separate readings by Olson, Robert Bly, and Adrienne Rich.¹⁹⁷

Readings in early 1964 by Robert Duncan and future faculty member Robert Creeley gave students at Buffalo a glimpse of the vision of American poetics that would soon come to inform the

¹⁹⁵ Like Cook, Hammond was a working poet; he published four collections of poetry between 1966 and 1989. See “Obituaries: Mac S. Hammond, 71, poet, English professor emeritus.”

¹⁹⁶ Kimball and Brady, 240.

¹⁹⁷ Id., 240-41.

department, as did the university's first-ever summer program in Modern Literature in July of 1964. In addition to Creeley, the faculty of the Program in Modern Literature included two other well-known figures from the Black Mountain scene, Ed Dorn and Robert Kelly, and a founding member of the Black Arts Movement, LeRoi Jones.¹⁹⁸ Nor was the English department at Buffalo insensible to the fact that its earliest poet-taught courses represented the academic-institutionalization of a discrete aesthetic worldview. In a June 1964 letter to the Director of the university's summer session, Mac Hammond asked for funds in support of readings by summer session faculty LeRoi Jones, Ed Dorn, and Robert Kelly, as well as Denise Levertov, "a leading member of the school to which all of these poets belong..."¹⁹⁹

From the start, the Poetics Program at Buffalo sought both the talent and wisdom of established Black Mountain poets and the tuition dollars of aspiring authors. In December of 1963, Cook placed an advertisement in *Poetry*, the nation's leading poetry magazine, encouraging young poets to apply to Buffalo to study poetics.²⁰⁰ The ad was successful, and drew to Buffalo a bevy of young poets that included future luminaries Fred Wah and Stephen Rodefer, the latter of whom would in the early seventies become one of the co-founders of the "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry movement. Wah's recollection of studying with Olson emphasizes the sort of unique environment Cook's idiosyncratic vision of literary instruction had brought to Buffalo:

Olson spent half the semester saying we couldn't do anything because we didn't have...[Richard Payne Knight's] *The Worship of Priapus*. It was an obscure nineteenth century tome, but Olson talked about it as if it

¹⁹⁸ Id., 241.

¹⁹⁹ Kimball and Brady, 241. While several of these authors had taught at Black Mountain College, given that the school folded in 1957 it seems clear Hammond is speaking, more figuratively, of the "Black Mountain School" of poetry inspired by the college and discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. During the same year to which Hammond refers, the Student Book Shop at SUNY-Buffalo would publish *Fubballo*, a literary magazine whose first issue featured numerous authors associated with the Black Mountain School and its progeny, including Olson, Dorn, Kelly, Jones, Levertov, Diane Wakowski, Aram Saroyan, and Stephen Rodefer.

²⁰⁰ Id., 242.

contained everything we needed to know about the origin of the universe. But, since we couldn't get it, we couldn't have the class, and he went on for weeks like this. One day a few of us—Fred Wah, Andrew Crozier, Mike Glover, and I—made a trip to Cleveland to go to Jim Lowell's Asphodel book shop and to a then legendary bookstore that had a square mile of used books underground....We spent all day there, and finally we found *The Worship of Priapus*, along with some early H.D. and Mina Loy, I remember. Needless to say, we jumped for joy and rushed back to class, as it were, triumphant. But it was too late, Olson said, and Payne Knight was wrong anyway.²⁰¹

Wah's recollection, while somewhat different from Rodefer's, is nevertheless even more vivid:

I found the Payne Knight in a store in Buffalo—it was on Main Street, I think—and brought it into class. Olson immediately borrowed the book. A week went by. Then he announced in class that the passage he remembered wasn't the way he thought it was, and he threw the book against a wall: 'This is bullshit.' Silence. Class continued.²⁰²

Outbursts like Olson's undoubtedly did little to aid in developing collegial respect between Buffalo's poet-scholars and its literary scholars, and from the start relations between the Poetics Program and the English department at large were frosty. Creeley, who taught at Buffalo from 1966 to 1993, recalls being told by a student that a graduate adviser in the department had declared Creeley's classes "didn't count" for credit, on account of them being taught by someone who was "not really a teacher."²⁰³

Buffalo's transition from a conventional English department with an unconventional archive of literary materials to an English department populated by poets and housing the nation's only program in "poetics" was a gradual one. The first major step was taken on October 22, 1964—approximately concurrent with the opening of the second creative writing MFA, at University of

²⁰¹ Id., 243.

²⁰² Kimball and Brady, 243.

²⁰³ Id., 238.

Massachusetts in Amherst. In Buffalo, the English department's "Statement on Poets and their Function in the Department of English" was revised to the following:

In building a consistent program, the English Department proposes to consider three kinds of poets:

- A) Master poets with international reputations.
- B) Professional poets who are also academic professionals, having a Ph.D. and/or standard academic specialties (linguistics, bibliography, period scholarship, etc.).
- C) Professional poets who may be regarded as academic professionals when they have done considerable college and university teaching at levels above those of our "200" courses, though they do not have a standard specialty other than periodical criticism.

(We are not considering here category D, professional poets with little or not [sic] academic experience; such poets are best utilized, transitionally or permanently, only as visitors.)²⁰⁴

Significant here was Buffalo's determination that its English department only had room for "non-professional poets" who had already developed an "international reputation," a high standard by any measure. While the document did not define what might constitute a "professional poet," one possibility is a usage of the phrase similar to that employed decades earlier at Harvard: an individual with significant expertise in the craft of poetry, perhaps—given that in this instance it was university faculty, not students, being discussed—accompanied by a substantial record of published poetry.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Id., 244.

²⁰⁵ This submission is bolstered by language elsewhere in the document noting that "we will add poets to the staff, the poetry serving as a professional qualification in the area of publication." Kimball and Taylor, 245. Notable also are comments made by Buffalo faculty member Creeley at the Berkeley Poetry Conference in 1965: "We have the dilemma that so far as a person working actively in the English Department is a professional, [we] presume that he or she has a committed intellectual interest in some range of research or [a] qualification of that sort, and therefore reads a lot...and keeps up with the bulletins and materials...that is the nexus that gives authority to teaching. Possibly. On the other hand, as anyone who's been to school knows, teaching really has remarkably little to do with the subject [itself], and a good teacher is maybe virtually inept with respect to the subject. I know I've been taught brilliantly by teachers who really didn't know anything about their subjects specifically...but prompted me to learn a great deal." Id., 247. This comment by Creeley, coming just eighteen months after the revision of Buffalo's "Statement on Poets" cited above, implicates Creeley's own attitude toward that section of the revised document that establishes writing ability as a partial but substantial qualification for a teaching post at the university. Creeley's view stands in contrast to that of David Fenza, Director of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs, who wrote in his "Creative Writing and Its

Perhaps more surprising than this emphasis on the hiring of “professional poets” was Buffalo’s circumscription of the role of such individuals in the department:

[They] are useful for a Department concentrating on modern literature and criticism in the following ways:

1) Creative writing.

Poets are uniquely qualified to teach courses in creative writing. In the light of our emphasis, we should expand the undergraduate offerings in creative writing beyond the single course taught at present. We subscribe to the principle honored in departments of music and art that to practice the techniques of the art provides for all students a valuable supplement to studying its history and criticism.

In the graduate program, we do not at present plan to follow the Iowa and Johns Hopkins plans of formal graduate degrees in Creative Writing. As at Harvard and Berkeley, we will henceforth accept some course work in creative writing (perhaps a maximum of six hours) as a part of training for an advanced degree and propose to add a single advanced course in creative writing open to graduate students.²⁰⁶

The above declaration is a historically significant one, especially given its timing at a point in the development of the discipline of creative writing at which only one terminal-degree program in the field was operating. In creating a “conventional” undergraduate environment for creative writing—multiple courses offered for credit as part of the fulfillment of an English degree—and in creating a graduate curriculum not substantially different from that then present at the creative writing M.A. at Cornell University, where graduate students were taught by working writers, received degree credit for writing workshops, but nevertheless wrote critical theses, Buffalo executed a negotiation between creative writing and scholarship that seemed to have been managed less reflexively at other

Discontents” (2000) that “[t]he best teachers of the *making* of the arts are those experienced in *making* them; they are not specialists in *studying*, *preserving*, or *analyzing* the arts, although art programs must include these endeavors, too, in their pedagogy and curriculum” (emphasis in original). See “Creative Writing and Its Discontents.”

²⁰⁶ Kimball and Brady, 244.

institutions. Moreover, in recognizing the utility of hiring working poets to teach creative writing in the context of a scholarly English department, Buffalo formed—simultaneous with the beginning of the Program Era proper—the foundation for a “poetics program” that would deviate substantially from other models for creative writing instruction.

In at least one respect, however, the Buffalo English program was unfortunately very much in keeping with the times, that being the attunement of its founding documents to the hiring of specifically male professors. In discussing the Department’s criteria for appointment and promotion, the “Statement on Poets and Their Function in the Department of English” notes that the criteria should be

the quality of the man’s work as judged by those qualified in the Department. Quality should outweigh duplication as a consideration, on the principle of a ‘good man regardless of field.’ That is, avoiding duplication, we prefer having a Joyce man and a Yeats man to having two Joyce men. But we would prefer adding a second (or third) excellent Joyce man to adding merely a passable Yeats man...²⁰⁷

Even accounting for the tenor of the times—and the conventions of the period with respect to personal pronouns—the language above regarding hiring practices bespeaks, perhaps, the particular influence of Olson, who, as noted in Chapter 4, had not permitted female students at Black Mountain College to attend many of his seminars, requiring instead that they peek in from the hallway.²⁰⁸ Also notable in Kimball and Taylor’s history of the program at Buffalo is that in the two years from Olson’s hire in 1963 to his departure from the university in the early fall of 1965, fully 93% of the 55 hires, lectures, readings, on-campus publications, and student matriculations whose occurrence was recorded for posterity involved males.²⁰⁹ While the cadre of Buffalo professors who

²⁰⁷ Kimball and Brady, 245.

²⁰⁸ Davidson, 37.

²⁰⁹ Kimball and Brady, 244-7.

would eventually create the idiosyncratic graduate program only hinted at in 1964 was, if only gesturally, heterogeneous as to gender—poet Susan Howe was among their number—expanding the culture of the English department at Buffalo to be more inclusive of female authors was an ongoing process in the decades after the “Statement on Poets” was revised.

Between the late 1960s and the early 1990s, after the beginning of the Program Era but before creative writing would experience its first statistically significant “boom”—as, while fifty MFA programs were founded from 1964 to 1989, the 1990s alone would see nearly forty programs founded, a per-year program creation rate 800% higher—Buffalo continued to seek a mediation between the dual functions of its English department. According to Carl Dennis, hired by Buffalo in 1966,

Back then, Cook was hiring eight or nine people a year for three or four years; as a new hire, you would find yourself in an instant community of twenty to twenty-five people your own age. I’m an example of how flexible the department was—no one raised an eyebrow when I moved from academic teaching to teaching writing. It was the only department in the country where you could do that without feeling like you were betraying the people who’d hired you.²¹⁰

Dennis’ account contrasts with the experience of professors at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, whose physical, curricular, and administrative secession from the English department at Iowa did indeed force English professors then on campus to align themselves administratively—and pedagogically—with one camp or another.

In 1991, Robert Creeley, Susan Howe, Dennis Tedlock, Charles Bernstein, and Raymond Federman formally founded the Poetics Program at Buffalo. Bernstein became the Program’s first director—though consistent with the idiosyncratic history, mission, and structure of the Program itself, his professional background was in some respects unusual for someone with such a high-

²¹⁰ Id., 249.

profile academic post. A well-known poet, indeed the most visible of the “Language” poets who had risen to prominence in the 1980s, Bernstein had taught composition, literature, and creative writing prior to his hire as the Butler Visiting Chair in the fall of 1989. And yet, his highest degree was a 1972 A.B. from Harvard, his first composition teaching experience had been just two years before receiving the Butler Chair (1987), his first experience teaching literature had been just a year prior (1988), and his first creative writing teaching experience had come just a *semester* before his arrival in Buffalo (1989).²¹¹ Creeley had long been a professor at Buffalo when Bernstein arrived, while Howe, who beginning in 1988 had been a visiting professor at the campus, was hired as a full-time professor in 1991, a year after Bernstein.

According to Bernstein, the idea for the Poetics Program had been his and Creeley’s. For at least a quarter century, Creeley had been engaged by the question of how to integrate creative writers into the intellectual life of an English department. As he once said of (as he then termed it) Buffalo’s “creative writing program” in the mid-1960s, “I thought always [that] it put students into a cul-de-sac—that it took them out of the resources that they would expect to have as graduate students in an English department and ghettoized them in some way.”²¹²

While a poetics-oriented program largely populated by creative writers among its faculty and student body helped conjoin the several functions of Buffalo’s English department, it also forced upon Bernstein and Creeley an administrative question with curricular implications: was the Poetics Program an arts program or an academic one? Creeley advised—to use a term Bernstein has since used in interviews—“seceding” from the English department in favor of the university’s newly developed Center for the Arts.²¹³ Meanwhile, Bernstein saw value in maintaining ties to not just the

²¹¹ Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems*, 7. See also, Bernstein, “Curriculum Vitae.”

²¹² Kimball and Brady, 249.

²¹³ Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems*, 23-24.

financial resources but also the modes of inquiry and scholarship endemic to the English department, though this would mean, in turn, granting matriculants to the Poetics Program a conventional English Ph.D. upon graduation. In subsequent interviews, Bernstein has implied that his willingness to have the Poetics Program remain connected to the English department at Buffalo was rooted in part in the synchronicity of the two programs' curricular aims.²¹⁴ In *Attack of the Difficult Poems*, he notes that “while the ‘creative writing’ approach at universities often debunks the significance of critical reflection, sometimes pitting creativity against conceptual thinking, the Poetics Program insists that scholarship, historical research, and critical writing are at the core of graduate education.”²¹⁵

Bernstein has described his interest, in co-founding the Poetics Program, as one of “suggesting an alternative model for poets teaching in graduate, but also undergraduate, programs. The Poetics faculty teaches in the English Department’s doctoral program, supervising orals and directing scholarly/critical dissertations, even if our license to [do] this is more poetic than formal.”²¹⁶ What enabled this alternative model was a simultaneous departure from both conventional literary studies and the “workshopping” endemic to creative writing, though in this departure we find a juxtaposition of the two modes rather than a radical break from either. Bernstein’s sense of the role of a Poetics Program faculty member offered a particularly stark contrast to the role of faculty members at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, who—in an analogue to the original suggestion by Robert Creeley that the Program at Buffalo should secede from the English department—had in fact by 1991 segregated themselves from Iowa’s English department such that their involvement with students’ critical dissertations had been reduced to zero.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Bernstein, 24.

One of the factors enabling Buffalo's differential relations with its English department was its citation of "poetics" as the main pedagogical emphasis of its new program. But what was "poetics"? While different scholars and artists may offer slightly different definitions of the term, the characterization found in Buffalo's current online promotional materials holds "poetics" to be

the sum of the theoretical languages that define and inform the term *poiesis* as construction and making. It recognizes the literary text from its material existence—right down to the ink and paper—to the labor that creates it, its personal significance to the poet, and its historical value to the culture that consumes it. It attends to its relation to the human body, to speech and physiology, to the poem as utterance and performance. It acknowledges historical forces and philosophical movements, poetry past along with poetry present. It is mindful of neuro-linguistics, of speech acts, of the poetics relevant to a wide range of cultures. Via ethnopoetics (which entails attention to the ethnic specificity and regional locality of all poetic practices) it considers both alphabetic and non-alphabetic writing codes of the historical past and imaginary codes of a potential present.²¹⁷

Still housed in the University's English Department, the Poetics Program today bills itself as one that "takes as its principle that literary artists should teach not only the art of writing but also the theory of writing practice, in both undergraduate courses and graduate seminars."²¹⁸ Of note here is the phrase "not only"; while Buffalo's founding documents suggest a divergence from the Iowa (MFA) and Johns Hopkins (M.A.) models of certifying creative writers through programmatic degree-granting apparatuses, the notion that it is not just "the theory of writing practice" but also "the art of writing" that is taught to undergraduate and graduate students at Buffalo is a key element of the exceptional position of the Poetics Program in the Program Era. Because curricular juxtapositions are at times more easily accommodated in the academy than are administrative ones, it remains the case that applicants to Buffalo are not required to submit a creative writing sample with their graduate school application, though the Program notes that "creative writing is welcome in

²¹⁷ See "Poetics in the 21st Century."

²¹⁸ See "The Program."

addition” to the 15 to 25 pages of critical writing on a literary topic the program does require.²¹⁹

However, despite the fact that students applying to the Poetics Program enter a pedagogical space that deems “scholarship, historical research, and critical writing...[to be] at the core of graduate education,” applicants are not required to submit scores for the GRE Subject Test in English.²²⁰

Students are admitted to the Poetics Program under the same academic requirements—and with consideration by the same admissions committee—as are students admitted to the English Ph.D. at Buffalo, though at Buffalo half of the admission committee members are graduate students, including students from the Poetics Program.²²¹ Buffalo looks not only for aspiring writers and scholars with critical acumen as to the study of poetics, but also with regard to a host of sub-specializations whose methods of inquiry owe more to literary studies than creative writing. Specifically, the Program notes that, “unique among literature departments in North America,” its curriculum emphasizes not only writerly poetics but also a range of scholarly sub-specializations including “ethnopoetics; the poetics of fiction, nonfiction, and translation; and the poetics of various literatures of the Western traditions.”²²² Moreover, the Program introduces its undergraduate and graduate students to poetics as an interdisciplinary area of inquiry, one that incorporates, for instance, Comparative Literature, Romance Languages, Art History, American Studies, Philosophy,

²¹⁹ See “Graduate Admissions.” Because it is a question commonly asked by applicants during the admissions process—Bernstein called the question a “frequent” one during his directorship of the Program—the Program in its “Graduate Admissions” instructions, as elsewhere on its website, reminds prospective students that the Poetics degree “is given for critical thinking and scholarly research” as opposed to the matriculant’s output in creative writing. Ibid. According to Bernstein, “A frequent question I get from students applying to the program is whether they can write a creative dissertation. I always do a double take: ‘I hope it will be creative, but it can’t be a collection of poems or a novel.’” Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems*, 23.

²²⁰ See “Advice for Applicants.” As of 2005, 41.5% of English doctoral programs require the GRE Subject Test, according to the Modern Language Association (MLA). Steward, 12.

²²¹ Faculty from both the English and Poetics Programs comprise the other half of the admissions committee for the department. “Advice for Applicants.”

²²² See “The Program.”

Music, and Media Studies.²²³ While students can, if they so choose, complete the program without studying under English faculty outside the Poetics Program, regardless of their course selection students in the Program are certain to be contemporaneously reading, practicing, and theorizing poetry-writing—a combinational pedagogy in which writing practice, visual poetry, critical theory, diasporic literature, digital media, and the historical study of the avant-garde are conjoined.²²⁴

As with many undergraduate and graduate creative writing programs, the Poetics Program is notable as much for its partnerships within the university community as for its departmental offerings. The Poetry Collection of the University Library and the Electronic Poetry Center—two projects initiated by the Poetics Program—are key resources for students in the program. The Program also offers a “Poetics Plus” lecture and reading series that interweaves creative and critical writing from contemporary artists and scholars with students’ weekly seminar work. And infusing all core-curricular and extracurricular programming sponsored by the Program is the most lengthy and pedagogically substantive mission statement of any program associated with the Program Era. Indeed, of the several hundred graduate creative writing program websites reviewed for this study, only the Poetics Program at Buffalo offers a comprehensive mission statement as part of its online promotional materials.²²⁵ This statement, as of the 2016 iteration of the Program’s website, reads in part:

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ To be sure, many programs offer boilerplate program introductions on the main pages of their websites, offering prospective students a brief overview of the program’s workshop policies (often limited to the number of students admitted per workshop), a statement regarding the postgraduate success of recent students, a rather generic statement regarding the faculty’s commitment to teaching, and some words about the curriculum in its entirety—for instance, which genres are available for study, how many credit hours are required, and how long the program may be expected to take. No program makes either a theoretical or pedagogical argument for its own educational efficacy, let alone a robust case for its intellectual grounding, in the fashion of the Buffalo Poetics Program. Indeed, no statement of this sort appears to ever have been associated with the online promotional materials of any creative writing MFA program at any time. One of the most interdisciplinary and pedagogically diverse creative writing MFA programs, California College of the Arts, says only this in its overview of the program: “CCA’s Graduate Program in Fine Arts challenges you to take your work to a higher level through rigorous practice and a robust exchange of ideas with an engaged and diverse artistic

The Poetics Program creates a generative space for inquiry around poetry's extraordinary and urgent critical re-grounding of foundational categories of thought and praxis. Poetry scrutinizes and activates language as a medium that materializes history and power and forms the very frames of perception and consciousness. The Poetics Program's intensive focus on poetry's capacity to re-world in turn fosters the making of scholarly and artistic work *on alert*—work that is profoundly responsive to the epochal shifts of the 21st century and that opens up new, consequential objects of study.

To comprehend the “now” means recalibrating questions, even the positions from which we question, towards a radical remaking of paradigms. Poetics invites and collectively models disciplinary iconoclasm, proliferating interventions of multiple scales and dimensions. Sites of address include: literary form and the politics of aesthetics; structures of experience and affect; literary technologies, modalities of performance, and new media ecology; language as subject to morphing, compression, and euthanization under capital; temporality and schemas of history; cross-cultural poetics and processes of translation across languages, cultures, and locations; speculative thought and the limits of discourse; language's relation to the material world, language as *materia* in old and new materialisms; textual ethics and alterity; language's making of multiply marked and positioned bodies. Pedagogy in the program commits to disruptive, constructive reading practices and engages with texts that insist on redefining reading.²²⁶

To the extent the principles elucidated above infuse the Poetics Program's special programming—readings, symposia, talks by visiting scholars and poets, and editorial internships—they generate a subculture around the Program that differs from that which is established through readings,

community. As your work evolves, you will gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationships among art, culture, and society.” See “MFA in Fine Arts: Discover and Interdisciplinary Artist Community.” Another program with a similar profile, CalArts, merely offers two- to three-sentence, marketing-oriented summaries of its ten “defining features”: an untracked curriculum; “a critical context for creative work”; interdisciplinary opportunities; “close attention and mentoring to the development of a singular writing practice”; “an award-winning, multi-dimensional faculty who are also dedicated teachers”; “a nationally and internationally renowned literary journal”; a writer-in-residence program; a reading series with an associated seminar; active professional development; and “alumni achievements.” See “MFA Creative Writing Program: Defining Features.”

²²⁶ See “Poetics in the 21st Century.” This language has been consistent since at least October of 2014, per the oldest iteration of this page accessible via a WayBackMachine search of this web address. The oldest archived iteration of any portion of the Buffalo website is a December 2008 capture of its main page—<http://poetics.buffalo.edu/program/index.html>—which reveals that the text of this page has remained unchanged since 2008.

symposia, visiting lectures, and editorships at other programs. Indeed, students at Buffalo are positioned more as interrogators than as self-expressive creators. A review of the Program's course catalog in April of 2015 reveals courses in Classical, European, non-Western, modernist, and postmodernist poetics, philosophy, and critical theory; 20th- and 21st-century avant garde movements, such as Objectivism, Language poetry, and feminist writing; single-author courses focused on iconoclastic figures in the literary avant-garde; the "architectonics of the book"; the poetics and philosophy of "voice"; and courses in eco-poetics, parapoetics, nanopoetics, biopoetics, bio-politics, cross-cultural poetics, translation, and multi-media/cross-platform writing.²²⁷ While not all of these courses are offered each year, all—or some variation of them—are available to each student during their period of academic coursework. By way of comparison, the Iowa Writers' Workshop's description of its "philosophy" is, in total, fewer than forty words: "Though we agree in part with the popular insistence that writing cannot be taught, we exist and proceed on the assumption that talent can be developed, and we see our possibilities and limitations as a school in that light."²²⁸ That this sentence is considered an adequate summary of the oft-discussed "Iowa Model" of programmatic creative writing instruction underscores just how little transparency the discipline has thus far achieved on the topic of critical creative writing pedagogy.²²⁹

While the Poetics Program at Buffalo has influenced scholarship upon and the production of experimental writing in the United States, in one respect it has not yet effected a sea change in the academic-institutional study of creative writing: as of 2015, only one university in the United States—University of Notre Dame—has followed Buffalo's lead by developing a Ph.D. program in

²²⁷ See "Curriculum & Course Offerings."

²²⁸ See "Philosophy."

²²⁹ See Chapter 7 for additional discussion of the dearth of research into, and the lack of writing on, critical creative writing pedagogy.

Poetics.²³⁰ More recently, University of Washington at Bothell founded a Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing and Poetics, representing the most literal synergy to date of the fine arts study of writing and the scholarly study of poetics.²³¹

In view of the above, Buffalo's place in the history of creative writing generally and the Program Era specifically is at once a contingent and central one. While the discipline of creative writing *per se* found little purchase at SUNY-Buffalo in the early decades of its Poetics Program, aspiring creative writers looking to study literature from a writerly perspective, often with a hope of publishing their own creative writing later on, flocked to the Poetics Program from the moment of its founding in the early 1990s. And Buffalo's promotional materials explicitly encourage this positioning of poetics study within the broader education of a working writer.

Moreover, Buffalo remains today one of the few bastions of experimental writing for those sometimes embattled academic-institutional creative writers whose aesthetic and theoretical inclinations run toward the avant-garde. Of the nearly 350 terminal-degree creative writing and poetics programs in the world—including low- and full-residency MFA programs as well as doctoral programs in creative writing—fewer than ten advertise in their promotional materials a special emphasis on experimental writing. Brown University and CalArts, both MFAs, and University of Denver, a creative writing Ph.D., emphasize the involvement of critical theory and literary experimentation in their curricula; Buffalo, however, is more direct than any other program of this

²³⁰ See "Modern Poetry and Poetics."

²³¹ Of the four founding faculty members of the UW-Bothell Poetics Program—Jeanne Heuving, Joe Milutis, Ted Hiebert, and Rebecca Brown—three (Heuving, Milutis, and Hiebert) held doctoral degrees at the time the program was initiated in 2012. This is an unusually high percentage of Ph.D.-holding faculty for an MFA program. The fourth founder, Brown, was at the time a Lecturer whose highest degree was an MFA in creative writing from University of Virginia. Heuving's Ph.D., from University of Washington, is in English; Milutis', from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, in Modern Studies; and Hiebert's, from Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, in Humanities. Notably, Milutis had previously studied Modern Studies and Media at Brown, and Hiebert had studied Art at University of Calgary—both of these universities being well-known for their faculties' scholarship in poetics. See "Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and Poetics: About Us."

sort, announcing itself in its promotional materials as “a major national and international center for the study of modernist and experimental poetry.”²³² Its roster of alumni bespeaks this commitment: from Lisa Jarnot to Peter Gizzi, from Graham Foust to Elizabeth Willis, the spirit of experimentation with language can be read not only in the roster of esteemed faculty who have moved through the Program but also those aspiring student-writers who incorporated poetics instruction into their education either in lieu of, or as an adjunct to, a conventional creative writing program.²³³

Notably, SUNY-Buffalo has lately bent—however slightly—to the times. In 2014, almost 25 years after the founding of its Poetics Program, the university initiated a Certificate in Innovative Writing that allows M.A. or Ph.D. students in English (including students studying for the Ph.D. in Poetics) to add to their present curriculum an eighteen-credit, four-class course of creative writing workshops intended to be “particularly useful for students who are interested in enhancing their writing portfolios and/or their critical and literary backgrounds before applying to MFA and PhD programs.”²³⁴ The Certificate’s promotional materials note that, “for PhD students, the Certificate is value as a credential for writing-related careers, including the teaching of creative writing.” Designed to be completed in either two, three, or four semesters, the Certificate gives graduate students at Buffalo the opportunity to take courses in which the production of original creative writing rather than merely its study or (as in some of Bernstein’s courses, per his *Attack of the Difficult Poems*)

²³² See “The Program.” Both the Poetics Program at University of Notre Dame, founded in 2012, and the Ph.D. program with Internal Creative Writing Minor at University of Wisconsin-Madison, would also answer to the description of a doctoral creative writing program with a scholarly dissertation.

²³³ Bernstein notes that “the Poetics graduate students form a vital community among themselves, where their shared interest in criticism and scholarship, poetry writing, and teaching make for an active bond. As it turns out, this mix seems to produce Ph.D.s who are eager and well qualified to teach literature as well as writing.” Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems*, 23. Noteworthy here is Bernstein’s suggestion that the writing culture at Buffalo is sufficiently robust that graduates of the Poetics program, despite not receiving a degree for their writing skills, are nevertheless “well qualified to teach...writing” as a result of their course of study.

²³⁴ See “Certificate in Innovative Writing.”

exercise-oriented imitation is especially featured. The university bills its new Certificate program as “a unique form of graduate study in creative writing, closely intertwining the practice of writing with literary and aesthetic inquiries.”²³⁵ While indeed innovative, we must note of this recent addition to the Buffalo curriculum, too, that studies have found that “universities often create certificate programs when limited resources preclude the ability to create a degree program. Sometimes certificate programs are created to gauge interest [in a subject], to provide an educational alternative, or when the topic material does not justify a degree program.”²³⁶ Certificate programs are also more financially lucrative for their host universities than are the full-fledged terminal degree-granting programs which may, given the standards set by the Association of Writers and Writing programs, require a university to offer at least some students tuition remission and teaching assistantships. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* notes that the number of short-term certificate programs offered nationally rose by 151% between 2000 and 2010.²³⁷

The introduction of the Certificate Program as an accompaniment to the Poetics Program gave the curriculum at Buffalo its first routinized poetry and fiction workshop offerings, as well as annual “workshop colloquia” in both genres. Certificate students also take Introduction to Critical and Cultural Theory and an independent study-like course as part of their required course-load.²³⁸ While by no means a repudiation of its founding philosophy, what the new Certificate at Buffalo does point toward is a closing of the circle in the long and divergent history of creative writing and literary studies as academic disciplines. The Certificate, should it in time evolve into a master’s or

²³⁵ See “Certificate in Innovative Writing.”

²³⁶ WVU Forensic Science Initiative, 45.

²³⁷ Mangan, 1.

²³⁸ See “Certificate in Innovative Writing.”

doctoral degree, would reflect a reflexive conjoining of two of the three primary functions of the contemporary English department: literary studies and creative writing.²³⁹

Beyond the relatively new Poetics Program at University of Notre Dame and the MFA in “Creative Writing and Poetics” created in Bothell in 2012, there are other signs that such synergies between literary studies and creative writing are becoming more popular. For instance, in 2014 the Pratt Institute created a “writing” MFA—notably, not a “creative writing” MFA—“specifically designed to support and encourage intellectually rigorous and inspired writing practices that are *philosophically*, culturally, and politically informed” (emphasis added).²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Historically, the third major function of such a department would be the offering of courses in Rhetoric and Composition.

²⁴⁰ See “Our Program” and “Writing M.F.A.”

Chapter 6: The Beginning of the “Program Era”

As we have seen, the New Critics who dominated the English departments of America’s most venerated colleges and universities in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s by and large declined the opportunity to advance the Iowa experiment by creating new terminal-degree creative writing programs at their employing institutions. A retrospective of the academic careers of more than a dozen of the most prominent New Critics confirms that not one—not even those among them, such as Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, who were working authors themselves—oversaw the creation of an MFA program during their periods of employment in higher education:

Monroe Beardsley	Yale University	1940-1944, 1946-1947
	Mount Holyoke College	1944-1946
	Swarthmore College	1947-1969
	Temple University	1969-1985
R.P. Blackmur	Princeton University	1940-1964
Cleanth Brooks	Louisiana State University	1932-1947
	Yale University	1947-1975
Kenneth Burke	Bennington College	1943-1961
William Empson	University of Tokyo (JPN)	1931-1934
	Peking University (CHN)	1935-1939, 1947-1952
	Sheffield University (UK)	1953-1971
F.R. Leavis	Downing College (UK)	1936-1962
John Crowe Ransom	Vanderbilt University	1914-1936
	Kenyon College	1937-1959
I.A. Richards	Magdalene College	1922-1929
	Tsing Hua University (CHN)	1929-1930
	Orthological Institute (CHN)	1936-1938
	Harvard University	1939-1963
Mark Schorer	Dartmouth College	1936-1938
	Harvard University	1939-1945
	California-Berkeley	1945-1965
Allen Tate	Southwestern College	1934-1936
	University of North Carolina	1938-1939
	Princeton University	1939-1942
	New York University	1947-1951
	University of Chicago	1949
	Harvard University	1955-1959
	University of Minnesota	1951-1968

Robert Penn Warren	Vanderbilt University	1931-1934
	Louisiana State University	1934-1942
	University of Minnesota	1942-1950
	Yale University	1950-1973
W.K. Wimsatt	Yale University	1939-1975
Yvor Winters ²⁴¹	Stanford University	1928-1966

Temple University would only create a terminal-degree creative writing program 25 years after Monroe Beardsley had departed; Louisiana State University, 40 years after Cleanth Brooks had gone and 45 years after Robert Penn Warren's tenure; Bennington College, 34 years after Kenneth Burke; Vanderbilt University, 69 years after John Crowe Ransom and 71 years after Warren; New York University and University of Minnesota, 45 and 28 years, respectively, after Allen Tate.²⁴²

By comparison, the first generation of Iowa Writers' Workshop graduates were instrumental in spreading the Iowa Model to other parts of the country. Indeed, in the 1960s, as the first generation of Workshop graduates came of age and became creative writing instructors in their own right, many moved immediately to found their own terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs. Offering just a few examples of these early Workshop graduate-founded creative writing programs serves to tell the tale better than any summary, as certain commonalities manifest in the biographies of those Workshop alumni who, at these and many other colleges, sowed the seeds for a repeat of the Iowa City phenomenon.

In the mid-1960s, three graduates of the Workshop—Donald Kaufman, Robert King, Lawrence Wyatt—were invited by a fourth, Edmund Skellings, then an Associate Professor at University of Alaska in Fairbanks and the founder of the University's undergraduate Creative Writers' Workshop, to move to Fairbanks and initiate a creative writing MFA program. The men

²⁴¹ Stanford offered a non-terminal creative writing MA between 1946 and 1988. The figure most instrumental in the creation of this MA was, by all accounts, Wallace Stegner, not Winters (see this Chapter, *infra*).

²⁴² Abramson, "Foundation Dates."

had all known one another in Iowa City, and indeed Skellings' development of a "Creative Writers' Workshop" for undergraduates in 1962 had been an idea explicitly "transplanted from the University of Iowa."²⁴³ The Creative Writers' Workshop was considered at the time both "popular and controversial"—perhaps because the readings sponsored by the Workshop often included multimedia, explicitly political content, and a light show in addition to poetry readings.²⁴⁴ As explained in a University-produced documentary,

the formal, degree-granting Workshop began as a "Monday night informal meeting of people interested in creative expression through writing poetry, fiction, and other genres. It was started in 1962 with 12 people . . . [and has] grown to include almost 60 people 'The Writer's Worksheet,' created by the writer's workshop [sic], is a mimeographed bulletin. Over 500 copies are picked up each week. Each Monday night contributions of verse, fiction, life sketches, and other writing forms in the worksheet are criticized . . . the criticism ranges from cold analysis to hot emotional expressions of life or dislike. Attendees of the workshop range from radical, bearded students from Berkeley to Alaskans just in from a summer of firefighting and Fairbanks residents of almost every occupation."²⁴⁵

Soon enough the four professors had, in addition to developing an MFA program in Fairbanks, taken their acts on the road: dubbing themselves "The Flying Poets," they flew to every corner of the state in a rented plane reading poetry to high schoolers. Their stated aim was "to show young students that literature was a living process and not the 'museum of the printed page'"—a partial rebuke to the New Critics, whose development of a specialized vocabulary for the analysis of contemporary poetry promised to democratize access to poetry at the college level, yet did little to activate further study of verse in elementary school classrooms.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Quist, 4.

²⁴⁴ *Denali Yearbook*, 15.

²⁴⁵ Quist, 4.

²⁴⁶ See "Feature Poet: Derek Burlson."

Around the same time, in 1963, Midwesterner Warren Carrier, a 1952 graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, was hired by University of Montana to chair its English department, and within just three years had initiated the nation's eighth creative writing MFA program there.²⁴⁷ As its first director he hired Earl Ganz, and as its first faculty members James Crumley and James Lee Burke—all three men having just graduated from the Workshop.²⁴⁸ In contrast to the determined regionalism that had birthed the Workshop in Iowa City, Carrier's plan to create a new graduate creative writing program in the Pacific Northwest was originally prompted by more pragmatic considerations. Writes Brady Harrison in *All Our Stories Are Here: Critical Perspectives on Montana Literature*, "Carrier's interest in the University of Montana had little to do with Montana, and nothing whatever to do with its tradition of encouraging regionalism Carrier's expansion of the department came at what turned out to be the only period when Montana's university system was prospering. Further, creative writing was a new degree that wouldn't require hefty additions to the mediocre library. A handful of new faculty was all it took."²⁴⁹

Using the discipline of German as an case study, University of California-Davis professor John Marx has noted, of the academy of the 1960s, that "grad student enrollments went up in part to address the demand for professors predicted by growing undergraduate enrollments, but undergraduate growth was not nearly fast enough to keep pace with the proliferation of PhDs. Between fall 1959 and fall 1969, total undergraduate enrollments jumped from 3.6 million to over 8 million. But a jump of 120% in enrollments didn't in itself call for an increase of over 500% in the number of PhDs in German."²⁵⁰ Marx's analysis helps explain the situation that University of

²⁴⁷ Harrison, 228.

²⁴⁸ Id., 229.

²⁴⁹ Harrison, 229.

²⁵⁰ Marx, "The 1960s Origins of the Academic Labor 'Crisis.'"

Montana and other public universities found themselves in in the mid-1960s. Due to rising undergraduate enrollments, these universities had sufficient tuition funds both to hire new faculty to initiate graduate creative writing programs, and sufficient interest among undergraduate creative writers in attending such programs—due in part to a then-realistic ambition of securing full-time employment as a professor upon graduation—to expand these programs dramatically with minimal financial risk to their founding institutions. Even so, as is noted by Harrison, the discipline of creative writing was in 1963 still new enough that its low overhead was also vital to its programmatic expansion attracting support from university administrators.²⁵¹

Yet despite Harrison’s insistence, the flourishing of creative writing in Missoula was not merely a matter of good timing, nor was it wholly removed from the belief in local storytelling that had played such a significant role at the Writers’ Workshop in the 1940s and 1950s. H.G. Merriam, who had founded the undergraduate creative writing program at University of Montana in 1929—only the second such program in the United States—did so in substantial part because his own alma mater, Harvard University, had created the first.²⁵² Merriam, “an unremitting advocate for the cause of regional literature,”²⁵³ further honored his own early writing education by insisting, as had been the case at Harvard, that creative writing faculty members at Montana teach literature as well as creative writing—a subject that in Missoula, as elsewhere, was termed “imaginative writing.”²⁵⁴ Much like the composition studies faculty at Harvard, which had exhibited such openhandedness in response to its students’ enthusiasm for creative writing, Merriam initiated at University of Montana a student literary magazine, *Frontier*, within a year of being named chair of the English department in

²⁵¹ It bears repeating that, as of 1963, only one creative writing MFA program was in operation in the United States (or, for that matter, the world): the Iowa Writers’ Workshop in Iowa City.

²⁵² *Id.*, 228.

²⁵³ *Id.*, 224.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Interestingly, this same phrase was also favored by noted creative writing critic Allen Tate.

1919.²⁵⁵ The magazine published student, local, regional, and some national authors: Dorothy Johnson, Wallace Stegner, and Bud Guthrie (winner of the 1950 Pulitzer Prize) received some of their earliest publications in the pages of *Frontier*.²⁵⁶

Frontier, much like Merriam's other writing initiatives at Montana—including the Montana Institute of the Arts (1948) and a host of summer literary conferences throughout the 1940s—was reflexive about generating, from whole cloth, a “recognized community of interest” around “imaginative writing.”²⁵⁷ In this respect it was not only Merriam's regional emphasis that was particularly symptomatic of the Program Era—and, later, conducive to Carrier's creation of an MFA in Missoula in 1967—but also his belief that educational programming was uniquely capable of generating writing communities where previously there had been none. Indeed, as had been the case in Iowa City in the 1930s, Merriam's sour attitude toward the cultural hegemony of writing communities in New York City and California was a substantial impetus behind his curricular innovations. As he would write in 1946, even as tens of thousands of American G.I.'s were reintegrating themselves into the American academy via the G.I. Bill,

many Westerners know that the Northwest economic pattern is tied to the control of the East, making our region a semi-colony and ourselves only a little more than colonists. Leadership in the Northwest, backed by the people's support and will, could and should break the pattern. The Northwest has been like a young giant in serfdom so busy getting pioneer jobs done that he has not noticed his boss and the conditions of his labor. Like many Westerners, I want the young giant to rise and declare his freedom.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Harrison, 225.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

Merriam's militaristic metaphor was not only historically well-timed, but also geared toward a desire for self-empowerment that made creative writing in Missoula seem not only a strike against cultural irrelevancy but also a call to arms rooted in regional pride. This may explain, in part, the substantial enrollment gains achieved by the creative writing program at Montana in mid-century, though other factors having little to do with academia—such as the fact that up until the spring of 1970, American college students could avoid the Vietnam War draft lottery with a student deferment—likely played a role as well. Whereas Richard Hugo reported only eleven students enrolled in graduate creative writing courses when the first such courses were offered in Missoula in 1964, by 1969, just two years after the formal institution of an creative writing MFA program there, more than two hundred students were enrolled.²⁵⁹

At University of Massachusetts-Amherst, where the nation's second creative writing MFA was founded in 1964, poet Joseph Langland, a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, sought to recreate the educational environment that he had experienced in Iowa City in the early 1940s. Like many other early MFA program coordinators, he had not only studied but taught creative writing at University of Iowa, spending a brief stint there as a part-time instructor between 1946 and 1948. Also like other early pioneers of the Program Era, his own roots were located, at least partially, in the Midwest: he was born in Minnesota, grew up in Iowa, and after teaching at University of Iowa spent eleven years on the faculty at University of Wyoming.²⁶⁰ It has been said of Langland that “the background of much of his poetry was the American Midwest, the farmlands of Iowa where he spent his youth and later [the West], the mountainous country of Wyoming.”²⁶¹ As with others who attended the Writers' Workshop in its early years, Langland had found in Iowa City a level of

²⁵⁹ Harrison, 228.

²⁶⁰ See “Obituary: Joseph Langland, Noted Poet, Longtime Professor.”

²⁶¹ “Iowans in the Arts: Joseph Langland,” 513.

support and encouragement that been unavailable to him during his rural upbringing. As he told an interviewer in 1977, “I think my father admired the profession of poetry but I cannot remember that he ever praised anything I was writing in my teens. As he told me—and this was fairly standard conduct in that area then—if you do well, that is expected of you; if you don’t, I’ll tell you.”²⁶² Nor were Langland’s neighbors much more enthusiastic: “As for the rural community generally,” Langland recalls, “the writing of poetry was an aberration which was O.K. if you were proficient in other accepted activities such as farm work, sports, and orthodox school work. If my writing of poetry had been dependent upon community approbation and encouragement, it would have ceased long ago.”²⁶³ And yet Langland would find approbation and encouragement in Iowa City. More importantly, he found there both an interest in excellence and a suspicion of ostentatiousness that would resonate with the middle-class, Midwestern values of his childhood. Of his childhood Langland recalls, “I certainly was never encouraged to think of myself as much different from anyone else, and I seldom did.”²⁶⁴

In the Writers’ Workshop of the early 1940s, at that time still populated primarily by small town Midwesterners, Langland was able to engage the same artistic inclinations that had long been part of Northeastern culture without leaving behind the values and principles that made the Midwest home. According to Langland, “University of Iowa, in 1938 and on, was a marvelous cultural community with more stimulation than any young man could profitably use. I think of Midwesterners as being fairly straightforward, often blunt, sometimes bland, generally honest and dependable, mistrusting both ‘wit’ and ‘airs.’”²⁶⁵ While much the same has at times been said of the

²⁶² *Id.*, at 518.

²⁶³ “Iowans in the Arts: Joseph Langland,” 518.

²⁶⁴ *Id.*, 520.

²⁶⁵ *Id.*, 522.

poetry produced by the early creative writing workshops, one can see in Langland's experience of Iowa the regional pride and commitment to community that prompted his founding of the Program for Poets & Writers in Amherst in 1964.²⁶⁶

Similar stories can be told about the progenitors of other early MFA programs, for instance at University of Oregon (whose graduate creative writing program was founded in 1964), University of Arkansas (1965), and Cornell University (1967). The program at Oregon was founded by novelist James B. Hall, who was born and educated in the Midwest (Midland, Ohio and Miami University of Ohio) and then—after serving, like Langland, in the infantry in World War II—attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop in the late 1940s. Hall's teaching career prior to his arrival at University of Oregon had taken him through several of the early Program Era institutions: University of Iowa, Cornell University, University of North Carolina-Greensboro, and University of British Columbia in Vancouver.²⁶⁷ The latter three institutions would create MFA programs in the first three years of the Program Era.

Meanwhile, a novelist teaching at University of Arkansas, William Harrison, would found a creative writing program in Fayetteville with the assistance of the poet James Whitehead, who like Harrison had attended the Writers' Workshop.²⁶⁸ Harrison, born in Texas and educated in Tennessee and North Carolina, is perhaps the best example of an Iowa Writers' Workshop graduate sufficiently inspired by the culture and curriculum there to recreate it elsewhere with almost alarming alacrity; the novelist attended the Workshop from 1961 to 1962, less than twenty-four months

²⁶⁶ Though he spent a total of 56 years living in New York City, San Francisco, Chicago, Seattle, Vancouver, London, Oslo, and Rome, Langland would say in 1977 that "I still think of myself as being rural and 'small-town' in my basic orientation." *Id.*, 523.

²⁶⁷ The program in Vancouver was founded in 1965.

²⁶⁸ See "William Harrison, Author, Founder of Creative Writing Program, Dies at 79."

before initiating a push to bring a graduate creative writing program to Arkansas.²⁶⁹ While the story of Cornell's entry into the ranks of MFA-granting institutions is less dramatic—after all, the University had already established a non-terminal creative writing MA in 1948—it nevertheless underscores how institutions which had long flirted with creative writing as a serious, degree-worthy enterprise were moved to take the next obvious step once terminal-degree MFA programs had been established in Greensboro, Amherst, Missoula, and Fayetteville.²⁷⁰

While most of the MFA programs founded during the Program Era's first decade were direct institutional descendants of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, one—University of North Carolina at Greensboro, which, alongside UMass-Amherst, became the first creative writing MFA program outside Iowa City when it was founded in 1964—was the result of that alternative strain of institutional writing instruction that ran through both the non-terminal MA degrees of the 1950s and the hybrid “poet-critic” sensibilities of the New Critics. Still, even the program at UNCG was only indirectly the result of New Critical philosophies.

While Allen Tate had taught at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill in the 1930s, it would take nearly three decades more—and the creation of a new institution within North Carolinian higher education—for creative writing to become “formalized” within the state's educational system.²⁷¹ As noted by the current promotional materials for the UNCG MFA program, it took “circumstance, inspiration, and dedication” for North Carolina to follow University of Iowa's lead and treat creative writing as an academic discipline eligible for terminal-degree graduate study. The circumstance in question was the founding of University of North Carolina-Greensboro in 1964, an event provoked by state legislation renaming and relocating what had previously been

²⁶⁹ Ibid.; see also “William Harrison, 79, Novelist and ‘Rollerball’ Author, Dies.”

²⁷⁰ Menand, “Show or Tell: Should Creative Writing Be Taught?”

²⁷¹ See “The MFA Program: The History.”

North Carolina's foremost women's college. As a new coeducational institution, University of North Carolina-Greensboro needed to offer graduate degrees to survive. In deciding to offer an MFA in creative writing, the university conceded curricular space to a discipline that even its own present-day promotional materials concede was, at least in 1964, considered "vaguely suspicious and perhaps a downright sham, both by the Academy and by many writers."²⁷²

Three mid-1960s faculty hires at UNCG—poets Fred Chappell and Robert Watson and novelist Peter Taylor—were charged with developing the new writing program in Greensboro. While Chappell was a graduate of Duke University, Taylor had been an itinerant student who had studied under both Allen Tate at Southwestern College and John Crowe Ransom at Kenyon College. Watson had attended Johns Hopkins University during the mid-1950s period in which the school was creating its non-terminal MA in Creative Writing. Says Chappell of the experience of creating the program at UNCG, "We had plenty of misgivings, to be honest. We didn't want to pit writers against one another in a heated, competitive environment. But we also didn't want some sort of 'magic wand' program, in which we handed out graduate degrees for 'signs of poetic sensitivity.'"²⁷³ These concerns about the formal study of "creative writing" echoed those voiced by Tate himself—indeed, in that same year, 1964—in his essay "What Is Creative Writing?"²⁷⁴ Tate's contention that "[n]obody can be academically certified in an art which, in its very essence, is not subject to the objective discipline that the scholar passes on from one generation to another" reflected a then-common view within the academy.²⁷⁵ Indeed, when, in 1957, Vladimir Nabokov had been proposed for a Chair in Literature at Harvard—having, at that point, not only published *Lolita* to great

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ See "The MFA Program: The History."

²⁷⁴ Tate, 102.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

controversy and acclaim but also taught for seven years at Wellesley College and almost a decade at Cornell—Roman Jakobson, a noted scholar and professor of Slavic Studies at Harvard, famously objected to the appointment by opining to McGeorge Bundy, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, “Even if one allows that he is an important writer, are we next to invite an elephant to be Professor of Zoology?”²⁷⁶

The view that working writers might not be suited to teaching writing to others, if indeed creative writing was to be taught in the academy at all, in part animated Tate’s critique of the discipline as well. Tate, like Chappell, was concerned about the academic rigor of creative writing as a discipline; along with both Jakobson and Chappell, he fretted too about the possibility of a program issuing degrees not for genuine skill but merely for poetic inclination. Tate had famously observed in “What Is Creative Writing?” that “the academically certified Creative Writer goes out to teach Creative Writing, and produces other Creative Writers who are not writers, but who produce still other Creative Writers who are not writers.”²⁷⁷

Chappell and his peers consequently took a different tack in justifying their decision to introduce the programmatic study of creative writing to the curriculum at University of North Carolina-Greensboro. “Our aim,” says Chappell, “was to build a community of writers. We wanted to give students not just time to write, but to have the types of conversations that only happen when you’re around other writers.”²⁷⁸ In keeping with this principle—one originally derived in Iowa City in the 1930s—Robert Watson would in 1966 create, along with graduate student Lawrence Judson Reynolds, a new literary magazine at UNCG, the *Greensboro Review*. The new magazine gave UNCG students an opportunity to discuss and publish their own work outside of class. Even today, the

²⁷⁶ Baena, “Nabokov and Jakobson.”

²⁷⁷ Tate, 183.

²⁷⁸ See “The MFA Program: The History.”

emphasis at UNCG is not on treating creative writing as an academic discipline with its own unique and comprehensive pedagogy, as in fact students are required to take substantial academic coursework in addition to their workshop requirements. Rather, it is on the same community-oriented activism that was simultaneously surfacing in Montana and Alaska in the mid-1960s. “Workshops and academic classes provide the core of the experience [at UNCG],” announces the program’s welcome video for prospective students, “but students and graduates will tell you that the time outside of class, spent working on their own and interacting with other students and with faculty, matters just as much.”²⁷⁹

Creative Writing As a Byproduct of Regional Subcultures

Identifying the regional enthusiasms and sociopolitical circumstances that helped create the Program Era’s early-adopter institutions is particularly key, as a minority report has lately emerged tying the birth throes of the Era to a far more clandestine source: the massive intelligence apparatus of the United States government. Eric Bennett, a professor at Providence College, argues in his book *Workshops of Empire* that two early programs in particular—the MFA program in Iowa City and the non-terminal MA at Stanford University founded by Wallace Stegner in 1946—were funded in part by propagandists within the U.S. government who believed, against any evidence to the contrary, that creative writing could be instrumental in helping America defeat Communism. As noted by the *New York Times* in its review of Bennett’s treatise, “creative-writing programs during the postwar period taught aspiring authors certain rules of propriety. Good literature, students learned, contains ‘sensations, not doctrines; experiences, not dogmas; memories, not philosophies.’ The goal, according to Bennett, was to discourage the abstract theorizing and systemic social

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

critiques to which the radical literature of the 1930s had been prone, in favor of a focus on the personal, the concrete and the individual.”²⁸⁰

Perhaps more germane to Bennett’s argument is a clear association between at least one type of government funding—the G.I. Bill—and the uptick in creative writing study that was observed in the years immediately following World War II. While certainly not the “surge in creative-writing degree programs” some have alleged,²⁸¹ as in fact only four graduate creative writing programs of any stripe were founded in the late 1940s, it is true that Title II of the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 provided four years of tuition-free undergraduate or graduate study for veterans, and that some of these former soldiers used graduate creative writing programs as a means to process, in poetry or fiction, the particulars of their overseas service.²⁸² While Louis Menand has associated this influx of funds earmarked for “degree-granting” programs—all told, a larger government expenditure than the Marshall Plan, and one taken advantage of by more than two million veterans by 1950—with the transition of creative writing from a non-degreed to a degreed course of study, the fact that no terminal-degree creative writing programs were created in the United States until nearly two decades after the Paris peace treaties were signed belies this claim.²⁸³

As for Bennett’s more salacious thesis, it is complicated both by the presence of undergraduate creative writing programs at a number of universities prior to World War II—indeed, several of the earliest MFA programs were mere extensions of existing curricular structures, rather

²⁸⁰ Aubry, “Workshops of Empire” (internal quotations from Bennett).

²⁸¹ Menand, “Show or Tell: Should Creative Writing Be Taught?”

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.* However, the influx of undergraduate GIs may well have swelled the ranks of students entering undergraduate creative writing courses across the country. This particular topic lies outside the scope of this study in all but one respect: though a hypothetical influx of GIs into undergraduate creative writing classrooms did not, in the event, create many new undergraduate degree programs in the 1940s or 1950s, it did help stir an on-campus interest in creative writing that would later manifest in GI Bill-funded WWII veterans attending MFA programs and founding new ones in the 1960s.

than new programming born of external impositions—as well as the fact that most of the universities that participated in the first stage of the Program Era did so only upon the hire of an Iowa Writers’ Workshop graduate as faculty. While these hires did create a traceable historical linkage between the Workshop in Iowa City and graduate creative writing programs founded elsewhere, this linkage was quite evidently personal rather than ideological. There is little sign that any presumed political agenda held by teachers or administrators at the Workshop was systematically delivered *in situ* to its graduates—nor that any of these faculty and staff stridently deviated from a classroom pedagogy whose general contours had been laid down before they themselves were born, and molded many years before Hitler’s Beer Hall Putsch or the rise of Stalin.²⁸⁴ Indeed, Bennett’s argument is not so much that the Workshop exported anti-Communist propaganda under the guise of a writing pedagogy that had existed since the 1880s, but rather that those leading the institution were complicit in promoting, in workshop critiques, “a vision for literature that in their minds might help save the free world from totalitarianism or destruction . . . [and] inoculate the citizenry against fearsome ideologies, heal the spiritual wounds of catastrophic global warfare, and forestall or prevent a third world war.”²⁸⁵ Whatever the aesthetic, political, and aesthetic-political motivations of these men who, by and large, had been born in the late nineteenth century and had not fought in World War II, the fact that so many of their GI Bill-funded students in the 1950s and 1960s had indeed fought Nazism and imperialism in Europe and Asia suggests that some number did develop, as war veterans, both an organic need to self-assess and some deep-set personal political convictions.

In short, the early years of the Program Era were defined by the exertions of individual personalities, whether or not large infusions of “dark” money from Big Government proxies aided

²⁸⁴ Loren Glass, a professor of English at University of Iowa, recently initiated a long-term project to chart these linkages between the early decades of the Writers’ Workshop and creative writing programs founded elsewhere. Entitled “Year One,” the project aims not only to emphasize the influential nature of the Workshop, but also to trace the discipline’s trajectory in the critical years between 1950 and 1970. See generally, Glass, *Year One*.

²⁸⁵ Bennett, 1.

one or more of the institutions at which these personalities finally made their mark. Were there evidence that men like Paul Engle, Wallace Stegner, and John Berryman fundamentally changed the trajectory of creative writing in America—rather than merely being three of the scores of American writers who shepherded the discipline through a period of expansion prompted by the G.I. Bill, relative domestic prosperity, rising rates of college attendance, and the increasing visibility of pedigreed authors (owing to several decades of Workshop graduates finding national markets for their work)—Bennett’s Great Man Theory of creative writing would be more persuasive.²⁸⁶ While individual writers and educators were, as this history notes, influential in spreading creative writing to selected American institutions of higher learning in the 1950s and 1960s, this influence was mainly felt in the decision by these men and women to seek full-time employment in the field in which they’d been trained and, secondarily, in their willingness to replicate at their new institutions a decades-old pedagogy they’d first encountered in Iowa—not in any consequential alteration to creative writing’s broader pedagogical outline. Indeed, one through-line of this history is how little amendment was made to creative writing pedagogy between the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Bennett’s finding that Paul Engle was irreplaceably essential to the founding of the Writers’ Workshop—which, given Engle’s biography, offered significant grist for Bennett’s theories regarding anti-Communist political intrigue in Iowa City—is intriguing but finally as incomplete as Jed Rasula’s observation that Norman Foerster, a New Critical sympathizer, was the “final *persona* in the development of creative writing.”²⁸⁷ While Foerster’s presence and role at University of Iowa around the time of the founding of the Writers’ Workshop provides a historical linkage between the New Criticism and creative writing, as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, audiologist Wilbur Schramm and

²⁸⁶ I refer here to a theory advanced primarily by Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle in the 1840s, which held that “the history of the world is but the biography of great men.” See generally Carlyle, *Selected Writings*.

²⁸⁷ Bennett, 6; Rasula, 438.

rural Nebraskan Edwin Ford Piper were laying the essential groundwork for the Writers' Workshop years before the Russian Revolution of 1917. Men like Engle and Wallace Stegner may well have played key roles in bringing programmatic creative writing instruction to Iowa City and Palo Alto, but as figures in a disciplinary history of creative writing they are secondary or even tertiary as compared to their predecessors in Massachusetts, Nebraska, and turn-of-the-century Iowa.

As for Stegner's work at Stanford, it must be distinguished from that of other Program Era pioneers by virtue of it resulting, by Stegner's own design, in only an MA program rather than MFA.²⁸⁸ Stegner's students were thus being prepared far more robustly for doctoral study and, thereafter, a life of scholarship than they were for national fame as culturally influential authors. Between 1946, when Stanford's Creative Writing Program was founded with just "a handful of master's degree students and three Writing Fellows," and 1988, when the master's degree was terminated and the fellowship program expanded, many authors of note graduated from the Program—most of them fiction-writers.²⁸⁹ Of those graduates of either the master's program or the fellowship program who are primarily known as poets, the University denominates Philip Levine, Wendell Berry, and Robert Pinsky as the most notable; Levine received a Stegner Fellowship in 1957, Berry in 1958, and Pinsky in 1965.²⁹⁰ Only Pinsky matriculated at Stanford as part of the University's non-terminal master's degree program, graduating from it in 1964. Indeed, of the 100 poets who received an M.A. degree in poetry at Stanford between 1946 and 1988, only three—

²⁸⁸ See fn. 1 for more information on this study's varying treatment of the M.A. and MFA degrees in creative writing. Also worth noting here is that Stegner was a graduate of the creative writing program at University of Iowa, a fact that suggests that his decision to institute an M.A. at Stanford rather than an MFA was a conscious one. Just so, Stanford's 1988 decision to terminate its M.A. track in favor of a non-degree fellowship program was likewise an acknowledgment of the gulf—quite often in perception, if only sometimes in curriculum—that then existed between the M.A. and MFA degrees in creative writing. By 1988, stiff competition from the then-ascendant MFA degree had made the maintenance of a creative writing M.A. degree at Stanford (and at many other colleges and universities as well) untenable.

²⁸⁹ See "History of the Stanford Creative Writing Program."

²⁹⁰ See "Complete List of Stegner Fellows."

Pinsky, Donald Hall, and Erica Funkhouser—would go on to enjoy national renown in the genre.²⁹¹ This may be in part because, while the Stegner Fellowship has for decades been the most selective post-MFA fellowship in the United States—it currently accepts less than 0.5% of applicants²⁹²—beginning in the mid-1960s Stanford’s M.A. program was competing with MFA degrees at other institutions. The latter degrees were more likely to offer teaching assistantships and, once the MFA became the terminal degree in creative writing in 1979, ensured the critical feature of terminality.²⁹³

The above notwithstanding, there’s reason to believe that Wallace Stegner was not unduly concerned with the modest success of his M.A. program’s graduates. He often wrote, most notably in his 1950 essay “Writing As Graduate Study,” that the real purpose of the M.A. in creative writing was not so much to prepare students to be scholars but to prepare them to teach freshman composition courses once hired at a college or university.²⁹⁴ This preparation, at the M.A. at Stanford, came not in the form teaching assistantships, but from the mere fact that, for M.A. matriculants and Writing Fellows alike, “the practice of writing is one of the better ways to understand literature; even more directly, it is the best way to understand the problems of expression which will occupy so much of the young teacher’s time.”²⁹⁵ Nevertheless, wrote Stegner, “I see no imperative reason for a writer’s getting *any* degrees beyond the B.A.” (emphasis added)—perhaps

²⁹¹ Several others, such as Turner Cassity, would go on to publish significantly and develop a regional reputation. While one would not normally expect a creative writing program chosen at random to produce a long roster of nationally renowned poets, it should be remembered that during the 42-year period that Stanford offered the M.A. degree in creative writing it was one of only ten graduate degrees in the discipline for 25 years (1946 to 1971), and one of only a few dozen such programs between 1972 and 1988. Moreover, the lengthy list of Stegner Fellowship recipients who went on to substantial success in poetry during this same period offers a stark contrast, suggesting that while the Fellowship Program was always (and continues to be) relatively selective, the M.A. program may not have been so. *Ibid.*

²⁹² See “Prestigious Fellowship Brings Top Writers to Stanford.”

²⁹³ Fenza, “Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing.”

²⁹⁴ Ritter, 288.

²⁹⁵ Stegner, 429.

another reason that Stanford's degree-granting creative writing program lasted only a dozen years after AWP's announcement of the MFA as the terminal degree in the discipline.²⁹⁶

However dubious the premise that America's creative writers helped win the Cold War, the creative work produced by the Program Era's early adherents surely produced a measurable effect within American culture, if primarily within the American literary community. Determining the nature of this effect is difficult, however, as graduate poetry programs and fiction programs have historically exhibited not only categorically different inputs but also widely divergent outputs. The stylistic conservatism focused upon by both Bennett and McGurl in the context of graduate fiction programs is less evidently a discrete product of graduate poetry programs. This is not because these programs produced the opposite effect in their students during the 1960s and 1970s—that is, a radicalization of their relationships with poetic form—but rather because the literary magazines of the day had already become well-established purveyors of conventional verse by the time a handful of new MFA programs graduated their first classes in 1967. While the early years of the Program Era may not have allayed these tendencies, there is also no evidence beyond the anecdotal to suggest that they exacerbated them.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 7: The Creative Writing Boom of the 1990s

The second boom in creative writing program creation began in the early 1990s and continues to the present day. It therefore has coincided with the internet boom—the reasons for which we need not struggle to imagine. The popularization of the Internet in the early to mid-1990s permitted widespread awareness of, and access to, the first-ever nationally disseminated rankings of graduate creative writing programs, published by *U.S. News & World Report* in 1997 (see Chapter 8).²⁹⁷ Also, regular access to the Internet for the nation’s aspiring literati made it possible for younger poets and writers to research potential program placements online; previously, it had been difficult to aggregate writing program information outside specialty publications distributed by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP). While AWP has worked diligently on its outreach programs for younger writers since its founding in 1967, it remains an organization whose first contact with writers often comes only once these writers have already matriculated at an undergraduate or graduate writing program. Added to these inducements for prospective MFA students in the 1990s was the fact that, at the time, the current job market crisis in the humanities was still in its early throes, and the relatively new terminality of the MFA degree—announced by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs in 1979, but not commonplace knowledge among undergraduates until the mid-1980s at the earliest—meant that a “terminal degree in creative writing” might still have seemed like a “professional” degree of sorts. Coupled with a booming economy, indeed a fast-growing “virtual” economy that appeared to place a premium on innovative content-creation, the financial risk of a graduate degree in the fine arts may well have seemed much lower in the 1990s than it seems to many today. More broadly, the 1990s saw the proliferation and popularization of fields of study initially the result of political and cultural movements in the late

²⁹⁷ See “Official MFA Rankings in Creative Writing.” A previous ranking was conducted by George Garrett in 1993, for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, but had no definable methodology other than the personal opinion of its author.

1960s—for instance, African-American Studies, American Studies, Asian-American Studies, and Women’s Studies—many of which emerging spheres in academia explicitly encouraged, as did and does creative writing, new modes of inquiry relating to subjectivity, identity, cultural integration, and the exploration of marginalized histories.

Unfortunately, little has yet been written about this second boom in program creation, in large part because the only histories of creative writing as a discipline now available were published before the timing, scope, and significance of this ongoing boom could be appreciated.²⁹⁸ Present explanations for the sudden expansion of the discipline in the early 1990s and thereafter risk not only the imprecision that comes with a lack of remove, but also the usual obscurations of any ill-defined critical lens.

The scores of colleges and universities that created new graduate creative writing programs in the 1990s were responding to not just a broader economic and academic climate but also financial, administrative, and historical stimuli particular to each institution. The timing and scope of the boom is therefore best determined using reliable hard data such as the rate of program creation both before and after 1990, the rate of program creation in the 1990s and the two succeeding decades, and the geographic and curricular diversity of the programs created during the last quarter-century. As for the significance of the current boom to both the discipline of creative writing and its capacity to influence American literary art, much of it can be surmised from the curricular case studies and longitudinal analyses of new programs’ geographic placement that naturally follow from these hard data. As has been the case throughout this history, our primary focus here is on graduate

²⁹⁸ See, e.g., Myers, *The Elephants Teach* (1996), and Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction in American Colleges* (1993).

creative writing programs; the popularization of undergraduate programs in creative writing is briefly discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.²⁹⁹

Understanding the scope of the second major advance in creative writing as a discipline requires consideration, first, of the sluggish pace of program creation prior to 1990—especially when compared to graduate study in other disciplines—and the remarkably rapid pace of program creation thereafter. As disciplinary historian Kelly Ritter has noted, “while doctoral studies has experienced a comparative stagnation [since 1975], due to an unsure job market in academia and a general decline in funding for less visible or financially profitable Ph.D. programs—such as those in religious studies, philosophy, and, more recently, American Studies—the MFA in creative writing is, and historically has been, one of the fastest growing graduate specializations in the humanities in the United States.”³⁰⁰ Whereas in 1993 the National Research Council, the leading government organization charged with assessing graduate programs in the United States, identified 69 programs in Anthropology, 38 in Art History, 44 in Comparative Literature, 127 in English, 111 in History, 65 in Music, 71 in Philosophy, and 38 in Religion, in 2010 the NRC identified 82 programs in Anthropology (an increase of 18% over 1993), 58 programs in Art History (+53%), 46 in Comparative Literature (+4%), 122 in English (-4%), 138 in History (+24%), 63 in Music (-3%), 90 in Philosophy (+27%), and 40 in Religion (+5%).³⁰¹ Over this same time-span, the number of terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs rose from 87 to 228—an increase of 262%.³⁰²

The discipline of creative writing has enjoyed a meteoric rise over the last three decades even when compared to “professional” graduate programs with both a built-in post-graduate job market

²⁹⁹ See pg. 29.

³⁰⁰ Ritter, 18.

³⁰¹ See “NRC Rankings in Each of 41 Areas” and “September 2010 Data Tables.”

³⁰² Abramson, “Foundation Dates”; AWP, “Growth of Creative Writing Programs.”

and a long history—as is not the case in creative writing—of demanding prior academic training for all its practitioners. Yet it is clear, too, that data supporting Ritter’s view that “the MFA in creative writing is, and historically has been, one of the fastest growing graduate specializations in the Humanities” only emerges in the 1990s; for much of the 20th century the discipline of creative writing was a marginal one in academia.

While the fields of medicine and creative writing are distinct in any number of ways—for instance, as to the market demand for doctors rather than poets and the different data we might expect to see for each of medicine’s many specializations—comparing the growth of medical schools to that of graduate creative writing programs is useful for precisely this reason. Even taking into account just comparisons between the immediate utility of medical instruction and writing instruction, in view of the 87 medical schools in operation and the 7,500 newly minted doctors entering the American workforce each year by 1960, the total number of terminal degree-holders in the literary arts was strikingly few. Indeed, by 1960, nearly a quarter-century after would-be authors first began receiving terminal graduate degrees for their writing, creative writing could boast but one terminal program to medicine’s 87; where medicine was sending 7,500 terminal-degreed doctors into the workforce per year, creative writing (under the exclusive aegis of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop) was producing annually no more than fifty terminal-degreed poets and writers. Between 1936 and 1960, both aspiring doctors and aspiring authors could receive terminal graduate-level training; while nearly 200,000 future doctors took advantage of this opportunity, only slightly more than a thousand American authors did.³⁰³

In the 1960s and 1970s, the number of medical schools in the United States increased by nearly 50%, with 40 new programs founded in large part thanks to the Health Professions Assistance Act of 1963, which allocated federal monies for the founding of additional medical

³⁰³ Whitcomb, 5.

schools and the expansion of student bodies at current ones.³⁰⁴ And so by 1980 there were not only 127 medical schools in the United States, but an ever-increasing cohort size at many of them. If the number of medical schools increased by an impressive 46% between 1960 and 1980, the total annual enrollment in such programs increased by an even more striking 213%, from 7,500 to 16,000.³⁰⁵ Meanwhile, as programmatic creative writing at the graduate level entered its sixth decade, there were still fewer than two dozen terminal-degree creative writing programs in the United States, with all of these—in sum—graduating an estimated 500 poets and writers per year.³⁰⁶ As late as 1988, no nonfiction writing program had graduated a single class of students, and only two colleges in the U.S., Warren Wilson College and the Vermont College of Fine Arts, offered low-residency graduate-school options for creative writing students.³⁰⁷ While many critical of the Program Era would deem these low graduate totals entirely appropriate, particularly in comparison to hard data in the medical field, the slow pace of creative writing's early evolution is noteworthy in part because of the dramatic growth of the discipline in the 21st century.

The expansion in the number of law schools in the United States between 1960 and 1980 also provides a contrast to the state of creative writing as a discipline at that point in its evolution. At the time of the founding of the Writers' Workshop in 1936, there were already 139 law schools operating nationally.³⁰⁸ While it may appear to be comparing apples and oranges to trace the spread

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Id., 7.

³⁰⁶ Abramson, "Foundation Dates"; AWP, "Annual Survey of Creative Writing Programs." Generally speaking, graduate creative writing programs that offer only poetry and fiction tracks split their incoming admission spots 50/50, meaning that approximately 250 poets would have been receiving terminal degrees annually by the end of 1979. This figure must be reduced slightly, however, owing to the fact that three of the 22 terminal-degree writing programs in the U.S. in 1979 had yet to graduate even a single class of students. As for nonfiction students, the Iowa Nonfiction Writers' Workshop, the first terminal-degree program of its kind, would not be founded until 1986.

³⁰⁷ MFA Research Project, "Foundation Dates."

³⁰⁸ ABA, "Statistics."

of creative writing programs alongside that of law schools, at the time Emerson coined the term “creative writing” at Harvard in 1832—urging, moreover, that it become part of the standard university curriculum—there were but five law schools in the United States.³⁰⁹ While the law and creative writing are very different disciplines, and occupy largely distinct places in the intellectual and financial marketplaces of America, we can nevertheless note how readily graduate study in the former was popularized, and compare this popularization to the relatively slow growth of “creative writing” as an academic discipline. Indeed, even with the emergence of terminal-degree writing programs outside of Iowa City in the 1960s, the legal profession’s profile in the academy continued to grow well beyond that of creative writing between 1960 and 1980. Whereas only 16 full-residency, terminal-degree writing programs were founded and graduated even a single class of students between 1960 and 1980, as to law schools this figure was 43.³¹⁰

There are many possible reasons for the sluggish growth of creative writing in the three decades prior to 1990, though as yet no comprehensive survey of this period in the history of the discipline has been written. The hostility of some English scholars to the discipline, as exemplified by Allen Tate’s 1964 critique of its intellectual cohesion and rigor, as well as the lack of any foothold among the most highly ranked colleges and universities—even today, nearly 70% of the top twenty-five national universities according to *U.S. News and World Report* do not host a terminal-degree writing program—certainly could not have helped a young discipline gain broader acceptance and esteem in the academy.³¹¹ Nor could the discipline point to a discrete body of literature in support of its claim to a place in higher education. No history of the discipline was available until D.G. Myers’ 1996 *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880*, and Myers himself noted ruefully in 2012 that,

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ See “National Universities: Top 25 for 2015.” Of the eight Top 25 universities that do have terminal-degree writing programs, three (the programs at Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, and Vanderbilt) were founded in 2004 or later.

with respect to his seminal history of the discipline, “I’ve never come across it in a bookstore.”³¹² As for the scholarly study of creative writing pedagogy, as recently as 2013 Manhattanville College was billing its conference on “Critical Pedagogy and the Creative Writing Workshop” as among the first of its kind, with the conference’s stated aim being to “establish[] frameworks for the development of a critical creative writing pedagogy...”³¹³

While careful studies of disciplinary pedagogy might be expected to follow, rather than precede, the firm establishment of a discipline within academic culture, that the gap between creative writing projects appearing in the classrooms of leading American educational institutions and those institutions producing even a modest body of scholarship considering how best to engineer and execute such projects should be well over a century is surprising. According to a 2010 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, while the journal did offer “discussion groups” within its pages on “imaginative writing” (from 1954 to 1973) and “creative writing” (from 1955 to 1970) in college freshman writing curricula, these groups produced little scholarship on the subject.³¹⁴ Douglas Hesse, writing in 2010, observed that “there is . . . [a] relative absence of theoretical/pedagogical writing about creative writing, especially by writers themselves—in *any* venue, let alone in composition journals . . . That has changed in recent years, but writers historically have viewed it somewhere between foolish and tawdry to say anything useful and broad about the status or pedagogy of creative writing. That dismissal stems from beliefs that real writers should be doing real writing rather than ‘merely’ writing about writing.”³¹⁵

³¹² See generally, Myers, *The Elephants Teach*. See also Myers, “The Books I’ve Stolen.”

³¹³ See “Critical Pedagogy and the Creative Writing Workshop.”

³¹⁴ It should be noted, here, that scholarship on the teaching of composition did not experience its own “boom” until the 1980s. Even so, within the context of the still-burgeoning body of composition studies scholarship that existed between 1955 and 1980, discussions of creative writing barely registered.

³¹⁵ Hesse, 36. Emphasis in original; internal citations omitted.

Although a number of books on creative writing pedagogy have now been written, nearly all were published this century.³¹⁶ Moreover, while the first ranking of creative writing programs was published in 1993 (see Chapter 8), it was distributed to a narrow readership and was self-admittedly incomplete.³¹⁷ The first comprehensive and widely disseminated ranking of graduate creative writing programs would not be published until 1997, by *U.S. News & World Report*.³¹⁸ Without published rankings, a vibrant scholarly discourse, widespread and reliable peer support in university English programs, or a significant presence in the most talked-about American universities—and without the internet to assist aspiring poets and writers hoping to learn more about programmatic options within the discipline, or even the popularity of the discipline generally among their college-going peers—it is not difficult to understand why programmatic creative writing at the graduate level was still in a nascent state in 1990.

Reasons for the sudden increase in graduate creative writing programs in 1990s and 2000s might include a booming national economy for most of this period; the natural feedback loop of disciplinary expansion, in which more graduate programs in a given academic field means a more robust job market for those who graduate from such programs and wish to teach at the college level; significant economy-driven increases in undergraduate enrollment, thus more tuition dollars for colleges and universities, thus more money to create the fully funded MFA programs that by the late 1990s had proven themselves better able to draw talented applicants and faculty; a stagnation in English doctoral program creation, and thus less call for the Ph.D.-preparatory creative writing M.A. and more for the terminal-degree MFA; and, at those universities without the ability to fully fund a

³¹⁶ See, e.g., Leahy, *Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom* (2005); May, *Doing Creative Writing* (2007); Ritter and Vanderslice, *Can It Really Be Taught? Resisting Lore in Creative Writing Pedagogy* (2007); Vanderslice, *Rethinking Creative Writing* (2011); and Drew and Rein, *Dispatches from the Classroom* (2012).

³¹⁷ See Chapter 8 for an additional discussion of this topic.

³¹⁸ See “Official MFA Rankings in Creative Writing.”

creative writing MFA, the ability to use ever-increasing graduate creative writing program enrollments to keep otherwise struggling English department budgets in the black.³¹⁹

Although a tally conducted by AWP concluded, in 1994, that there were 139 *non-terminal* graduate programs in creative writing by that year, this figure is misleading for several reasons. Many of the programs identified by AWP in 1994 were in truth English degrees which simply took a permissive approach to coursework in creative writing, and thus offered little that was different (at least as a matter of curricular and course-credit structure) from the coursework English graduate students at Harvard had been permitted to complete in the early 1880s. Moreover, the non-terminal master's degrees these programs conferred were not accompanied by a commensurately large number of opportunities for doctoral study within the discipline; fewer than thirty creative writing Ph.D. programs existed in 1994, many admitting only one or two students per year, and as late as 1991 fewer than five individuals in the United States were receiving a doctoral degree in creative writing in any given year.³²⁰ Finally, of the 139 non-terminal graduate writing programs identified by AWP in 1994, a significant number had not yet graduated a class of students by 1990, greatly reducing the collective impact of such programs on American academia prior to the last decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, one indication of how “late” these 139 programs had been founded—as to the thirty-year period from 1960 to 1990—is that at the midway point of the period, in 1975, AWP could identify only 32 such programs. Yet the most telling statistic with respect to creative

³¹⁹ Perhaps the most prominent example of this last phenomenon is the creative writing program at Columbia University, which according to a 2009 interview with then-Acting Director of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs, “has been supporting its English department financially for many years.” Burriesci, 26 Oct. 2009 interview. As for increases in undergraduate enrollment, in the 1980s, undergraduate enrollment in the United States increase by 14%; in the 1990s, it increased by 11%. However, in the 2000s—the second decade of the twenty-year end-of-century “boom” in creative writing program creation—undergraduate enrollment increased by 37%. See “Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions.”

³²⁰ This is not errata. Myers lists the annual figure, taken from the *1991 Digest of Education Statistics*, as “four.” Myers, “The Rise of Creative Writing,” 277. These data call into question AWP’s claim that there were 29 doctoral degrees in creative writing in 1994, a fact the author has been unable to confirm but appears inconsistent with other research.

writing's limited role in the academy prior to 1990 is this one: in 1994, there were still only ten degree-granting undergraduate programs in creative writing in the United States. By 2004, a mere decade on, this number had increased by 860%.³²¹

The result of this increase in undergraduate and graduate programs in creative writing is that the national job market for full-time poetry-writing lecturers and professors, which in 1970 was estimated to comprise just four or five new positions each year, was by 2011—the first year of the “Creative Writing Jobs Wiki,” where thousands of creative writing job-seekers now congregate annually—large enough to accommodate nearly 40 new full-time positions in poetry, a 1000% increase.³²² Nevertheless, an increase in open positions from four in 1970 to forty over four decades later is not as noteworthy as the percentage increase in openings might suggest; this may help explain why the long-standing conventional wisdom that poets should not attend an MFA program with the hope of securing a teaching job afterward was ultimately reduced to writing in the starkest of terms. In a 2014 article in *Inside Higher Ed* titled “To Potential MFA Students: There Are No Academic Jobs,” John Warner writes, “There is no sustainable career path in academia for MFA holders in creative writing. If you ask me, that should be printed as a disclaimer at the top of every graduate program application. I implore you, do not think you’re the exception to these realities. You are not.”³²³

³²¹ See “2012-2013 Annual Report on the Academic Job Market.” Creative writing nevertheless had a robust presence in undergraduate colleges and universities by 1994, as AWP reports 287 minor programs in the discipline in that year. That the discipline had not yet reached maturity, however, is evidenced by the limited growth in minors since 1994, relative to the growth in undergraduate majors and MFA programs: while the number of minors grew by only 31% in the twenty years after 1994, the number of MFAs would grow by 353% and the number of undergraduate majors by 592%. This underscores that creative writing minors were an early—and indeed no longer particularly popular—foray into the academy for programmatic creative writing, since superseded by “top-line” degree-granting undergraduate and graduate programs.

³²² The *Creative Writing Jobs Wiki*, a crowd-sourced database updated in real time, is widely believed to be a comprehensive compendium of open positions in the field of creative writing. The data provided above relates only to open poetry positions. See “Creative Writing Jobs Wiki 2010.”

³²³ Warner, 1. See also Kealey, *The Creative Writing MFA Handbook*, for other instances of this conventional wisdom being widely disseminated to MFA applicants. While there are many adjunct positions available for teaching undergraduate

While the number of creative writing M.A. programs would increase significantly in the first four years of the 1990s, the reason to consider this decade the initial site of a second “boom” in programmatic creative writing is not—or not exclusively—a rapid expansion in the number of terminal-degree creative writing programs. In fact, by the end of decade fewer than 40 new MFA programs in creative writing had been founded in the United States. This compares unfavorably to the hundred such programs founded in the 2000s and the 54 thus far this decade, a pace slightly ahead of the aughts.³²⁴

Within the sphere of creative writing, then, the 1990s are most notable for the appearance of a creative writing “culture” that had not previously been evident. Academic rankings in the field—a critical marker of cultural permanence—had appeared, and, as noted, a serious discourse surrounding creative writing pedagogy was emerging. Moreover, the geographic reach of the discipline expanded significantly during the decade. Prior to 1990, no poet or writer had ever received an MFA in creative writing in 25 of the nation’s 50 states—including several states among the nation’s twenty most populous, such as Illinois, Georgia, Tennessee, Maryland, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.³²⁵ By the end of the 1990s, that number would be just 15—and as of 2014, eight of these states still do not offer a terminal-degree, full-residency MFA program within their borders.³²⁶

creative writers—positions which, often, include a role in teaching Freshman composition courses—the overwhelming majority of graduate creative writing programs make minimal use of adjunct professors. The exceptions to this general rule are almost exclusively in the urban MFA programs in New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, where working artists who already live in the local community are invited to teach intermittently. One program, the MFA in Creative Writing at Columbia University, has a faculty comprised primarily of adjunct professors; as discussed in Appendix T, at Columbia there are nearly 31 students for every full-time lecturer or professor. One reason for this rather extraordinary student-faculty ratio—the highest in the nation—is that Columbia makes substantial use of adjunct professors in part because its location gives it ready access to a talent crop of poets and writers who do not normally work in academia.

³²⁴ Abramson, “Foundation Dates.”

³²⁵ See “States Ranked By Size and Population.”

³²⁶ These states include Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. University of Kentucky welcomed its first full-residency MFA class in 2015.

The Hard Data of Disciplinary Evolution in Dispute

Assessing the state of creative writing qua academic discipline in the 1990s is difficult in part because much of the hard data published at the time was internally contradictory. As observed, AWP had estimated in 1994 that there were 29 creative writing doctoral programs; yet D.G. Myers' 1993 article "The Rise of Creative Writing" used *Digest of Education Statistics* to reveal that, as of 1991, only four doctorates in creative writing were awarded nationally.³²⁷ The writer John Barth declared in 1984, not without some chagrin, that the discipline of creative writing had to that point turned out, through MFA programs, "75,000 'official' writers"; yet by 1984 the Iowa Writers' Workshop had, in its half-century history, graduated only 2,000 or so poets and fiction-writers, and fewer than two dozen *other* terminal-degree programs in the United States had, by 1984, graduated even two classes of writers.³²⁸ At a time when more than half of American states did not host even one MFA program in creative writing, and indeed at a time when those teaching in the discipline had not yet even agreed whether its spelling should be subject to hyphenation, poet Greg Kuzma wrote that "Within five years, there will be a creative-writing program available for anyone in America within safe driving distance of his home."³²⁹ The 1988 article in which Kuzma's prediction received its

³²⁷ Myers, "The Rise of Creative Writing," 277. While creative writing doctoral programs are habitually small—some programs, like University of Kansas in Lawrence and University of Nevada in Las Vegas, today accept only one or two matriculants per year—the average number of annual matriculants at a creative writing doctoral program is currently 5.5, a figure that has remained relatively stable since the 1990s. One would therefore expect 29 creative writing doctoral programs to admit and graduate (even permitting significant deviations from that "5.5" figure) between 100 and 200 students per year, rather than the four observed by Myers. See "Annual Survey of Creative Writing Programs."

³²⁸ Barth could not have been including undergraduate majors in this figure, as the number of such programs in 1984 (ten in the world) was negligible. While he may have been including non-terminal English programs with a writing component in his tally, one would no more deem such students "official writers" than would the discipline of English consider the holder of a one-year M.A. in Literature an "official scholar."

³²⁹ Epstein, 16. While, in general terms, hyphenation practices can and do change with the times, both the concept and discipline of "creative writing," whether used as an adjective or a noun, has not commonly been hyphenated since at least the founding of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs in 1967. It would be fair, if perhaps unkind, to question the engagement with the discipline of any scholar or degreed literary artist hyphenating the term, just as an English scholar opining on the state of "literary-studies" might well be looked at askance by his or her colleagues. A SymbolHound search of the internet on August 7, 2016 for the hyphen-inclusive phrase "creative-writing" returned just two results worldwide, one of which was a dead link. See "Creative-writing."

widest reporting, Joseph Epstein’s “Who Killed Poetry?”, saw Epstein himself state that “The great majority of poets today live in an atmosphere almost entirely academic...the world of the creative-writing program and the writing workshop” (emphasis added).³³⁰ While the then-available data did not support Epstein’s conclusion, to the critic’s credit he did not so much lay the death of poetry at the feet of the odd non-degree-granting undergraduate creative writing course as include such courses at the top of a slightly longer list of culprits.

In 1988, Donald Hall, a recent winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, famously charged creative writing programs with promulgating formulaic and insubstantial “McPoems”; due to Hall’s stature in American poetry, his charge against creative writing workshops received significant exposure within the nation’s literary communities. His complaint—that workshopped poetry is unimaginative and emulative in part because of the pedagogy that guides its writing and (even more so) revision—implied, too, an older one regarding workshop students’ exposure to more than just basic technical instruction in the “craft” of poetry-writing. In a 1978 *New Republic* article, James Atlas warned of a nationwide “academic apparatus designed to promote successive waves of poets whose acknowledgments and knowledge of poetry are often astonishingly primitive.”³³¹ In 1978, however, only sixteen terminal-degree writing programs in the United States had ever graduated a class, and only a dozen of these sixteen had graduated five classes or more. The largest and oldest MFA other than the Writers’ Workshop, the Program for Poets and Writers at University of Massachusetts-Amherst, had in its entire history graduated no more than 120 poets.³³² While

³³⁰ Id., 16.

³³¹ Atlas, 9.

³³² Here, as elsewhere, I use a program’s total number of annual admittees in poetry as a measure of the number of working poets likely graduated by that program in a given year. Anecdotal evidence received from creative writing instructors and interviews with current and former MFA students conducted as part of this study suggest that some percentage of MFA programs, both in the past and still today, do not graduate all those poets they matriculate, nor graduate only “working” poets. Some MFA graduates, whether by choice or otherwise, do not ultimately publish in their genre of instruction—or, in some instances, at all.

more than two dozen terminal-degree creative writing programs were founded between Atlas's 1978 observation and Hall's 1988 critique, even in 1988 it was still the case that fewer than forty American MFA programs had ever graduated a class of students.

We must therefore ask the question: at what point in the history of creative writing could graduates of writing programs rightly be deemed a substantial presence in American publishing? It must be asked, too, given that the average age of a matriculating MFA student has historically been 26, at what point critiques of a poet's published work become more than an essay against mere juvenilia.³³³ By 1990, the Yale Younger Poets book series and anthology had established thirty-five as the uppermost limit for a "younger" poet; when Hall wrote "Poetry and Ambition" in 1988, only twenty writing programs' "normative" graduates had reached that age.³³⁴

Certainly, though, by the early 1990s working poets had registered the discrete presence of creative writing program graduates in their midst. Forty-three year-old poet August Kleinzahler, having himself only recently joined the ranks of the mid-career poets, managed to blame the Iowa Writers' Workshop for the poor writing of "*Rambo V*" in *Harper's* in 1992. In fact *Rambo III*, the most recently produced "Rambo" film at the time, had been jointly written by an army veteran with no art training beyond photography (Sheldon Lettich) and Sylvester Stallone, whose attendance at University of Miami preceded its offering of a writing program by decades.³³⁵ Kleinzahler's broader complaint, however, was not about writing programs but the state of poetry generally. "These days the better animals in the jungle are not drawn to poetry," he wrote.³³⁶ In the 1990s, this dim view of

³³³ Abramson, "2012 MFA Rankings: The Methodology."

³³⁴ See generally Hall, *Poetry and Ambition*. The age cutoff for applications to the Yale Younger Poets Series was in recent years amended to 40, then removed altogether in favor of a simpler requirement: submitters cannot have previously published a full-length book of poetry. *The Grants Register 2000*, 723; *Yale Younger Poets Series*, "Rules and Submission Guidelines."

³³⁵ See "About Sheldon Lettich"; see also Abramson, "Foundation Dates."

³³⁶ McFarland, 29.

the state of contemporary poetry was as common inside creative writing as outside of it. Ron McFarland, Director of Creative Writing at the then undergraduate-only creative writing program at University of Idaho, noted in 1993 that “the blaming of creative writing programs for the supposed decline in the quality of contemporary poetry and for the vanishing audience [for poetry] is a genuine concern.”³³⁷

And yet, however pressing, the question of creative writing’s lasting value as an academic discipline was one uniquely attributable to the academic discourse of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Indeed, in 1989 Hans Ostrom could still declare, of undergraduate creative writing programs, that these were an “unexamined subject,”³³⁸ and a review of academic articles from the 1980s reveals that mentions of the MFA degree in creative writing were virtually nonexistent outside individual authors’ literary biographies and advertisements for the programs themselves. While by the mid-1990s scholarly critiques of creative writing began to appear—perhaps most notable among them the account of the discipline given in Jed Rasula’s 1996 book *The American Poetry Wax Museum*—we find in these accounts not just an acknowledgment, but even a note of surprise, that the topic had not previously received more robust treatment. In Rasula’s view, the creative writing workshop deeded every student in its sphere “the wand of selfhood,” meaning that “virtually anything personally asserted [in a poem] was admissible without qualification” because it appealed “to the supreme validation of personal experience.”³³⁹ Rasula’s warning to the academy was thus both urgent and reflexive about its own tardiness. “We need to rethink,” he wrote, “the social role of creative writing, especially when we recognize that writing is the least significant part of it. The workshop values of self-development, interpersonal bonding through plain speech as the certificate

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ostrom, 55.

³³⁹ Rasula, 423; Id., 422-423.

of confidentiality, and appeal to the primacy of experience and emotion are a function of professionalization . . .”³⁴⁰

That Rasula’s critique of creative writing as “nothing less than an extension . . . of bourgeois control of the means of production” was published sixty years after the founding of the Writers’ Workshop demonstrates how long it took for scholarship—Allen Tate’s excepted—to take note of the discipline’s new role in both university life and, more broadly, American letters.³⁴¹ One might conclude, therefore, that the explosion of creative writing in the 1990s occurred as much in the public consciousness as in the roster of extant writing programs or the number of graduates whose mature writing style could be properly attributed to a programmatic course of creative writing instruction. What the 1990s saw expanded, then, was a debate that persists today about terminal-degree writing programs—both as to how to assess their efficacy and how to measure their impact upon literary culture—that would culminate in the publication, in this decade, of provocative books like Mark McGurl’s *The Program Era* and Chad Harbach’s *NYC v. MFA*. The first of these questions would prove particularly thorny and divisive, as it would implicate, for the first time, the troubling economic underpinnings of both the discipline specifically and the academy as a whole.

Understanding the timing of the second “boom” in graduate-level programmatic creative writing aids us, above all, in separating this narrative from others often associated with “creative writing” as a classroom pedagogy. For instance, while the progressive education movements of the 1920s and 1960s—typified by much discussion of “self-expressive” opportunities for American youth—dramatically altered elementary and secondary school writing pedagogy in the United States, it was not until the 1990s and 2000s that programmatic creative writing at the graduate level began to wrestle with its own identity and purpose in profound and highly public dialogues. In the last

³⁴⁰ Id., 424.

³⁴¹ Rasula, 426.

decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, the number of terminal-degree creative writing programs increased to the point that creative writing was no longer an idiosyncratic outlier residing at the margins of university life. Withering critiques from Literary Studies scholars began in earnest, even as those within the discipline began to perform reflexive analyses of their classroom strategies under the banner of “critical creative writing pedagogy.” And perhaps most significantly for the current situation of creative writing as an academic discipline, national assessment schemes designed to narrativize and quantify the structure and ambition of the discipline emerged as powerful forces in what—for many decades—had been a largely unexamined phenomenon.

Chapter 8: Assessing Creative Writing Institutions

Understanding when, why, and how graduate creative writing programs are assessed tells us much about how the why the discipline has developed as it has. Because, as previously discussed, there has been little writing on critical creative writing pedagogy thus far; because few histories of the discipline have ever been attempted, and all of these, apart from this one, have been from the standpoint of composition studies or fiction-writing; and because terminal degrees in creative writing are still exceptional in academia for a number of reasons—for instance, inasmuch as they are nonprofessional master’s degrees in a field whose primary skill-set cannot, it is routinely said, be taught—one of the only opportunities we have to understand how creative writers and creative writing institutions think of themselves is in those rare instances the discipline has permitted a comprehensive self-evaluation.

That doctoral programs in English are assessed by the National Research Council on the basis of how many grants and awards their faculty receive and how much they publish, or how quickly students are able to graduate and how successful they are at securing postgraduate employment, tells us much about what is thought to happen—and matter—at graduate programs in English. But what of graduate programs in creative writing? In a discipline that has only lately achieved a measure of reflexivity, which features of its graduate programs are thought to matter, and what does this tell us about the role programmatic creative writing intends to have in the larger American literary community? Moreover, how does the discipline’s reaction to, or even resistance against, systemic assessment reflect a continued willingness to stand apart from other academic disciplines? To the extent one of the chief difficulties in writing a history of creative writing is the discipline’s insistence on occupying a contingent and somewhat ill-defined place in academia—somewhere between literary study and a technical study of composition; partly teachable, partly

unteachable; an art, but also a body of codified knowledge—assessing the discipline’s attempts at self-assessment forces upon creative writing a measure of accountability that is otherwise difficult to achieve for either historian or literary scholar.

The second “boom” in creative writing program creation brought with it the discipline’s first-ever system-wide program assessment regimes.³⁴² The first such assessment, authored by George Garrett, a founding member of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs, appeared in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (DLB) in 1994 and was not thereafter revisited by either Garrett or the DLB. A second, more widely disseminated assessment was published by the American print magazine *U.S. News & World Report* (USNWR) in 1997, based on a single-question survey issued by the magazine in 1996. While the USNWR survey was republished by the magazine without revision in both 2001 and 2003, the publication did not conduct additional surveys after 1996. There exists today no documentary evidence suggesting that either of these two assessments faced substantial criticism from creative writing teachers and institutions; the historical record reflects systematic creative program assessment was not met with widespread opposition until a comprehensive program assessment regime was initiated within the discipline in 2009, this being a “ranking” (later renamed an “index”) of creative writing programs published annually by *Poets & Writers* between 2008 and 2013.

The story of how terminal-degree creative writing programs came to join their peer institutions in other disciplines in being systematically assessed on an annual basis spans five decades and several epochs in the history of creative writing. Reviewing this history assists us in understanding how and why the curricular and administrative development of graduate creative writing institutions has been so idiosyncratic and—at times—tumultuous over the past 75 years.

³⁴² For more on this second “boom,” see Chapter 7.

Systematic creative writing program assessment began with the first-ever aggregation of creative writing programs into a non-profit union. In 1967, the Association Writing Programs (AWP) was founded by Brown University professor and former University of Iowa student and faculty member Ronald Verlin Cassill, who along with fourteen other creative writing teachers representing thirteen creative writing programs created the organization to “to support the growing presence of writers in higher education and thereby foster new generations of writers and new audiences for literature.”³⁴³ Throughout its nearly half-century of development, the Association’s specific mission has comprised three primary aims: to “overcome” the resistance of English department scholars to the establishment of creative writing programs; to “advocate” for the establishment of new creative writing programs; and to “provide publishing opportunities for young writers.”³⁴⁴ Because the publishing and award programs of the Association have long been relatively modest in size and scope, and, moreover, equally geared toward the publication and recognition of experienced as young writers, the element of the organization’s mission that has received the most institutional attention thus far is its outreach to creative writing programs.³⁴⁵ More broadly, the Association has committed itself to seeing “departments of literature...restore[] their original, enabling scope: the study and practice of both the creative and critical literary acts.”³⁴⁶ As we saw in

³⁴³ See “Program Director’s Handbook”; see also Fenza, “A Brief History of AWP.”

³⁴⁴ See “Our History and the Growth of Creative Writing Programs.”

³⁴⁵ At present, AWP sponsors just six publishing contests. The George Garrett Award is earmarked for “teachers, writers, editors, and administrators” sufficiently experienced in the discipline to be “help[ing] the next generation of writers find their way”; the Small Press Publisher Award recognizes nonprofit publishers who have been especially successful, over the years, in “publishing creative works and introducing new authors to the reading public”; the WC&C Scholarship offers \$1,500 (in total) to three “emerging writers” per year for the purpose of attending the AWP (or another) literary conference, or, alternately, a writing center, retreat, festival, or residency; the National Program Directors’ Prize awards \$2,000 (in total) to two undergraduate literary magazines; the Intro Journals Award recognizes between twenty and thirty individual works of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction by awarding them publication in literary magazines sponsored by member institutions; and the AWP Award Series publishes four books a year—one each in the genres of poetry and nonfiction, and two in the fiction genre. Recent winners of the AWP Award have been roughly evenly divided between creative writing doctoral students, creative writing professors, high school and other non-university instructors, and those working full-time in independent publishing or other non-academic fields.

³⁴⁶ Fenza, “A Brief History of AWP.”

Chapter 1, the manner of achieving this scope employed well prior to the founding of AWP at institutions like Harvard helped spur the development of creative writing as a discipline. The Association has contributed to this process by offering writers working as program faculty and administrators guidance on how best to integrate themselves with their host English departments.

In 1979, AWP, by then identifying itself as the “Association of Writers and Writing Programs,” published a document entitled “Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing.”³⁴⁷ These Guidelines did not provide for an annual program assessment regime, in part because an important if unwritten element of the organization’s original charter was that it would not submit its member institutions to assessment mechanisms that might place one institution in a more advantageous position with respect to prospective students than another.³⁴⁸ Instead, the Guidelines, the result of a two-year study (1977 to 1979) by a “Curriculum and Academic Policy Committee” chaired by poets Ellen Bryant Voigt and Marvin Bell—the latter a long-time professor at the Writers’ Workshop—outlined in general terms what AWP expected of its member programs and their creative writing instructors. Particular emphasis was placed on the hiring of faculty and the development of a terminal-degree creative writing curriculum; most other administrative functions, including the provision of funding and post-graduate advising to students, were left to the best judgment of the Association’s member institutions. The Guidelines have been regularly updated since 1979; the most recent edit includes sections detailing administrative and curricular expectations in the areas of hiring, rank, tenure, parity, and course load; the workshop pedagogy; leave and sabbaticals; core curriculum; reading series; and visiting writers.

While the original version of the Guidelines was most notable for its formal establishment of the creative writing MFA as the terminal degree in the discipline, more recent revisions have

³⁴⁷ See “AWP Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing.”

³⁴⁸ Burriesci, 26 Oct. 2009 interview.

distinguished themselves on the basis of other significant edicts. For instance, the current version of the document establishes the following important principles of creative writing study:

- Teachers of creative writing should be assessed on the quality of their writing and their teaching, not on the basis of academic degrees held;
- where a faculty candidate's degrees are to be considered as a factor in hiring, the Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing shall be considered the equivalent of the doctorate in literature, linguistics, or composition;
- a professionally adequate creative writing curriculum must be at least two years in duration, requiring not only the production of a creative thesis but also coursework in form, theory, and literature;
- creative writing students should be offered an "individualized" course of writing study, to include "criticism and direction of the student's writing by experienced writers through workshop, tutorial, independent project, or thesis preparation";
- while AWP "does not advocate one approach to the study of creative writing over another," it finds that individual creative writing teachers' pedagogy is "most effective in the workshop format," with the ideal workshop enrollment being 12; and
- a reasonable taxonomy of creative writing program curricula would include "studio," "studio/academic," and "research/theory/studio" pedagogical models (with this last model formerly being termed, in earlier editions of the Guidelines, "traditional literary study and creative writing").³⁴⁹

This last contribution is of historical significance because it highlights the idiosyncratic nature of the program most commonly associated with the discipline of creative writing, the Iowa Writers' Workshop. While the "Iowa model" is a studio one, as implied by AWP many programs maintain a strong linkage between scholarly and creative activity by employing a "studio/academic" or "'research/theory/studio" model of writing instruction (see Appendix V).

In keeping with the macroanalytical emphasis of this history, we should note the relative emphasis placed by the Guidelines on different topics in program administration (as measured by their word-count within the document):

³⁴⁹ See "AWP Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing."

Hiring, Salary, Course Load, and Tenure of Creative Writing Faculty: 632
 Use of the Workshop Pedagogy: 53
 Curricular Expectations: 43
 Curricular Models (Studio, Theory, Research, and Hybrids): 463

No mention is made in the Guidelines of either the funding of graduate students, acceptable student-faculty ratios, or post-graduate career services for alumni, all topics that have come under significant scrutiny as the academic job market has worsened and the discipline come to be informed by a comprehensive program assessment regime founded in the early 2010s. These topics were addressed, however, albeit briefly, in a document first published seventeen years after the Association's Guidelines, "AWP's Hallmarks for a Successful Graduate Program in Creative Writing."³⁵⁰

The initial, 1996 version of the Hallmarks, intended as applicable to any graduate creative writing program—whether a terminal-degree MFA course of study or otherwise—"that accept[s] a creative work of writing for the thesis requirement," identified in its preamble four primary requirements for a successful graduate program in creative writing: accomplished writers as faculty members, a rigorous curriculum, strong administrative support, and the sort of complementary assets (such as a vibrant and diverse culture or myriad opportunities for interdisciplinary study) endemic to an academic institution of excellence.³⁵¹ The document proper added to these four areas one more—"excellent students and support for students"—which would in time become the prime area of contention between AWP, its member programs, and applicants to graduate creative writing programs. As to this final important program feature, AWP specifically urged its member programs

³⁵⁰ See "AWP Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing" (2016 edition).

³⁵¹ See "AWP Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing" (2000 edition).

to remain mindful of keeping low acceptance rates, fully funding “a large percentage” of students, and keeping tabs on graduates to ensure the program continues to produce successful alumni.³⁵² Subsequent versions of the document pulled back on several of these admonitions; by 2015, the section of the document regarding “Excellent Students and Support for Students” had been amended to suggest only that programs offer “some financial aid,” and that the purpose of this aid would be only “to attract the best students”—suggesting that competitive funding schemes, in which only certain top program candidates receive aid, would meet AWP’s requirements.³⁵³ While the Hallmarks make mention of the aesthetics of individual professors, noting that a program’s faculty members should exhibit “aesthetic differences related to their literary, ethnic, cultural, and other backgrounds,” no mention of poetics is made, nor is any further discussion of what sort of “literary backgrounds” might be recognizable or distinguishable in faculty hiring. Another telling revision relates to the Association’s definition of a “successful” graduate: in the first version of the Hallmarks, a successful graduate was defined simply as one who “go[es] on to publish significant work,” leaving to individual students and programs how best to circumscribe the value of a given literary contribution. By 2015, the language of the Hallmarks had been amended to urge programs to produce alumni who “publish significant literary work *and* win honors and awards for their writing.”³⁵⁴ Arguably, the organization’s new emphasis on MFA graduates receiving recognition from prize-granting organizations could be taken as an aesthetic endorsement of the sort of writing historically most likely to win prizes; given that experimental writing that challenges genre and formal conventions has fared less well in this regard, this amendment is worthy of additional consideration.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ See “AWP Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing” (2016 edition).

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

When AWP founding member George Garrett published his “Ten Best Creative-Writing Programs in America” for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* in 1994, less than two years before the organization of which he was a member would publish its “Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing,” he did so with some understandable trepidation. While not writing on behalf of the Association, he nevertheless began by observing, perhaps somewhat loosely, that “almost all the younger literary writers in America have come out of at least some exposure (and for some it has been significant, degree-earning exposure) to the multitude of creative writing programs in the country” (emphasis added).³⁵⁵ Having spoken to the relevance of his inquiry—as knowing the relative merits of the programs producing “almost all” of the younger literary writers would seem to most a worthwhile endeavor—Garrett offered an awkward demurral for one so closely aligned with a trade union for creative writing programs: “For better and for worse (and a little of both) this is the literary system of apprenticeship as the century staggers to an end.”³⁵⁶ Calling his list “debatable but defensible,”³⁵⁷ Garrett noted the existence of “a multitude of creative writing programs” before offering “a list of the best institutional writing programs.”³⁵⁸ At the time the list was published there were but 53 creative writing MFA programs—though AWP reports there were 139 creative writing M.A. programs in operation at the time.³⁵⁹ The primary reason for this discrepancy in the number of MFA and M.A. programs was that nearly all of the former terminal-degree programs, that is, all but

³⁵⁵ Garrett, 211.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ See “2014-2015 Report on the Academic Job Market.”

the Iowa Writers' Workshop, were still relatively new when Garrett was conducting his research in 1993, while the creative writing M.A. had first been popularized in the 1940s.³⁶⁰

Garrett's final list was a combination of MFA programs (University of Michigan, University of Virginia, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, University of Alabama, University of Iowa, University of Arkansas, and Florida International University) and M.A. programs (Hollins College and Johns Hopkins, both of which are now MFA programs). That 15% of the creative writing MFA programs then extant were cited by Garrett, but only 1% of the M.A. programs, underscores not just the differential esteem the two degrees had accrued in the view of experts, but also the systemic assignment of creative writing M.A. programs to the sphere of scholarly rather than "writing" institutions. Indeed, the two M.A. programs cited by Garrett were both founded at a time when there was only one creative writing MFA program in operation, suggesting that it was in part longevity, coupled with a lack of competition for a significant portion of their histories, that had put both Hollins and Hopkins on Garrett's list.³⁶¹

In 1996, a significantly more extensive program assessment system for creative writing programs—if not methodologically speaking, then certainly in terms of the influence it would later wield—was developed. *U.S. News & World Report* in 1996 mailed out hundreds of single-question questionnaires to creative writing faculty, asking each to rate "the quality of the program" at peer institutions. A similar method was already in use by the magazine for the assessment and ranking of graduate programs in many other fields, including fine arts such as Ceramics, Graphic Design, Painting, and Photographs, and humanities and social sciences such as English, History, Psychology, and Sociology. Here as with those other surveys, respondents were not held to have had any

³⁶⁰ See Chapter 4.

³⁶¹ Worth noting, as well, is the fact that half of the MFA programs appearing on the list had been among the first five MFA programs ever created (see Appendix A).

firsthand experience attending or teaching in the programs they were asked to assess; instead, the purpose of the survey was to determine the *reputation* for quality earned by individual programs. The magazine described its methodology in this way: “[These assessments] are based on the results of surveys sent to academics...[t]he individuals rated the quality of the program at each institution from marginal (1) to outstanding (5). Individuals who were unfamiliar with a particular school’s programs were asked to select ‘don’t know.’”³⁶² This last provision appeared only to assure that survey respondents would enjoy a basic familiarity with the programs they assessed; it was not an invitation for professors to offer a self-assessment of the institution at which they were employed.

The results of the *U.S. News & World Report* survey were telling. Of the top 15 programs in the USNWR listing, seven were among the first 15 MFA programs founded, with another being Johns Hopkins—the oldest graduate creative writing program not located in Iowa City. Of the remaining seven programs in the USNWR top 15, five had been founded in the first 20 years of the Program Era (that is, in 1984 or prior) and the remaining two were New York University and University of Washington—both universities in major urban centers that were renowned for the impressive names dotting their creative writing faculty rosters. MFA programs (48) outnumbered M.A. programs (24) two-to-one on the list of 91 programs, with most of the M.A., low-residency, and doctoral programs clustered at the back of the list. As in Garrett’s ranking, MFA programs outperformed their portion of the field—with 48 of the 77 then-extant programs (62%) making the list, but only 17% of M.A. programs (24 of 142)—with nearly every then-extant creative writing doctoral program appearing somewhere on the list, though few performed well.³⁶³ A slim majority of the programs inside the ranking’s top 20 were in large cities (11), while the rest were in small cities or

³⁶² Hobson, 121. See also Appendix S.

³⁶³ The only exceptions were University of Houston and University of Utah, both of which appeared in the top quartile of the list. The two programs would appear in the top quartile of the doctoral program ranking published more than fifteen years later by *Poets & Writers*. See “Doctoral Program Rankings.”

college towns.³⁶⁴ And while the funding schemes of MFA programs in the mid-1990s are by now unrecalled even by the administrators of those programs, we can note that of the programs ranked inside the top 20, half were programs that are now fully funded and half were programs that remain today unfunded or only partially funded.³⁶⁵

What is most telling about the USNWR ranking, however, is how little its readers could glean from it. Because the programs were ordered by their “reputation score,” and because no additional information was offered about each program, the list served primarily to establish a pecking order of institutionalized prestige in the discipline. Nevertheless, there appears in the historical record no evidence of any protest against the USNWR rankings, perhaps in part because both the magazine and its ranking methodology had become well established, and was in use not only for creative writing but also for several dozen other disciplines across the spectrum of higher education.³⁶⁶ Despite this, the magazine declined to return to ranking creative writing MFA programs after 1996, though it continues to the present day to rank MFA programs in the visual and material arts.³⁶⁷

In “Advice to Applicants: Labor, Value, and MFA Program Design,” Hillary Miller notes that, as between different terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs, “there are frequently differences in philosophies of approach...[so] it is challenging to find a standard of measure of with

³⁶⁴ Interestingly, the Buffalo Poetics Program was not ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*, either in 1996 or when the rankings were republished—without alteration—in 2003.

³⁶⁵ Given the historical trend for programs to increase rather than decrease funding over time—the only program to consider a decrease in student funding this century, Pennsylvania State University, closed its doors rather than do so—we can reasonably expect that a majority of the programs inside the top 20 of the USNWR listing in 1996 were not at the time fully funded.

³⁶⁶ As of 2016, the magazine uses this methodology in 54 different areas of study. While this total was much lower in 1996, over two-thirds of the disciplines currently ranked by the magazine were also ranked in 1996. USNWR, “Best Graduate Schools.”

³⁶⁷ See “Best Fine Arts Schools.”

which to ‘rank’ MFA programs.”³⁶⁸ The approach taken to this problem by the two most recent assessments of creative writing programs, those published by *The Atlantic* and *Poets & Writers*, was to sidestep the issue by avoiding overall rankings of programs and instead focusing on either non-exhaustive lists of superlative programs (*The Atlantic*) or individuated rankings of program features without the issuance of an overall assessment of quality (*Poets & Writers*).

In 2007, journalist Edward Delaney wrote an article for the Fiction Issue of *The Atlantic* titled “Where Great Writers Are Made: Assessing America’s Top Graduate Programs,” in which he, by his own accounting, produced “an alchemy of hearsay, tenuous connectors, certain measurable facts, and one’s own predilections about the art of writing” to determine a short roster of superlative graduate fiction-writing programs.³⁶⁹ While certain of the “measurable facts” subsequently cited by Delaney did not turn out to be entirely accurate—there were not 300 creative writing MFA programs in 2007, as Delaney estimated, but rather less than half that number; Delaney wrote that “20,000” people apply to creative writing MFAs each year, though the actual figure is between 3,500 and 4,500 (see Appendix P)—no truck could be had with the journalist’s opinions, which formed part of the analysis and were governed, as he conceded, by “his own predilections.”³⁷⁰ To the extent Delaney investigated certain “tenuous connectors,” the most scrutiny was applied to program reputation (measured by “the renown of a program’s graduates”, as seen through the lens of prizes awarded and appearances in anthologies); the fame of program faculty (as determined by “name recognition”); selectivity (as measured by Delaney, variously, though assessments of cohort size, applicant-pool size, and in several instances hard-data acceptance rates); and funding (as measured

³⁶⁸ Miller, 33.

³⁶⁹ Delaney, “Where Great Writers Are Made.”

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

by case studies and information regarding forthcoming bequests to individual programs).³⁷¹ While Delaney also included in his article references to programs whose pedagogical approach to writing instruction he found particularly innovative, the standard for including a program in this category was not discussed.³⁷²

Ultimately, the rankings article accompanying Delaney's essay, "The Best of the Best: A Guide to Graduate Programs in Creative Writing," mentioned 36 of the more than 250 programs eligible for inclusion in either the MFA, doctoral program, or low-residency categories created by the magazine. The nine lists to which those names were attached—"Ten Top Graduate Programs in Creative Writing"; "Five Programs With Notable Alumni"; "Five Highly Selective Programs"; "Five Programs With Distinguished Faculty"; "Five Innovative/Unique Programs"; "Five Well-Funded Programs"; "Five Up-and-Coming Programs"; "Five Top Low-Residency Programs"; and "Five Top Ph.D. Programs in Creative Writing"—were all unordered and non-exhaustive, though this did not stop several of the programs appearing therein from advertising their placement in both *Poets & Writers* and AWP's *The Writer's Chronicle* (often reversing Delaney's syntax to style themselves one of the "Top Five" programs in a given category).³⁷³ While the article's classification as a "ranking" of programs is cast into doubt by the absence of a rigid methodology for selection, it was received at the time as a comprehensive program assessment and was met, as with Garrett's and the USNWR rankings, with either indifference or acceptance by professionals working within the discipline.³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Delaney, "Where Great Writers Are Made."

³⁷⁴ In a separate article entitled "Writers in Training," Jessica Murphy Moo interviewed Delaney for *The Atlantic* to inquire about the journalist's selection methodology. Delaney's response, while candid and illuminating, nevertheless did not outline a methodological approach to ranking programs. As described by Moo, "Delaney made in-person visits to about 30 creative writing programs and interviewed program directors, faculty, students, and graduates of many more. The success of these programs, he found, was difficult to measure....[but] Delaney found that there was enough of a consensus of opinion to produce a top-ten [sic] list....He notes there are also many other strong programs, however, that he didn't have room to mention." Added Delaney, in response to Moo's observation that he did not have an MFA

One of the pitfalls of conducting a qualitative rather than quantitative study of MFA programs, according to Delaney, is that “[it’s] amazing how many times I was given ‘facts’ about a program that were simply not true and hadn’t been true for a long time. . . . So you have to be aware that when you do a poll or you informally interview people about these programs, they may be operating on misperceptions and out-of-date information.”³⁷⁵

In 2008, *Poets & Writers* began the process of addressing the bad data then ubiquitous in the discipline by publishing a data chart detailing critical information never before compiled in print or electronic databases of programs, including AWP’s annual *Guide to Writing Programs*: namely, the funding packages available at individual programs. I personally spearheaded the effort to bring this information to *Poets & Writers* and have it published in the pages of the magazine, having myself undergone the arduous process of applying to creative writing MFA programs in the fall of 2006. It was immediately apparent to me that the sort of information readily available when applying to other types of graduate programs, such as the law schools I’d applied to myself in 1998—information such as acceptance rates, student-faculty ratios, and postgraduate job placement data—were unavailable for nearly all graduate creative writing programs in the United States. The piece of data perhaps most critical to any graduate school application process, this being the funding package available to incoming students at each institution, was also missing for the overwhelming majority of MFA programs in creative writing. It’s for this reason that I approached *Poets & Writers* with a large quantity of this type of information, having compiled it—specifically, a listing of all domestic MFA

himself, “It’s interesting that I’m the one who ended up writing this article. I think one of the reasons *The Atlantic* asked me to do it was because I didn’t have many predispositions or any particular kind of loyalty.” Moo, “Writers in Training.”

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

programs in creative writing that waived tuition and offered teaching assistantships to all matriculants—as part of my own application process.³⁷⁶

Published in November of 2008, the one-page chart listed 19 programs under the heading “The Top Fully Funded Programs.”³⁷⁷ Accompanying the chart was an article entitled “Show Me the Money: A Round-up of the Top-Funded MFA Programs,” which observed that “[because] it’s unlikely that upon graduation [MFA alumni] will be recruited for a high-paying job that will offset the cost of having attended [an MFA program]...it only makes sense that prospective students should avoid having to pay for the degree when they can.”³⁷⁸ The article noted, too, a sea-change in the relationship between creative writing degree programs and full funding packages. “Today, the top candidates for the nation’s most selective MFA programs can expect free tuition, free health insurance, and no student fees during the two to four years of their graduate study, in addition to a generous stipend for living expenses . . .”³⁷⁹ While laying out in detail the magazine’s definition of a “full funding” package, the article conceded that “assessing MFA financial aid packages is complicated, because most programs choose not to publicize their financial aid offerings—only about 20 percent of programs advertise a dollar-specific financial aid package.”³⁸⁰

The *Poets & Writers* funding rankings of 2008 did not result in pushback from the programs; if there was disapproval among individual programs at being left out of the mix, it was communicated neither to me or to *Poets & Writers*, nor were any public complaints published via

³⁷⁶ In the interest of full disclosure, the seven graduate creative writing programs I applied to myself were Brown University, Cornell University, The Johns Hopkins University, University of Iowa, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, University of Michigan, and University of Virginia. I was admitted to University of Iowa, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and University of Michigan; in August of 2007, I matriculated at the first of these.

³⁷⁷ Abramson, “The Top Fully Funded Programs.”

³⁷⁸ Abramson, “Show Me the Money: A Round-up of the Top-Funded MFA Programs,” 80.

³⁷⁹ *Id.*, 81.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.* This assessment was made after reviewing the online promotional materials for every then-extant creative writing MFA program.

national media outlets. The same could not be said, however, of the next few years of program assessments published by *Poets & Writers*. I was responsible for conducting these assessments as well, having agreed with *Poets & Writers* by the end of 2008 to expand my data-collection project to include ranked data listings in twenty categories for every terminal-degree graduate creative writing program in the United States.

Beginning in 2009 and ending in 2013, the magazine annually published my twenty-category data chart—comprising both ranked columns of information and unranked columns of raw data—whose constituent areas of assessment included a program’s popularity among applicants; its duration, cohort size, acceptance rate, funding package, student-faculty ratio, and per-semester teaching load; information regarding curricular features like opportunities for cross-genre study and foreign language requirements; post-graduate job and fellowship placement statistics; and more esoteric data, like the cost of living in a given program locale, the cost of applying to each program, and every program’s history of compliance or noncompliance with the Council of Graduate Students Resolution regarding the acceptance of funded offers of admission.³⁸¹ I had personally selected all of these categories, as well as developing methodologies for capturing hard data relating to each of these program features; however, the selection of categories was in the first instance inspired by interviews with hundreds of program applicants in several online creative writing communities—some on Facebook, some on Blogger, others at the *Poets & Writers* website—which interviews revealed that the categories listed above were the ones of most interest to the programs’ prospective students. Subsequent polling of both program applicants and current and former MFA faculty and students revealed that a number of the above program features were considered vital to these latter groups as well (see Appendices E and F).

³⁸¹ Broadly, the Resolution requires that signatories give accepted applicants until April 15th of each admissions cycle to accept or decline funded offers of admission. For more information on the categories of assessment used by *Poets & Writers*, see “2012 MFA Rankings: The Methodology.”

The popularity, funding, student-faculty, and placement categories were “ranked” using available hard data (see Appendix S), while the remaining categories merely recited important program features.³⁸² The most prominent of the annual chart’s columns, the “overall” and “genre” popularity rankings, used current applicants’ application lists to assess program popularity, which application lists were described by the magazine as “conclusions [about programs that] also necessarily take into account unmeasurable program features like location, faculty, and curriculum....these considerations are...reflected in applicants’ decisions about where to apply.”³⁸³

The first hard data-driven, multi-variable assessment of MFA programs, the charts published by *Poets & Writers* were variously styled as “rankings” (2009-2011) and “indexes” (2012-2013), and were accompanied by print and online methodology articles (see Appendix S) that I had authored. These critical adjuncts to the data-collection project emphasized what I considered an important *caveat* to the project: that in fact the magazine’s assessment was not at all comprehensive. “[O]ne’s final application and matriculation decisions can never and should never be made on the basis of facts and figures alone,” I opined in the 2010 edition of the rankings, as “an applicant’s final calculus is, understandably, more a product of instinct and personal proclivity than cold logic.”³⁸⁴ The 2009 edition of the rankings had likewise warned of “the evils of educational rankings,” which my

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Abramson, “2011 *Poets & Writers* Magazine Ranking of MFA Programs: A Guide to the Methodology,” 75. Given the large number of application lists compiled, while applicants’ “safety” or “fallback” programs were indeed registered (without distinction or diminishment) in this assessment, only the most universally popular schools of this sort could be expected to place much more highly than an assessment of program “quality” might normally have allowed. However, because this assessment was only of the popularity of a program among applicants tasked with choosing where to apply, and did not distinguish between the reasons those applications were finally made—for instance, whether an application was made because of non-academic considerations such as a program’s location, an applicant’s connection to an institution through family members or a significant other, or still other, more esoteric program qualities—the presence of backup choices among a student’s application list was not seen to in any sense invalidate the results of the assessment.

³⁸⁴ Abramson, “2011 *Poets & Writers* Magazine Ranking of MFA Programs: A Guide to the Methodology,” 76. Here, as elsewhere, the statements I made in the pages of *Poets & Writers* were both approved and endorsed by my editors at the magazine, then-Editor-in-Chief Mary Gannon, and then-Managing Editor Kevin Larimer.

introductory essay described as “legion.”³⁸⁵ Indeed, in this first-ever *Poets & Writers* ranking of creative writing MFA programs, I wrote at some length on the subject:

At base it is impossible to quantify or predict the experience any one MFA candidate will have at any one program....By and large, students find that their experiences are circumscribed by entirely unforeseen circumstances: They befriend a fellow writer; they unexpectedly discover a mentor; they come to live in a town or city that, previously foreign, becomes as dear to them as home. No ranking ought to pretend to establish the absolute truth about program quality, and in keeping with that maxim the rankings that follow have no such pretension.³⁸⁶

This theme was one the magazine would return to repeatedly in the ensuing four years, both in my own essays and in essays authored by other freelancers and, in one instance, the editors of the magazine.³⁸⁷ The 2012 edition of the rankings described itself as merely “comparative information about a selection of leading MFA programs to help you begin your search for the one that best suits your needs”³⁸⁸; the 2013 edition observed that “there’s no wrong way to choose an MFA program....[t]he 2014 MFA Index is intended to be one place to start...”³⁸⁹ The 2011 edition of the rankings featured an introduction by the magazine’s editors rather than me; consistent with the introductions that preceded and followed it, this introduction described the rankings as “a spark for the deep thinking and serious consideration the [application] process requires” and “a good

³⁸⁵ Abramson, “The Top Fifty MFA Programs in the United States,” 82.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ See Gannon and Larimer, “MFA Nation: Do You Want to Be Part of It?”

³⁸⁸ Abramson, “2014 MFA Index: 26 Low-Residency Programs.”

³⁸⁹ The indexes and rankings were titled one year ahead of their publication; thus, for instance, the “2014 MFA Index” was published in the fall of 2013. Abramson, “2014 MFA Index: An Introduction,” 72.

foundation for further individualized research.”³⁹⁰ In a Q&A written by the editors, the point was made even more starkly:

Q: Should I rely on these tables to choose where to apply?

A: No. The following tables offer information to help you begin your research about which program is best for you. The best programs are those that will provide you with the experience you need to thrive as you hone your skills as a writer....you are the only one who can determine the criteria that will result in such an experience....³⁹¹

Despite these admonitions, public reaction to the rankings, which was largely negative, impugned both their perceived finality and their willingness to engage applicants’ application decisions as one measure of a program’s popularity.

The rankings did receive, over the years, many positive reviews in the media, and on occasion from those in the professorial class: *College & Research Libraries News* called the information “thorough and invaluable”³⁹²; Hank Lazer, a longtime English professor writing in *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry Since 1945*, called the assessment a “daring and data-rich endeavor”³⁹³; the *Chronicle of Higher Education* deemed the work “comprehensive”³⁹⁴; the *Missouri Review* applauded the rankings’ ability to “peel back the layers of MFA programs and get applicants to make informed decisions”; *The Kenyon Review* called the rankings “necessary....and very illuminating”³⁹⁵; and more

³⁹⁰ Gannon, 70.

³⁹¹ Id., 71.

³⁹² Burkhart, 157.

³⁹³ Lazer, 160.

³⁹⁴ Blackwell, “What Defines a Successful Post-M.F.A. Career?”

³⁹⁵ York, “Something Rank in the State of Writing Programs.” “What Seth offered was necessary, and is still necessary. The picture his rankings offered then was—and that they have continued to offer is still—very illuminating: these surveys show us how writing programs are imagined and how the ground sense that gets built up over time can shift the imaginary topography of the world of aspiring writers who see education as an important part of their development.”

broadly, the thousands of applicants to graduate creative writing programs who participated in the creation of the “popularity” data consumed the ensuing charts with alacrity and in large numbers.

If reaction to the rankings among the applicant class was strongly positive, and among the journalist class decidedly mixed, among the professorial class it was, Lazer excepted, unambiguously hostile.³⁹⁶ This was particularly true as to the 2011 rankings³⁹⁷; while there was little reaction to the 2009 or 2010 rankings, and virtually none to the 2012 or 2013 unranked “indexes,” the response to the 2011 *Poets & Writers* issue was sufficient to permanently call into question the entire enterprise.³⁹⁸

On September 8, 2011, 200 creative writing professors from 118 of the nation’s 863 undergraduate and graduate creative writing programs published the following open letter:

The people who have signed this letter have all taught as creative writing program faculty. Many of us are now program directors and serve as members of our admissions committees. Most of us also hold MFA and/or doctoral degrees. We hope our collective experience and expertise will provide good counsel to anyone thinking about applying to writing programs.

To put it plainly, the *Poets & Writers* rankings are bad: they are methodologically specious in the extreme and quite misleading. A biased opinion poll—based on a tiny, self-selecting survey of potential program applicants—provides poor information. Poets & Writers itself includes on its website a disclaimer suggesting the limitations of these rankings, recommending that potential applicants look beyond them. Regrettably, the information appears on a separate page.

What’s worse, if a program decides against encouraging a bad process by choosing not to provide information, P&W’s process insists on including that program as though the information was negative, a procedure we think is unethical, as well as statistically misleading. The P&W rankings, in their language and approach, labor to create the impression that the application process

³⁹⁶ There were, of course, exceptions to this general rule. At least 20 program coordinators were regularly in private contact with both me and *Poets & Writers* to express their appreciation for the work. However, for every one such coordinator, there were ten others whose public reaction to publication of the research was of the opposite character.

³⁹⁷ Abramson, “2012 MFA Rankings: The Top Fifty,” “2012 MFA Rankings: Twenty-Five Honorable Mentions,” “2012 MFA Rankings: The Low-Residency Top Ten,” and “2012 Creative Writing Doctoral Programs: The Top Fifteen.”

³⁹⁸ I make these observations on the basis of personal knowledge. Throughout my time as the chief researcher on MFA programs for *Poets & Writers*, I was in regular contact with the magazine both to respond to critiques (directly as well as by making amendments to the rankings’ methodology) and to ensure that any existing errors in the work were acknowledged and fixed.

between applicants and programs is adversarial. It is not, as any proper, sensible survey of MFA students and alumni would indicate.

Instead of asking such students and alumni about quality of instruction, or anything else about actual program content, P&W's rankings are heavily skewed toward viewing a program's financial aid offer as the final arbiter of that program's overall quality. We agree that financial aid must be a serious consideration, but a student's relationship with his or her faculty—what and how one learns—is at least equally as important.

In economic times like these, there is no immediate correspondence between any degree and employment. This is particularly true of the MFA in creative writing and PhD in English with a creative dissertation. While we work hard to help our graduates find jobs, it is essential to understand that creative writing for the vast majority is not a profession. Some writers earn their living as teachers, but others are lawyers, full-time homemakers, doctors, editors, business owners, sales clerks, and mechanics. No applicant should consider pursuing a creative writing degree assuming the credential itself leads to an academic job. And no applicant should put her or himself in financial peril in order to pursue the degree.

Our best advice is to do your research through the programs you're considering. If you are able to visit those programs, ask to sit in on classes and for the contact information of current and recent students. Talk to people you respect about different programs. Read work by the instructors.

Most programs have basic academic and financial information available on their websites. But don't hesitate to ask questions of the program directors, admissions committee members, and students presently attending the programs. This kind of commonsensical research will help you find a program suited to your hopes and talents.³⁹⁹

The earnest concerns expressed above notwithstanding, it should be noted that *Poets & Writers* surveyed, between April 2008 and April 2012, 2,215 of an estimated 13,985 fiction and poetry MFA applicants in the discipline during that time-span—a 16% sampling of the population.⁴⁰⁰ As for the self-selection of survey respondents, and the magazine's decision to eschew polling of current MFA students or faculty, as I noted in my 2013 methodology article for the magazine, “national educational-institution assessment schemes have historically sought out unbiased observers to assess accredited degree programs, with self-reporting of interested observers implicitly or explicitly

³⁹⁹ Stoeffel, “Creative Writing Profs Dispute Their Ranking—No, the Entire Notion of Ranking!”

⁴⁰⁰ Abramson, “MRP Survey: Fiction and Poetry Programs Combined”; see also “2013 MFA Index: Further Reading,” 3.

disallowed . . . [we] improve on this model by surveying individuals who not only are in a position to gauge the professional performance of individual programs' graduates and professors (i.e., by reading their published work), but who also have access to—and a natural interest in—a large stock of hard data regarding the programs they are being asked to consider.”⁴⁰¹ For the full response by *Poets & Writers* to this letter, written by then-Editor-in-Chief Mary Gannon, see Appendix Y.

Developed and disseminated by poet Erin Belieu, coordinator of the creative writing program at Florida State University, and novelist Leslie Epstein, coordinator of the creative writing program at Boston University, the open letter would in short order be republished, excerpted, or linked to by media outlets both in the United States and abroad, including *The New Yorker*⁴⁰², *The*

⁴⁰¹ Id., 2. In the months following the publication of the open letter, it became clear that some of the concern over the rankings related to their presentation rather than their construction. At the time, *Poets & Writers* used its “applicant popularity survey” to determine which programs would be featured in the print edition of the magazine, and by aligning this survey’s results at the left-hand side of all its published charts created the appearance of an “overall ranking” of program quality. In fact, the applicant popularity survey was intended to be just one of twenty independent and non-exhaustive measures of program quality, a fact the magazine thereafter made clear by alphabetizing the programs listed in its print edition. Most of the outcry over the rankings, both in public discourse and private complaints to the magazine, dissipated upon my and the editors’ decision to amend our presentation of the ranking data.

⁴⁰² Minkel, “Should M.F.A. Programs Be Ranked?” “The idea that only the opinions of prospective students should count strikes many as very strange,” wrote Minkel. “But that doesn’t get at the heart of the problem of ranking M.F.A. programs: it’s not black and white, and when you think about it, programs like these aren’t really that rankable.”

*Atlantic*⁴⁰³, *The Guardian*⁴⁰⁴, *Slate*⁴⁰⁵, *Publishers Weekly*⁴⁰⁶, *The New York Observer*⁴⁰⁷, *The Missouri Review*⁴⁰⁸, *The Kenyon Review*⁴⁰⁹, The Poetry Foundation⁴¹⁰, and independent book-reviewing outfit *Coldfront*⁴¹¹.

While several dozen universities issued press releases celebrating their placement in the 2011 rankings⁴¹², unaffiliated journalists by and large took a neutral position on the letter-writers and their message. *The New York Observer* may have coyly implied that the signatories had ulterior motives—the outlet’s article on the situation was titled “Creative Writing Profs Dispute Their Ranking—No, the Entire Notion of Ranking!”—but most others offered only reportage on the subject.⁴¹³

Meanwhile, AWP Director David Fenza penned an open letter panning the rankings, joining his

⁴⁰³ Friedman, “A Window Into the Class Warfare of Creative Writing.”

⁴⁰⁴ Flood, “Anger Over ‘Misleading’ Ranking of Creative Writing Courses.”

⁴⁰⁵ Kenemore, “Nice Try: Why the Poets & Writers MFA Rankings Are a Sham.” Kenemore called the rankings “risible,” accusing *Poets & Writers* of dropping his alma mater in the rankings “to shame Columbia into lowering it[s] cost of attendance[.]” As noted above, the rankings to which Kenemore refers were developed by cataloging application lists.

⁴⁰⁶ Habash, “The Big Stink That Rankings Causes.” “[A]ttempting to objectively rank something of dubious worth is like extracting sunbeams out of cucumbers. . . .An MFA experience comes down to the writer. The school has ridiculously little to do with whether a writer will become successful, so all of this bellyaching seems beside the point.”

⁴⁰⁷ Stoeffel, “Creative Writing Profs Dispute Their Ranking—No, the Entire Notion of Ranking!”

⁴⁰⁸ Nye, “MFA Rankings Are Useless (Could They Be Useful?).” While calling *Poets & Writers* “by far the most respected and well-known magazine in the writing and publishing world,” Nye urged the magazine to “[e]liminate the rankings. Rankings of MFA programs are bad for everyone involved.”

⁴⁰⁹ York, “Something Rank in the State of Writing Programs.”

⁴¹⁰ See “Profs to MFA Rankings: Drop Dead.” “The MFA power rankings, set forth by the spreadsheet-loving folks at *Poets and Writers*, have been hotly contested and detested by MFA professors the country over in small mob form.”

⁴¹¹ Amadon, “Letter to An MFA Applicant.” “You’re not getting an MFA to get funded by an MFA program, nor to have a good teaching load, nor to move somewhere with an ideal cost of living. You’re getting an MFA to have your writing taken seriously by serious writers who you respect. There’s no way of knowing ahead of time if someone is going to be a great teacher and especially not if they’re going to be a great teacher for you. But I swear that anyone who tries to tell you teachers aren’t the most important part of an MFA program has been spending too much time on the internet.”

⁴¹² See, e.g., “MFA in Creative Writing” (University of Mississippi); “Director’s Welcome” (Old Dominion University); “Creative Writing Program Ranked Fifth in Country” (Syracuse University); “Our History” (University of Wisconsin).

⁴¹³ Kat Stoeffel, “Creative Writing Profs Dispute Their Ranking—No, the Entire Notion of Ranking!” Two of the more widely disseminated responses, in *Slate* and *Coldfront*, were written not by journalists but by former students of Columbia University, in protest of that program’s ranking in the 2011 MFA Issue of *Poets & Writers*.

organization's voice to the dissent initiated by Belieu and Epstein's own open letter.⁴¹⁴ Fenza later added to this rebuttal an official statement from AWP on the *Poets & Writers* assessment, which statement appeared on the AWP website for nearly a year after the publication of the 2011 rankings (see Appendix Z).

Following the furor in 2011, *Poets & Writers* made two small but crucial changes to its methodology. First, the magazine would henceforth use the term "index" in place of "rankings," and eschew the latter term altogether in its future publications of MFA data; second, whereas the magazine's annual spread had previously ordered the appearance of programs in the magazine using its methodology's controversial "popularity" ranking—erroneously making it appear as though the popularity ranking were also an overall ranking—after 2011 it ordered programs in the annual "MFA Issue" alphabetically, with the popularity ranking listed as just one view of the programs among many. The historical record reveals virtually no dissent (in fact, nearly no reaction whatever) to the "MFA Index" published by *Poets & Writers* in 2012 and 2013, nor does the magazine report having heard more than a couple scattered complaints during that period.⁴¹⁵ Nevertheless, in 2014 the magazine ceased publishing comparative data relating to MFA programs, telling *The Guardian* that it had opted instead for "allowing prospective students to make what is ultimately a subjective decision [by] determining for themselves which program attributes are most important."⁴¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, Bloomsbury, a British trade publisher, entered into a multi-year arrangement with the *MFA Research*

⁴¹⁴ By mid-2012, this letter had been removed from the AWP website, and is no longer retrievable. However, the organization did address the rankings in its article "Ranking the Writing Programs Best for You" (2012), which says of the *Poets & Writers* rankings that they are "pretentious and misleading." See "Ranking the Writing Programs Best for You."

⁴¹⁵ Reported on the basis of personal contact with the editors of the magazine, Mary Gannon and Kevin Larimer, during and after the compilation and publication of the 2012 and 2013 listings.

⁴¹⁶ Scutt, "Value of the Creative Writing Degree Defended at the Comic-Con of MFAs."

Project to aggregate its data in a reference guide to be published once every three years beginning in 2018.⁴¹⁷

It is of course not for this history—and particularly not for this author—to speculate on the lasting influence of the *Poets & Writers* assessments, other than to note that in the years since the assessments began creative writing MFA programs across the country have conceded to adding tens of millions of dollars in student funding in response to the assessments' implicit encouragement of funding transparency and, more particularly, full funding for all admitted students. Advertisements in *Poets & Writers* and *A Writer's Chronicle* are now more likely to mention program funding than previously, and the roster of fully funded MFA programs has increased with each passing year. Conventional wisdom among the MFA applicant class, as evidenced by public conversations on the annual *MFA Draft Group* hosted by Facebook, suggest that certain basic principles of the rankings-cum-indexes have reached the point of cultural crystallization: for instance, the premise that MFA applicants cannot assess teaching aptitude through assessments of a faculty member's writing, and that taking on significant student debt for a non-professional degree that doesn't guarantee future employment is unwise. Whether these premises will continue to have purchase in coming years remains to be seen. Certainly, the rapid increase in the percentage of all creative writing MFA programs that are low-residency (see Appendix A) suggests that many of the issues surrounding full-residency MFA programs may be less relevant to the discipline of creative writing five years from now than they were five years ago.

More importantly, the MFA research published by *Poets & Writers* between 2008 and 2013 exposed a divide between creative writing instructors and prospective applicants to their programs. While the response to the *Poets & Writers* rankings and indexes was almost universally positive among the latter group, it was almost universally negative among the former. This disparity exposed

⁴¹⁷ See *The Huffington Post*, "Seth Abramson" (biography).

the two groups' differing views on whether the funding available at a graduate creative writing program should in any instance determine whether an applicant applies to it.⁴¹⁸ The *Poets & Writers* project also uncovered a significant stock of data that had little to do with the ranking of programs using categories like funding and selectivity; as reported by *The Guardian*, *Poets & Writers* was also the first media outlet to discern the likelihood of a creative writing program graduate receiving a full-time job teaching creative writing in the academy post-graduation—less than 1%.⁴¹⁹ Discoveries like these may have raised the financial stakes for applicants applying to study creative writing at the graduate level.

⁴¹⁸ But see Appendix F; like applicants, creative writing instructors report that they consider “funding” information to be the most important element in any MFA program assessment.

⁴¹⁹ Scutts, “Value of the Creative Writing Degree Defended at the Comic-Con of MFAs.”

Conclusion: The Future of Creative Writing

The discipline of creative writing as we know it today is the result of several interwoven histories. No understanding of creative writing's current situation within the American literary scene is complete without simultaneous consideration of the advanced composition courses at Harvard in the 1880s and the informal gatherings in professors' offices that have taken place within the Iowa Writers' Workshop since its inception. The quarter-century history of the integrated arts community at Black Mountain College coincides, as to its historical significance if not temporally, with the painstakingly articulated modes of inquiry and administrative practices of the Buffalo Poetics program. In today's multitude of creative writing master's programs we find curricular echoes of the literary studies-oriented, non-terminal creative writing master's degrees of the 1950s and even the Literary Studies and Creative Writing doctoral programs beside which many contemporary creative writing MFA programs are housed.

But it is not merely a consideration of how and where creative writing manifests today that demands a concurrent emphasis on the different institutional environments in which creative writing has thrived. The myriad possibilities for the advancement of creative writing in the future are also encoded within the several histories that make up this single study. Harvard's idiosyncratic approach to advanced composition studies in the nineteenth century was admirably focused on civics rather than canon, on personal writing practices rather than conventional wisdom, and on the development of abiding writing communities rather than the maintenance of spaces to briefly house aspiring writers. The 80-year history of the Iowa Writers' Workshop has confirmed that it is possible to situate something approaching an artists' commune in the midst of an educational institution. Black Mountain College performed, for several decades, an instantiation of poetry in which the art-form was treated not merely as practice, performance, or theory-driven procedure but totalizing praxis—

one integrating work, study, and community. University of Buffalo's introduction of "poetics" as an intersection between poets' critical faculties and their creative energies offers an intriguing if imperfect harmonization of creative writing and its longtime departmental partner, Literary Studies. And throughout these manifestations of programmatic creative writing instruction we find the workshop operating at once as a space that discourages risk and rewards homogenization and one where critical, collaborative, creative, and performative modes are sometimes dynamically aligned.

Given the present diversity of graduate creative writing programs, generalizations about contemporary creative writing curricula, let alone the heterogeneous writing they produce, become difficult to make responsibly. As the foregoing history details, the academic institutionalization of creative writing at the graduate level has not—with the notable exception of continued employment of the workshop—been accompanied by significant pedagogic standardization. The question, then, is whether a standardization of the *subculture* attaching to creative writing in academic-institutional settings produces observable trends in the writing produced under its sign. If so, what are the pervasive limitations or unique capabilities of such a subculture, and what are the notable qualities of the writing it encourages? Can the insinuation of creative writing into academic-institutional spaces do more than re-inscribe aesthetic conventions of yesteryear? More particularly, given our present situation at the beginning of the Digital Age, can such a dramatic evolution of writing's role in civil society and higher education—a circumstance in which thousands of poets graduate from MFA programs every year—contribute to, or at least respond to, paradigm shifts particular to this Age?

Certainly, we can see in the development of creative writing as an academic course of study a very old, and yet also very new, intertwining of scholarly and creative energies—one that puts poets in an unusually fraught position. This position was foreseen not only by Emerson, who called upon creative writers to equally be "creative readers," but also by British scholar Matthew Arnold, who proposed, in an 1865 essay entitled "The Function of Criticism at the Current Time," a binary

theory of literary energies that persisted for nearly a century as conventional wisdom in American English departments.⁴²⁰ And the middle decades of creative writing's evolution—from the founding of the Writers' Workshop in 1936 to the opening of the Buffalo Poetics Program in 1991, a period during which creative writing programs drifted further and further from their neighbors in Literary Studies—did much to instantiate this conventional wisdom within the academy.

In Arnold's imagining, the critical and creative functions of literary persons are distinct, as each function separately participates in what Arnold terms the "current of new, fresh ideas" that both inform and are exhibited by literary art and literary criticism.⁴²¹ The disinterested critic conceives of new ideas, Arnold argued in 1865, and then, in publishing these ideas, insinuates them into a "current" out of which, at some later date, a poet of great literary ambition may pluck them. Essential to this metaphor for cultures' literary production is a corresponding presumption that critical and creative energies are active only in an alternating fashion, and that, contra Emerson, no individual should consider herself capable of being equal parts creative writer and literary critic. It's for this reason Arnold distinguishes between "epochs of expansion" and "epochs of concentration"; for Arnold, critical and creative energies are so extricable that even such an encompassing term as "epoch" cannot be spoken of as a combinative concept but rather, and only, a hegemonic one.

The introduction of creative writing pedagogies to advanced composition classrooms at Harvard in the 1880s implicitly complicated Arnold's analysis. In the classrooms overseen by such men as Barrett Wendell and LaBaron Russell Briggs, the critical function was conjoined with the creative function *in situ*. Students were not asked to separately and disinterestedly consider questions of public policy and idiosyncratic, counter-canonical mechanisms for the composition of literary art; instead, they were encouraged and at times required to engage these purportedly distinct energies

⁴²⁰ Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time."

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

simultaneously. It was a pedagogy that cut against Arnold's central premise—and soon enough became cause for consternation among those members of Harvard's English department whose understanding of the role of an English student was more conventionally circumscribed.

To the extent philosophical distinctions may be drawn between creative writing as it was practiced at Harvard and creative writing as conceived by the founders of the Writers' Workshop, the distinction relates not just to Arnold's theory but also to the Workshop's self-consciously New Humanist roots. Unlike Wendell and his progeny, the creative writers who shepherded the Writers' Workshop in its early years were proud New Humanists—or protégés of such—whose instructional emphases were underwritten by the same philosophy that had encouraged the Workshop's founding. These emphases implicitly drove students toward regional rather than national enthusiasms; away from the classroom as a space for consequential writing instruction; and into a communal artistic sphere that quite literally segregated itself from the other work of the university that housed it.

The backlash the "Iowa Model" experienced between the 1940s and the 1980s—featuring the well-publicized animus of the poet-scholars of the New Criticism; universities' preference for the creation of academically oriented creative writing MA programs; the poetics-oriented pedagogies in evidence at Black Mountain College and the State University of New York at Buffalo; the emergence of non-immersive programmatic writing instruction, such as that found in low-residency creative writing MFAs and independent workshops such as the Umbra Workshop—seems, in view of the above, traceable to this historical division between the creative and critical energies first discussed by Arnold. If the Harvard Model offered a possible reunification of Arnold's purportedly disparate energies, the Iowa Model refuted that effort; and in the subsequent ascension of the latter model we find our explanation for the last half-century of criticism of the creative writing MFA.

Fears that creative writing has too aggressively segregated itself from the other functions of a contemporary English department are well-founded. And yet, the examples of Buffalo and Black

Mountain and Umbra and even the Stegner Fellowship argue for something other than a mere return of creative writing to the analytical, theoretical, and historicizing work of a Literary Studies program. If we find that certain workshops offer students too little historical context or instruction in literary analysis, and too much orchestration and restriction upon their self-expression, the solution may not be to resolve these tensions and contradictions but to situate them within a paradigm even broader than that previously envisioned by other counter-institutional movements, such as Black Mountain, New Formalist, and Language poetry. Doing so may well reveal that revolutionary revisions to contemporary writing practices can, in the Digital Age, take place within, as it were, the belly of the beast. Certainly poets have already found ways to turn social media—nominally, much like the creative writing program, a totalizing institution—into a medium for subversive acts of authorship.

As the Program Era has moved from infancy to maturity, there are signs that graduate creative writing programs are beginning to embrace the same critical-creative nexus that Emerson first spoke of in coining the term “creative writing” in 1832. This nexus informed much of the avant-garde verse produced outside the boundaries of “traditional” academia in the latter half of the twentieth century, most notably those texts authored by the Black Mountain poets of the 1950s and 1960s and the “Language poets” of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. But the new juxtaposition of Emersonian “creative writing” and “creative reading” that we now find in academic-institutional spaces is something else altogether: a convergence of tradition and experimentation that is uniquely of the Internet Age as well as this particular moment in creative writing’s evolution as a discipline. Indeed, among other, equally important theorizations of recent developments in contemporary

poetics, we might argue that the burgeoning exploratory poetics now found in the academy attaches to a paradigmatic manifestation known as “metamodernism.”⁴²²

The Metamodern Paradigm

Metamodernism, at once a literary philosophy and a cultural paradigm ontologically at the level of modernism and postmodernism, was first described by University of Oregon Professor Mas’ud Zavarzadeh in a 1975 *Journal of American Studies* article entitled “The Apocalyptic Fact and the Eclipse of Fiction in Recent American Prose Narratives.”⁴²³ Writing at the dawn of the Program Era, Zavarzadeh posited the emergence of a reconstructive creative writing practice that aimed, in the face of “anti-modernism”—his gloss of poststructuralist literary theory—generatively to synchronize and then transcend seemingly opposed spheres. Zavarzadeh saw, in “metamodern” fiction particularly, not a deconstruction but a combinative and generative juxtaposition of, for instance, the critical and the creative, reality and unreality, and the international and the individual. In this reconstructive juxtaposition, argued Zavarzadeh, could be found a Modernist-influenced return to metanarrative that acknowledged, too, a postmodern inheritance. We now find evidence of Zavarzadeh’s theorization not only in the increasingly interdisciplinary and cross-generic spaces of contemporary MFA programs, but also in much of the writing produced by their graduates.

Metamodernism is a still-emerging cultural philosophy that remains at the fringes of contemporary literary theory. And yet it has been a presence in both American and European scholarship for decades. In 1999, Moyo Okediji, writing in *Transatlantic Dialogue: Contemporary Art In*

⁴²² For other theorizations, see, e.g., Keller, *Thinking Poetry: Readings in Contemporary Women’s Exploratory Poetics*. Keller identifies a vital and still-emerging sphere within contemporary poetry in which women poets navigate this very nexus. “The women who create the exploratory work examined here,” writes Keller, “are convinced that poetry, like philosophy or political theory, enacts a significant intellectual engagement with the most important and challenging issues faced by contemporary Americans.” *Ibid.*

⁴²³ Zavarzadeh, “The Apocalyptic Fact and the Eclipse of Fiction in Recent American Prose Narratives.”

and *Out of Africa*, called metamodernism an “extension of and challenge to modernism and postmodernism” designed to “transcend, fracture, subvert, circumvent, interrogate and disrupt, hijack and appropriate modernity and postmodernity.”⁴²⁴ Okediji thus raised the possibility that among metamodernism’s reconstructive juxtapositions could well be a renegotiation of the complex interrelationship between Modernism and postmodernism. In 2002, Andre Furlani, writing in *Contemporary Literature*, described metamodernism as a literary aesthetic “after yet by means of modernism. . . a departure as well as a perpetuation.”⁴²⁵ Furlani observed that metamodernists’ relationship to Modernism went “far beyond homage, toward a reengagement with modernist method in order to address subject matter well outside the range or interest of the modernists themselves.”⁴²⁶ In 2007, a professor at University of Otago in New Zealand, Alexandra Dumitrescu, posited that metamodernism partly emerges from, and is partly a reaction to, postmodernism, inasmuch as it “champions the idea that only in their interconnection and continuous revision lie the possibility of grasping the nature of contemporary cultural and literary phenomena.”⁴²⁷ More recently, Dutch cultural theorists Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, writing in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, positioned metamodernism as the “new cultural dominant,” a system of logic and a structure of feeling amounting to a new paradigm; the two men summarized the new paradigm as “a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism.”⁴²⁸ In addition to developing a website, *Notes on Metamodernism*, dedicated to metamodern research across a variety of fields—from architecture to cultural theory, from poetry to sculpture—the two scholars will publish in 2017,

⁴²⁴ Okediji, 32. If these and the following quotes seem familiar to those who have read the Wikipedia article on “metamodernism,” it is because the research done for this study, and by this author, now appears in that space as well.

⁴²⁵ Furlani, 713.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Dumitrescu, “Interconnections in Blakean and Metamodern Space.”

⁴²⁸ Vermeulen and van den Akker, 5.

along with their colleague Alison Gibbons, the first full-length book devoted to Metamodern Studies, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism*.⁴²⁹ Meanwhile, outside academia, the term now makes regular appearances: for instance, in articles about actors such as James Franco and Shia LaBeouf; on digital culture-oriented websites popular with Millennials, such as 4chan.org; and in discussions of art on websites focusing on contemporary art theory, such as *ARTNews*.

Of most relevance to the current study, however, is Zavarzadeh's original research on the topic of metamodernism, as inflected by the writing of Stanley Horner, a professor at Concordia University in Canada, whose 2000 work *The Subject of Art in Process* framed metamodernism as an art pedagogy focused on collaboration, cross-generic study, interdisciplinarity, flexible personal metanarratives, coexistence of praxes, dialogic learning, and "transitional pedagogic time and space" (broadly speaking, an interactive learning matrix roughly synonymous with the workshop model).⁴³⁰ This pedagogical inflection of the term—coupled with Zavarzadeh's sense of the metamodern text as radically juxtaposing concepts in a way that simultaneously privileges (without any diminishment) "multiple realities"—seems most immediately relevant to the way discrete energies and endeavors are perpetually being fractured and reunited in a *generative* way in contemporary poetry workshops.

The elements of metamodernism enumerated above are present in not just the workshop environment but also the subcultural spaces frequented by the contemporary American poet. Where, for instance, the aspiring screenwriter today enjoys opportunities to author disinterested criticism

⁴²⁹ Forthcoming from Rowman and Littlefield.

⁴³⁰ Horner, "part ii-d." As a performance of his unique approach to art education, Horner's book is not sequentially numbered. Horner's conception of the "transitional" encompasses a non-hierarchical, dialogic space whose natural end-product is the capacity for "self-teaching." The self-teaching ability is, in the first instance, fostered by the reception of simultaneous, non-triaged intellectual stimuli; these compel the student to accept the certainty of intermittent failure as well as its accompanying disillusionments, and to create (and distinguish between) both realistic and unreachable goals. Removal of the "safety net" of an exclusive classroom authority (nominally, in the conventional classroom setting, the presiding faculty member) is critical to the self-teaching ability, as are collaboration, dialogue, and a mutual exploration of ambiguous (e.g., cross- and inter-disciplinary) spaces. *Ibid.* The ultimate ambition of the creative writing workshop—that its alumni will be able to "self-workshop" when and as they no longer have access to academic-institutional writing instruction—is attainable only by students who have developed in themselves this "self-teaching" authority and capacity.

entirely apart from any imaginative acts of authorship—as through popular media outlets like *Indiewire* and *Culture Vulture*, whose focuses on film and television respectively come from the perspective of a consumer, not an author—the economy of the working poet is much smaller in breadth. Poets hoping to participate consequentially in the American poetry community, and indeed to be read and published by their peers, face an invisible expectation that they will participate in poetry’s “gift economy” by doing double-duty as reviewers, editors, readers, panelists, blurbists, advocates, proofreaders, social media cheerleaders, and first readers for contests.⁴³¹ Poets participate in these activities not to develop or further their careers as educators, but merely to remain sufficiently in good standing with their peers to continue to publish and sell books. While workers in many fields feel compelled toward such acts of service, in the contemporary poetry community service is mandatory and ubiquitous because poetry, unlike the corporate or academic spheres, is not an economy of scale. Poetry readings are largely attended only by poets; poetry books are largely read only by poets; and poets are almost exclusively published by publishers specializing in poetry. This means that failure to pull one’s weight as a community member quickly removes one from poetry’s gift economy altogether. That contemporary American poets live in a time when even the academic-institutional spaces they often inhabit as younger, unpublished authors compel from them the simultaneous roles of critic, author, reader, editor, student, teacher, and community-builder would seem to erode longstanding distinctions between life in a graduate creative writing program and the life in poetry that often precedes and follows such study.

⁴³¹ Sample publications of this latter sort include *Boston Review*, *Jacket*, *The Rumpus*, *The Millions*, *The Aml*, *The Huffington Post*, and others.

Zavarzadean Metamodernism

Zavarzadeh coined the term “metamodernism” at a time when creative writing was still only a marginal player in the politics of English departments nationwide. Indeed, when “The Apocalyptic Fact and the Eclipse of Fiction in Recent American Prose Narratives” was being written in 1974, only a dozen American universities had ever graduated a class of creative writing MFA students. It is therefore worth noting how frequently the authors Zavarzadeh identified as “metamodern” intersected with the Program Era. Among Zavarzadeh’s proposed “metamodernists” were Donald Barthelme, the founder of the creative writing program at University of Houston, one of the first dozen programs of the Program Era; the most widely known professor then teaching in the Johns Hopkins creative writing MA program, John Barth; and Thomas Pynchon, who studied creative writing at Cornell University in the 1950s, just as its creative writing M.A. was in full bloom. Notably, all of these authors would later be cited as major influences by David Foster Wallace, considered by some to be the first metamodern novelist.⁴³² Wallace began writing his metamodern *magnum opus*, *Infinite Jest*, in 1986, a time when he was very much under the influence of the authors of the “late sixties and early seventies”—the very moment in literature upon which Zavarzadeh focused his attention.⁴³³

The last author Zavarzadeh placed in explicit alignment with metamodernism, Ishmael Reed, had been a leading figure in one of the nation’s largest and most esteemed non-academic creative writing workshops, New York City’s Umbra Writers Workshop. The Umbra Workshop was at its peak of production and notoriety in the late 1960s, not coincidentally also the first half-decade of

⁴³² See, e.g., Knudsen, “Beyond Postmodernism: Putting a Face on Metamodernism Without the Easy Clichés.” Knudsen notes that “Wallace was a harbinger in the after-postmodernism question in a way that is analogous to those writers of the after-modernism question of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Such writers could tell that modernism had stopped ‘working’ properly, but nobody knew precisely what was next.” Ibid.

⁴³³ See Wallace, “Interview with Charlie Rose.”

the Program Era.⁴³⁴ To be sure, the bulk of contemporary scholarship on the four authors above has identified them as “postmodern”; Zavarzadeh’s separation of one strain of “post-Modernist” writing (“metamodernism”) from another (“anti-modernism”) has therefore come to be seen, in time, as a paradigmatic rather than merely semantic distinction. Zavarzadeh’s post-1970s writings confirm that this proposed paradigmatic distinction rests on a single key premise: that poststructuralist theory inadvertently destabilizes or deauthorizes revolutionary political and cultural practices by eliminating even the possibility of a universal metanarrative. By ceding the possibility of guiding metanarratives while acknowledging that if and when they arise they do so in the context of atomized subjectivities, the neo-Marxist Zavarzadeh sought to return agency to prospective counter-cultural movements.⁴³⁵

While the focus of this account of creative writing’s disciplinary history has been on academic-institutional poetry-writing, not the intertwined yet discrete practice of fiction-writing, Zavarzadeh’s “metamodernism” may yet prove critical to understanding not only much poetry-writing practice in the era of the internet and the graduate creative writing program—as noted previously, two totalizing environments a majority of poets now find themselves consumed by—but also fiction-writing praxes. Indeed, Zavarzadeh originally defined metamodernism as a trend in “American experimental fiction, in response to the fictive behavior of the emerging realities of a technetronic culture, [that] moves beyond the interpretive modernist novel . . . towards a metamodern narrative with zero degree of interpretation.”⁴³⁶ Zavarzadeh associated this “zero degree of interpretation” with what he deemed to be a broken reality matrix. In metamodern literature—as online; as in a graduate creative writing workshop in which one receives simultaneous

⁴³⁴ The Workshop was founded in 1962; as of 1968, New York City still had not seen the development of a graduate creative writing program at any of its many institutions of higher education. While an MFA in creative writing at Columbia University would be founded in 1968, and one at Sarah Lawrence in 1969, no college or university in New York City would graduate a creative writing MFA student in the 1960s. Abramson, “Foundation Dates.”

⁴³⁵ See generally Zavarzadeh, *Theory, (Post)Modernity, Opposition*.

⁴³⁶ Zavarzadeh, “The Apocalyptic Fact,” 69.

and contradictory direction—the poet struggles to assign weight, value, or meaning to stimuli even as those stimuli exert a powerfully generative influence. Critical to Zavarzadeh’s understanding of metamodernism, then, was a circumspect view of the condition of “reality” in postwar America. Its condition—terminally compromised—Zavarzadeh in fact deemed the most prominent feature of an “epistemological crisis” then (in 1975) plaguing the country. As he explained,

[T]he overwhelming actualities of contemporary America render all interpretations of ‘reality’ arbitrary and therefore simultaneously accurate and absurd. In the post-absurd world, daily experience eludes simple meaningful/meaningless reality testing; it is, in Robbe-Grillet’s words, “neither significant nor absurd. It is, quite simply.” . . . With the increasing complexity of urbanized life in a post-industrial society, and the individual’s growing sense of helplessness ever to come to grips with it, the old assurance about a solid reality, different and separable from mere illusory appearance, has been lost, and consequently the dividing line between fact and fiction has gradually faded away.

To catalog the metamodern condition, as expounded upon by Zavarzadeh, is to catalog, too, the state of creative writing pedagogy several decades on from the 1964 origin of the Program Era. Per Zavarzadeh, the metamodern condition is a return to certain Modernist principles in the context of, and with acknowledgment to, postmodern developments.⁴³⁷ Metamodernism is therefore typified by simultaneously accurate and absurd manifestations of alienation, deracination, and victimization, experienced not as a single site of fracture but as simultaneously local, universal, and utopian phenomena; submergence beneath a “technetronic reality” that is non-absorptive via conventional

⁴³⁷ For two different perspectives on similar phenomena, see Marjorie Perloff’s *21st-Century Modernism: The “New” Poetics* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2002) and Felix Bernstein’s *Notes on Post-Conceptual Poetry* (Insert Blanc Press, 2015). Both Perloff and Bernstein implicitly reject Zavarzadeh’s (and later Vermeulen and van den Akker’s) originary premise—that of a paradigm shift from a “postmodern” to a “metamodern” cultural philosophy—in favor of, per Perloff, explaining contemporary avant-garde literary production as “a carrying-on...of the avant-garde project that had been at the very heart of early modernism.” Perloff, 3. Bernstein, meanwhile, positions Millennial poets’ “postpostmodernism” as a materialistic neo-Romanticism defined by studied denials of Modernist structuralism and postmodern irony rather than any crafting of a “new” cultural philosophy. To a degree, Zavarzadeh’s (and this author’s) position broadly parallels Perloff’s, as the unification of the praxes of art and life—indeed an early modernist directive—is in metamodernism elevated from the level of craft to an encompassing structure of feeling and system of logic informed by digital culture.

morality and manifests as “machine-generated guidelines for action” (a reasonable summary of the social media sphere within which poetry’s gift economy is now conducted); awareness of “empirical irony”, that is, irony as an automatic rather than manufactured component of everyday experience; the indistinguishability of the factual and the fictional, producing both a realistic surrealism and a sense that reality’s final function is merely the production of material for creative writing; exhaustion with using extended metaphors for the interpretation of reality; and awareness of living through “an historical phase that denies [the writer] an integrated view of reality and the innocence of moral or metaphysical certitude.” Seen in this light, both virtual environments and the radical juxtapositions of the contemporary poetry workshop and graduate creative writing program are “unreal” spaces nevertheless indistinguishable from that quality of the “real” we sometimes romantically associate with bohemian enclaves. This indistinguishability is registered by Zavarzadeh as the product of a simultaneous shift in political and literary culture in the industrialized West:

What used to be almost universally recognizable as fictional and associated with the conjured illusion of reality in the fictive novel has become lived reality on the international, national, and individual levels. Observing the visible surface of this new runaway reality is like entering the fantastic world of fiction. Reality has become so extravagant in its contradictions, absurdities, violence, speed of change, science-fictional technology, weirdness and constant unfamiliarity . . . that just to watch what is with accuracy takes the conscientious reporter into the realm of the unknown—into what used to be called the world of the imagination.⁴³⁸

If these trends indeed began manifesting in the 1960s and early 1970s, as supposed by Zavarzadeh, they also coincided with the beginning of the Program Era. This may in part explain why the well-known novelist Philip Roth, an Iowa Writers’ Workshop faculty member, noted in 1961 that “the American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand,

⁴³⁸ Zavarzadeh, “The Apocalyptic Fact,” 70 (internal citations omitted).

and then describe, and then make *credible* much of the American reality. . .the actuality is continually outdoing our talents.”⁴³⁹

Metamodernism and Postmodernism

Correspondences between metamodernism and postmodernism are of course evident, as metamodernism is—several decades of metamodern scholarship confirm—a mediation between and transcendence of qualities variously associated with modernism or postmodernism. Zavarzadeh in 1975 acknowledged that one of the primary utilities of the term “metamodernism” is that it may be used in conjunction with two other coinages—“anti-modernism” and “para-modernism”—to underscore that the term “Post-modern” is, as Zavarzadeh particularly opined, “too general.”⁴⁴⁰

If the general thrust of postmodernist literary theory has been to posit the impossibility of stable referents, metamodernist art presumes stable referents but categorizes them as beyond plausibility. More importantly, whereas postmodern thought, particularly in contemporary poetry studies, would by the early twenty-first century become so suspicious of the stable subject as to question even the virtue or possibility of “creativity” in creative writing, the emphasis in metamodern discourse has been, as Zavarzadeh first observed, merely on whether “any single individual. . .[could] have a complete perception of the world, or even believe that he has one.”⁴⁴¹ Even a stable subject, that is, is impossibly inadequate to understand, reflect upon, or represent in art the reality he or she inhabits, in part because of the scope of that reality and in part because, irrespective of a subject’s stability, reality itself exists in a state of instability that keeps it non-absorptive. If Modernism hypothesized a possibly unknowable universal metanarrative, and

⁴³⁹ Zavarzadeh, “The Apocalyptic Fact,” 73 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁴⁰ Zavarzadeh, “The Apocalyptic Fact,” 75, fn. 17.

⁴⁴¹ Id., 75.

postmodernism deemed universal metanarratives both an impossibility and beside the point, metamodernism re-inscribes the possibility of a universal metanarrative while acknowledging that any one person can possess only its smallest fraction. As a neo-Marxist, Zavarzadeh considered this distinction critical; only a stable subject empowered to carry forward an absolute if entirely local metanarrative could advance a sociopolitical agenda in a society where all meaning is contingent. The resulting circumstance—a stable subject confronted by an unstable reality—is one that describes, per Zavarzadeh, both the metamodern condition and the condition of the creative writer of the late twentieth century:

The fusion of fact and fiction blurs the dichotomy between ‘life’ and ‘art’ and indeed such a sharp division between the two does not exist in the emerging aesthetics which I shall, for the lack of a better term, call ‘Metamodernist.’ As a result of these changes in the chemistry of contemporary reality. . . other forms of narrative which operate as an open set [are emerging], combining such allegedly antithetical elements as the ‘fictional’ and the ‘factual,’ ‘critical’ and the ‘creative,’ ‘art’ and ‘life.’

From the moment of its origin, the full-residency graduate creative writing program institutionalized the juxtaposition of the critical and the creative, a directed art practice and unscripted daily living, peers with a penchant for the mimetic and those with a demonstrated bias toward the fantastical. The creative writing student is called upon to practice creativity speculatively in the very same institutional spaces the student practices an amateur form of literary criticism; to make the practice of art and socialization with and among artists the sole preoccupation or “work” of a workaday life; and to produce artworks that are simultaneously mimetic enough to be discernible and plausible to a committee of peers while also imaginative enough to impress those same circumspect colleagues as superlatively inventive. In other words, the multifaceted spaces of creative writing workshops suffuse their poetry-writing participants in a series of irresolvable oppositions: novelty and familiarity; invention and reflection; individualism and collectivism;

competition and collegiality; selfishness and self-sacrifice; and idiosyncrasy and standardization.

Though sometimes positioned by creative writing skeptics as primarily a forum for therapeutic self-expression⁴⁴², the creative writing workshop is, in the metamodern view, a space in which the author, per Zavarzadeh, “is more a knight errant engaged in a bewildering quest of the self in an atomized society than a ‘typical’ person routinely engaged in a battle with a cohesive society characterized by solidly established and clearly recognizable manners and values.”⁴⁴³ If this first term, “knight errant,” suggests a stable and searching Romantic self of the sort common in Modernist fiction and identifiable in those Romantic-era theories of genius that animated the Modernist poets, the “atomized society” referenced by Zavarzadeh is a recognition that the contours of our reality are unstable and therefore recognizable in the “post-modern.”⁴⁴⁴

The generative juxtapositions of the metamodern may be found in all of creative writing’s concurrent histories, however, not merely that single through-line in which we find the conventional poetry workshop. At University of Buffalo in the late 1960s, we found a combinatory approach to writing pedagogy that conjoined the seeming mundanity of scholarship with the aleatory qualities of imaginative writing. Indeed, faculty member Mac Hammond’s 1969 book *Cold Turkey* was inspired by the same “emerging technetronic culture” spoken of by Zavarzadeh, and particularly that

⁴⁴² Vickery, 6-7. Vickery notes “the privacy of the workshop poem and its therapeutic enabling of the individual. . .the workshop poem constructs the poet as self-determining viewer of the world.” Id., 6. She also, impliedly, connects the workshop to a tradition in verse of “lyricism devoted to the self,” “individualist trends in the cultural production of literature,” and a desire to “describ[e] the world.” Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Zavarzadeh, “The Apocalyptic Fact,” 76.

⁴⁴⁴ Present, too, in this analysis is an awareness of how the first and second generations exposed to the Program Era—the Baby Boomers and Generation X—also felt themselves to be in competition, as artists, with two at first emerging and ultimately hegemonic cultural setpieces: television and film. As Zavarzadeh wrote, “Television is far more capable of telling a story or capturing the texture of daily reality, two important concerns of the fictive novel. If the task of the writer of a fictive novel is, as Conrad put it, to make the reader hear, feel, and, ‘before all,’ to make him ‘seem’ then surely film and television can accomplish this more effectively.” Zavarzadeh, “The Apocalyptic Fact,” 76. This analysis holds true for poetry as well, though we must now add to television and film the Internet as an emerging technetronic reality that “represents another invasion of the traditional domain” of creative writing, and it is this reality that Generation Y MFA students in poetry have been compelled to confront. Ibid.

culture's new opportunities for juxtaposition. As Hammond has written, "I discovered that I could get them to record my voice on three different tracks and play them all at once. . .so here's a poem made up of language that is both orderly and disorderly at the same time, elements of the banal and elements that are aleatoric. At first I left the three tracks running parallel however they occurred, but later found it more interesting to orchestrate them."⁴⁴⁵ While many writing workshops fail to live up to this potential, there is, in the combination of new technologies with the cacophony of influence, critique, and performance we'd find in an idealized workshop, the possibility of producing texts that are recombinative (that is, simultaneously deconstructive and reconstructive) after the metamodern fashion envisioned by Zavarzadeh in 1975. While recombinative compositional practices were native to, for instance, both Beat and Language poets, in metamodernism the presumption of a coherent, cognizable subject, as well as the operationalization of metanarrative, allows these techniques to be self-expressive and widely legible—even to laypeople—with respect to their political commitments.

Metamodernism Beyond the Literary Arts

Zavarzadeh's metamodern theory has in this decade found its way into other disciplines, including architecture, photography, music, and art education.⁴⁴⁶ As Alexandra Dumitrescu notes,

[M]etamodernism [is] a period term and a cultural phenomenon, partly concurring with (post)modernism, partly emerging from it and as a reaction to it (especially to its fragmentarism, individualism, excessive analyticity, and extreme specialization), I shall also attempt to outline several features of metamodernism as a budding cultural paradigm. Allowing for diverging theories, metamodernism champions the idea that only in their interconnection and continuous revision lie the possibility of grasping the nature of contemporary cultural and literary phenomena. Thus, it may be conceptualized in relation not with the map metaphor, a favorite with Jorge Luis Borges (1889-1986), but as a set of maps under continuous revision . . . the metamodern space may be represented as a set of maps under continuous revision,

⁴⁴⁵ Kimball and Taylor, 253.

⁴⁴⁶ See, e.g., Horner, *The Subject of Art in Process. Notes on Metamodernism*, founded by cultural theorists Tim Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in 2010, has for years detailed manifestations of the metamodern in the material and visual arts.

each map of the set focusing not only on accurate representation, but also on pinpointing connections between various points of reference. Another fit metaphor may be that of a boat being built or repaired as it sails, or a palace or house under continuous construction.

Of course the life of the poet does not cease when he or she enters a graduate creative writing program; the boat of one's artistic ambition remains afloat and mobile even as the bewildering spaces of the creative writing workshop—or social media, or the frenetic gift economy of American poetry that increasingly transacts its business online—seem to batter it one way or another. But what graduate creative writing programs can also be, in addition to all this, is an alleviative presence in the life of a working poet. Indeed, to offer a generation of literary Americans institutional succor is to do much more than merely remove their literary endeavors to institutional spaces. Essential to the administrative history of creative writing institutions is a different and far more pragmatic first principle: that the artist need not suffer financially in the act of making art, even as and when a certain degree of emotional turmoil may continue to be broadly productive. While discussions of the pecuniary patronage offered to creative writers by graduate creative writing programs are often frustrated by hesitation over the topic itself—as the intersection of art and economics seems a topic best suited to scholars of economics—the economics of the Program Era are obviously material to the well-being of poets once they graduate from their programs.

Romantic-era visualizations of a solitary creative genius persisted well into the twentieth century, and found safer harbor outside the walls of the academy than within them. Within, Harvard undergraduates in the 1880s were professionalized into writing vocations such as journalism and editing; MFA students were credentialed to at least make possible, if statistically unlikely, participation in the institutional operations of the academy as adjunct or tenure-track faculty. The notion that, instead, the natural condition of the creative genius was one of cultural alienation,

penury, and bewilderment finds its best expression in the lives of avant-gardists such as Lew Welch, John Wieners, Lorine Niedecker, and, though he was far better-known for his prose, Jack Kerouac.

One result of the general alienation of artists by their culture has been an openness, in art, to themes of degradation and decomposition that mirror, with some fidelity, the turmoil experienced by any individual whose financial and sociocultural status is marginal or otherwise contingent. As we have seen, metamodernism posits many equational relations sympathetic to postmodern thought—for instance, the juxtaposition of life and art—but does so in spaces whose emphatic motif is reconstructive rather than deconstructive. Is there an association between the financially stable period during which one is in a fully funded graduate creative writing program and a desire and ability to think reconstructively rather than deconstructively? We cannot say; certainly, we must note that graduate creative writing programs only recently began to be fully funded in any appreciable numbers.⁴⁴⁷ But we do know that, in reviving discussion of metamodernism in 2010, Vermeulen and van den Akker typified the metamodernist as evincing a willingness to inhabit the Kantian “as if?”—a condition in which the subject acknowledges but sets aside certain troubling verities to better condition him or herself for daily living. This “informed naivety” is the implicit foundation of an academic-institutional network in which innumerable incoherences—administrative, pedagogical, artistic, professional, and personal—are made to seem whole and, if not discretely generative, key adjuncts to new creativity.

The question for creative writing now is whether a more robust understanding of the discipline’s heterogeneous histories can instrumentalize a paradoxically incoherent whole as a vehicle for revolutionary writing practices. Certainly, we are in a time when avant-grade literary production

⁴⁴⁷ While data on when each now-extant graduate creative writing program became fully funded for all matriculants is unavailable, anecdotal evidence suggests that few if any such programs were fully funded prior to 1990. Even today, only between a third and a fourth of terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs are fully funded. For a definition of “full funding,” see Appendix S.

need not rely on one's "outsider" status; in a cultural and sociopolitical sphere governed not by the binary here-to-there communications of radio and television but the ubiquity of the internet, we are all already "inside" potentially revolutionary spaces. Creative writing's many histories can be made one, and whole, if we think of the discipline not as constituted in a program, institution, or pedagogy but as a praxis for daily living. The particular, often ineffectual conventions of the creative writing workshop aside, it has never been more the case that the workshopping poet experiences his or her life in poetry in a fashion that is largely synchronous with the lives of poets outside the academy.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁸ As to whether the reverse holds—whether those few contemporary poets who have not even once studied writing in an institutional setting consider their experiences synchronous with those of their peers—we cannot say. However, many of the presuppositions that might lead to some skepticism on this score, such as that poets in undergraduate or graduate creative writing programs have special access to leaders in the publishing industry, do not seem well supported by either present facts or recent history. The shape of literary publishing has long been that of an urbane, exclusive social network, and while many of those suffused in networks of this sort are also engaged in and by academic-institutional networks, the causal relationship between the two phenomena is far from clear. On the other hand, that greater financial resources are readily available to academic-institutional writing students than non-institutional ones, or that academic-institutional writing spaces are more conducive to the formation of instant writing communities than are the disparate and far-flung bohemian spaces of literary America, seems clear.

Appendix A: Program Foundation Dates

The foundation dates of nearly every full- and low-residency creative writing Master of Fine Arts program in the world are listed below. Dividing these dates by decade, and itemizing the order in which each program was founded, permits a historical analysis of both when the several “booms” in full- and low-residency creative writing program creation occurred, as well as how many programs were extant at various points in the history of the discipline. For instance, understanding how many creative writing programs were assessed by *U.S. News & World Report* in 1996 (see Chapter 7) versus how many were operative and assessed by *Poets & Writers* in the early 2010s enables distinctions to be made between the scope and ambition of the two assessment regimes. In the chart below, important events in the history of creative writing—such as the founding of well-known undergraduate, quasi-institutional, and non-institutional workshopping spaces—are also highlighted. Where the decade but not the year of a program’s founding is known, a question mark has been placed after the name of the institution. The number in parentheses after each decade is the number of terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs founded in that decade; a graph summarizing this information can be found in Appendix B. While most of the data below is exact—taken directly from program promotional materials or news and magazine articles discovered through online searches—the official margin of error for any date listed below, excepting dates already noted as estimates, is plus-or-minus two years.

1920s (0)

Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference founded (1923).

University of Montana establishes the second undergraduate creative writing program (1929).

1930s (1; 0% low-residency)

Vassar University establishes the third undergraduate creative writing program (1934).

1. University of Iowa (1936)

1940s (0)**1950s (0)**

San Francisco State College (now University) Sponsors Jack Spicer's "Poetry As Magic" Workshop (1957).

Kenneth Koch begins teaching an undergraduate poetry workshop at The New School in New York City (1958).

1960s (11; 0% low-residency)

Black Arts Movement's Umbra Workshop founded on Manhattan's Lower East Side (1962).

University of California at Los Angeles Writers' Program founded (1964).

- 2t. University of Massachusetts at Amherst (1964)
- 2t. University of North Carolina at Greensboro (1964)
- 2t. University of Oregon (1964)
- 5t. University of Arkansas (1965)
- 5t. University of British Columbia [CAN] (1965)
7. University of Alaska at Fairbanks (1966)
- 8t. Cornell University (1967)
- 8t. University of Montana (1967)

Association of Writers and Writing Programs founded (1967).

- 10t. Bowling Green State University (1968)
- 10t. Columbia University (1968)

Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center founded (1968).

12. Sarah Lawrence College (1969)

1970s (11; 18% low-residency)

13. University of California at Irvine (1970)

University of East Anglia establishes first graduate creative writing (M.A.) program in the United Kingdom (1970).

- 14. University of Arizona (1972)
- 15. University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa (1973)
- 16t. Brooklyn College [CUNY] (1974)
- 16t. Naropa University (1974)
- 18t. Goddard College (1976) *
- 18t. Warren Wilson College (1976) *
- 20. Wichita State University (1977)

Bennington Summer Writing Workshops founded (1977).

- 21. Washington University at Saint Louis (1978)
- 22. University of Florida (1979)
- 23. University of Houston (1979)

AWP declares Master of Fine Arts the appropriate terminal degree in creative writing (1979).

1980s (28; 7% low-residency)

- 24t. American University (1980)
- 24t. George Mason University (1980)
- 24t. Indiana University (1980)
- 24t. New College of California (1980) **
- 28t. Bard College (1981) *
- 28t. Eastern Washington University (1981)
- 28t. Emerson College (1981)
- 28t. McNeese State University (1981)
- 28t. University of Virginia (1981)
- 28t. Vermont College of Fine Arts (1981) *
- 28t. Western Michigan University (1981)
- 35t. University of Michigan (1982)
- 35t. University of Pittsburgh (1982)
- 35t. University of Utah (1982)
- 38. Virginia Commonwealth University (1983)
- 39t. Arizona State University (1985)
- 39t. Colorado State University (1985)
- 39t. De La Salle University [PHI] (1985)
- 42t. Pennsylvania State University (1986) **
- 42t. University of Iowa [Nonfiction Writing Program] (1986)
- 42t. University of San Francisco (1986)

The Writers Studio in Greenwich Village (New York City) founded (1987).

- 45t. Louisiana State University (1987)
- 45t. Purdue University (1987)
- 45t. University of Washington (1987)
- 48t. Florida International University (1989)
- 48t. Georgia State University (1989)
- 48t. San Diego State University (1989)
- 48t. University of Memphis (1989)

1990s (39; 13% low-residency)

- 52t. Brown University (1990)
- 52t. University of Maryland (1990)

Asian American Writers' Workshop Founded in the East Village in New York City (1991).

- 54t. San Francisco State University (1991)
- 54t. Texas State University at San Marcos (1991)
- 54t. University of Miami (1991)
- 54t. University of New Orleans (1991)
- 54t. University of South Carolina (1991)

Poetics Program at SUNY-Buffalo founded (1991).

- 59t. Ohio State University (1992)
- 59t. Syracuse University (1992)
- 59t. University of Texas at El Paso (1992)

United Kingdom establishes its first creative writing doctoral program (1992).

- 62. University of Texas at Austin [Michener Center] (1993)

Dictionary of Literary Biography publishes first-ever ranking of creative writing programs (1994).

- 63t. Hamline University (1994)
- 63t. Old Dominion University (1994)
- 63t. University of Notre Dame (1994)
- 66t. Bennington College (1995) *
- 66t. CalArts (1995)
- 66t. California State University at Long Beach (1995)
- 66t. Saint Mary's College of California (1995)
- 66t. Minnesota State University at Mankato (1995)
- 66t. Minnesota State University at Moorhead (1995)
- 72t. The New School (1996)
- 72t. New York University (1996)
- 72t. Southern Illinois University (1996)
- 72t. University of Idaho (1996)

- 72t. University of Minnesota (1996)
 72t. University of North Carolina at Wilmington (1996)

U.S. News compiles second-ever ranking of creative writing programs (1996).

Cave Canem founded (1996).

AWP Publishes "Hallmarks for a Successful Graduate Program in Creative Writing" (1996).

- 78t. Antioch University (1997) *
 78t. California State University at Fresno (1997)
 78t. Goucher College (1997) *
 78t. School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1997)
 78t. University of Nevada at Las Vegas (1997)
 83t. California State University at Chico (1998) *
 83t. Fairleigh Dickinson University (1998) *
 83t. Stony Brook Southampton (1998)
 83t. University of Missouri at Saint Louis (1998)
 87t. Boise State University (1999)
 87t. Chapman University (1999) *
 87t. Hunter College [CUNY] (1999)

2000s (98; 31% low-residency)

90. Otis College of Art & Design (2000)
 91t. Chicago State University (2001)
 91t. Queens University of Charlotte (2001) *
 91t. San Jose State University (2001)
 91t. Spalding University (2001) *
 91t. University of Mississippi (2001)
 91t. West Virginia University (2001)
 97t. Georgia College & State University (2002)
 97t. New England College (2002) *
 97t. New Mexico State University (2002)
 97t. Oregon State University (2002)
 97t. Simmons College (2002)
 97t. University of California at Riverside (2002)
 97t. University of Illinois (2002)
 97t. University of Southern Maine (2002) *
 97t. University of Wisconsin at Madison (2002)
 106t. Hollins University (2003)
 106t. Lesley University (2003) *
 106t. Lindenwood University (2003) *
 106t. Wilkes University (2003) *
 110t. Carlow University (2004) *
 110t. Florida Atlantic University (2004)

- 110t. National University (2004) *
- 110t. Pacific University (2004) *
- 110t. Pacific Lutheran University (2004) *
- 110t. Western Connecticut State University (2004) *
- 110t. Johns Hopkins University (2004)
- 110t. Transart Institute (2004) *
- 118t. City College of New York [CUNY] (2005)
- 118t. Florida State University (2005)
- 118t. NEOMFA (2005)
- 118t. North Carolina State University (2005)
- 118t. Plymouth University [UK] (2005)
- 118t. School of Visual Arts (2005)
- 118t. University of British Columbia (2005) *
- 118t. University of New Mexico (2005)
- 118t. University of Wyoming (2005)
- 118t. Savannah College of Art & Design (2005)
- 118t. Seattle Pacific University (2005) *
- 118t. Southern New Hampshire University (2005) *
- 118t. University of California at Riverside (2005) *
- 118t. University of Kansas (2005)
- 118t. Vanderbilt University (2005)
- 118t. Virginia Polytechnic Institute (2005)
- 118t. Whidbey Writers' Workshop (2005) *
- 135t. Boston University (2006)
- 135t. University of Central Florida (2006)
- 135t. Columbia College Chicago (2006)
- 135t. Iowa State University (2006)
- 135t. Long Island University at Brooklyn (2006)
- 135t. Pine Manor College (2006) *
- 135t. Sewanee: University of the South (2006) *
- 135t. University of Colorado at Boulder (2006)
- 135t. University of Georgia (2006) **
- 135t. University of Guelph-Humber (2006)
- 145t. Ashland University (2007) *
- 145t. Queens College [CUNY] (2007)
- 145t. Rutgers University at Newark (2007)
- 145t. University College Dublin [IRE] (2007)
- 145t. University of Massachusetts at Boston (2007)
- 145t. University of Texas-Pan American (2007)
- 145t. Universidad Nacional de Columbia in Bogotá [COL] (2007)
- 145t. University of New Hampshire (2007)
- 153t. Butler University (2008)
- 153t. California Institute of Integral Studies (2008)
- 153t. Goldsmiths (University of London) [UK] (2008)
- 153t. Mills College (2008)
- 153t. Northwestern University (2008)
- 153t. Pepperdine University (2008)
- 153t. Rutgers University at Camden (2008)

153t. Seton Hill University (2008) *
 153t. Southern Connecticut State University (2008)
 153t. University of Alaska at Anchorage (2008) *
 153t. University of Central Oklahoma (2008)
 153t. University of Glasgow [UK] (2008)
 153t. University of Missouri at Kansas City (2008)
 153t. University of South Florida (2008)
 167t. California State University at San Bernardino (2009)
 167t. Converse College (2009) *
 167t. Drew University (2009) *
 167t. Fairfield University (2009) *
 167t. Kingston University London [UK] (2009)
 167t. Oklahoma State University (2009) *
 167t. Portland State University (2009)
 167t. University of California at San Diego (2009)
 167t. University of Victoria [CAN] (2009)
 167t. William Paterson University (2009)
 177t. Adelphi University (200?)
 177t. California College of the Arts (200?)
 177t. Chatham University (200?)
 177t. Eastern Kentucky University (200?) *
 177t. Murray State University (200?) *
 177t. Roosevelt University (200?)
 177t. Rosemont College (200?)
 177t. University of Baltimore (200?)
 177t. University of British Columbia at Okanagan (200?)
 177t. University of Nebraska at Omaha (200?) *

2010s (56; 45% low-residency)

187t. Brigham Young University (2010)
 187t. City University of Hong Kong [CHN] (2010) *
 187t. Full Sail University (2010) *
 187t. Fudan University [CHN] (2010)
 187t. Northern Michigan University (2010)
 187t. Temple University (2010)
 187t. University of Texas at Austin [English Department] (2010)
 194t. Albertus Magnus College (2011) *
 194t. Arcadia University (2011) *
 194t. California University of Management & Technology (2011)
 194t. Hofstra University (2011)
 194t. Oklahoma City University (2011) *
 194t. Shanghai University [CHN] (2011)
 194t. University of Central Arkansas (2011)
 194t. University of Hong Kong [CHN] (2011)
 194t. University of Saskatchewan [CAN] (2011)

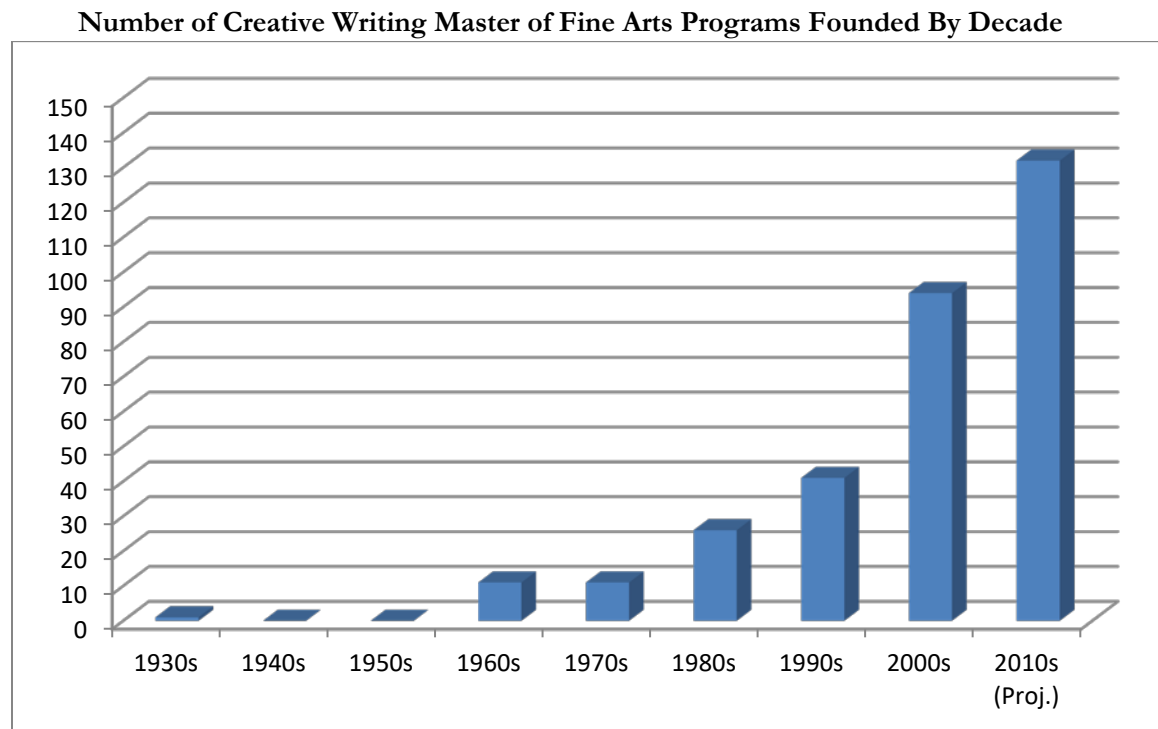
- 194t. West Virginia Wesleyan University (2011) *
- 194t. Western State College of Colorado (2011) *
- 205t. Augsburg College (2012) *
- 205t. Cedar Crest College (2012) *
- 205t. Eastern Oregon University (2012) *
- 205t. Institute of American Indian Arts (2012) *
- 205t. Manhattanville College (2012)
- 205t. New York University (2012) *
- 205t. Northern Arizona University (2012)
- 205t. Sam Houston State University (2012)
- 205t. Sierra Nevada College (2012) *
- 205t. University of Canterbury [NZ] (2012)
- 205t. University of Iowa [SCW] (2012)
- 205t. University of Tampa (2012) *
- 205t. University of Washington at Bothell (2012)
- 218t. The College of Saint Rose (2013)
- 218t. Creighton University (2013)
- 218t. New Hampshire Institute of Art (2013) *
- 218t. Oregon State University at Cascades (2013) *
- 218t. New Hampshire Institute of Art (2013) *
- 218t. Saint Joseph's College (2013)
- 218t. University of Arkansas at Monticello (2013) ***
- 218t. University of the District of Columbia (2013)
- 218t. University of King's College, Halifax [CAN] (2013) *
- 218t. Western Washington University (2013)
- 227t. University of Kentucky (2014)
- 227t. University of Tennessee-Knoxville (2014)
- 227t. Falmouth University [UK] (2014)
- 227t. Miami University of Ohio (2014) *
- 227t. Mount St. Mary's College (2014)
- 227t. Our Lady of the Lake University (2014)
- 227t. Pratt Institute (2014)
- 227t. Regis University (2014)
- 227t. School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2014) *
- 227t. University of Georgia (2014) *
- 227t. University of Houston-Victoria (2014) *
- 227t. University of Nevada at Reno (2014)
- 227t. University of Surrey [UK] (2014)
- 240t. Mississippi University for Women (2015) *
- 240t. Stetson University (2015) *
- 240t. University of St. Andrews [UK] (2015)

* Low-residency program.

** Program discontinued (New College, in 2008; Pennsylvania State University, in 2011; University of Georgia, in 2013; California State University in Chico, 2013).

*** Zero-residency program.

Appendix B: Program Creation By Decade



The figures in this and the preceding Appendix differ markedly from those published by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs, for several reasons. Most importantly, AWP only catalogs member programs, and estimates that approximately a third of creative writing programs (at all levels of instruction) are not AWP members; the Association only includes selected international programs, and also adds certain playwriting programs as part of its tally (whereas this study looks only at terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction); and finally, as the AWP database of programs is still a work-in-progress rather than, as the above, a completed study of all extant graduate creative writing programs, a number of its erroneous entries have yet to be removed. For instance, the AWP database of programs, officially titled “The AWP Guide to Writing Programs,” erroneously includes as “fiction and poetry” doctoral creative writing programs the doctoral literary studies or playwriting programs at Baylor University, Claremont Graduate University, Duquesne University, Harvard University, Michigan State University, Morgan

State University, Northeastern University, Rice University, and Wayne State University. Similar infelicitous inclusions can be found in the Master of Fine Arts section of the Guide.

A comparison between the AWP guide and the guide above conducted in 2012 displays the following disparities in the rate of creative writing MFA program creation: between 1936 and 1975, AWP reports the founding of 15 MFA programs, this study 17; between 1976 and 1984, AWP reports 16 additional program foundation dates, this study 21; between 1985 and 1992, 24 and 20, respectively; between 1993 and 2002, both studies report the founding of 44 programs; and between 2003 and 2012, AWP reports the founding of 92 additional creative writing MFA programs, this study 112.⁴⁴⁹ However, the data supplied by AWP is regularly updated and amended—sometimes upward, sometimes downward—so comparing the above study to those conducted by AWP is difficult. For instance, the 2013-2014 AWP Report on the Job Market observes that, in the view of AWP, 214 creative writing MFA programs were in operation in 2012, though its Handbook from 2012 only identified 191. No explanation was provided for the inclusion of 23 new creative writing MFA programs.⁴⁵⁰ A review of the current AWP Guide reveals that—excluding the double-counting of one university (Kent State University), a community college without an MFA (Paradise Valley Community College), the erroneous identification of an MFA program at University of Nebraska-Kearney, and the addition of a doctoral program in creative writing (University of Texas at Dallas) as an MFA program—the Guide does in fact show 210 creative writing MFA programs presently in operation. According to data compiled pursuant to the MFA Research Project, however, there are in fact currently 251 creative writing Master of Fine Arts programs around the world.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ Data taken from The AWP Director's Handbook 2012, available via www.awp.org.

⁴⁵⁰ During the period between 2012 and 2014 the MFA Research Project, which lists many more graduate creative writing programs than the AWP Guide, was founded. Data from the Project was publicly available on the Project website during the period the Association updated its program count.

⁴⁵¹ See The MFA Research Project (sidebar), www.mfaresearchproject.wordpress.com. The site also provides links to each program's website. David Fenza, Director of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs, has observed that the

Appendix C: Most Popular Fiction/Poetry MFAs

Data detailing which creative writing Master of Fine Arts programs are most popular among contemporary applicants are useful because they provide one view of how programs are being assessed by potential consumers—and therefore what program features applicants find most important in a graduate creative writing program. This, in turn, offers a sense (along with the data offered in Appendices D and E) of how aspiring poets and writers conceive of graduate study in creative writing. As discussed in much more detail in Appendix S, the data below were compiled by tallying the application decisions of more than 2,500 MFA applicants in poetry and fiction between 2008 and 2013. Applicants self-selected for this survey by entering their application lists at either of the two highest-traffic online websites for MFA applicants, The Creative Writing MFA Blog (used for data collection from 2008 to 2010) and the Facebook MFA Draft Groups (used for data collection from 2011 through 2013). Applicants were distinguished by unique user identifications provided to them by the Blogger and Facebook interfaces, respectively. A compilation of similar data in the genre of creative nonfiction can be found in Appendix D; the number of applicants surveyed for Appendix D is necessarily much lower than for the listing below, as the genre of creative nonfiction attracts a much smaller—if rapidly expanding—class of applicants than do graduate creative writing programs in poetry and fiction.

The numbers in parentheses are correspond to the number of times the listed program appeared on the applicant list of a surveyed applicant. In total, 170 of the 226 creative writing MFA

question of how many creative writing programs exist in the United States has been the foremost topic of interest among journalists researching creative writing. As he wrote in “Creative Writing and Its Discontents” (2000) regarding his past media interviews, “The first thing the journalists wanted to know, usually, were the total numbers of creative writing programs, as if there were something scandalous in their numbers alone. Since there are roughly 1,500 colleges and universities in the U.S., the journalists expect to expose a major conspiracy.” See <http://web.archive.org/web/20000831015016/http://awpwriter.org/fenza1.htm>.

programs in operation (or open to applications) by 2013 received at least one citation by a surveyed applicant.

1. University of Iowa (1,290)
2. University of Michigan (896)
3. University of Wisconsin-Madison (777)
4. University of Texas-Austin [Michener Center] (702)
5. Brown University (663)
6. University of Virginia (625)
7. Cornell University (570)
8. Syracuse University (532)
9. Washington University in St. Louis (483)
10. New York University (479)
11. University of Massachusetts-Amherst (471)
12. University of Minnesota (454)
13. Vanderbilt University (447)
14. University of Oregon (446)
15. University of California-Irvine (441)
16. Indiana University (440)
17. University of Florida (400)
18. University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa (341)
19. Johns Hopkins University (320)
20. Brooklyn College [CUNY] (292)
21. Louisiana State University (284)
22. University of Montana (278)
23. University of Houston (272)
24. Arizona State University (270)
25. Hunter College [CUNY] (257)
26. University of North Carolina-Greensboro (250)
27. University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign (246)
28. Virginia Polytechnic Institute [Virginia Tech] (241)
29. Ohio State University (240)
30. Columbia University (237)
31. Purdue University (230)
32. University of Notre Dame (224)
33. University of Arizona (223)
34. University of Mississippi (216)
35. Southern Illinois University (206)
36. University of Wyoming (202)
37. Colorado State University (199)
38. The New School (195)
39. University of Arkansas (194)
- 40t. Hollins University (189)
- 40t. University of North Carolina-Wilmington (189)
42. McNeese State University (180)
43. Boston University (177)
44. University of Colorado-Boulder (166)

45. University of Nevada-Las Vegas (165)
46. Florida State University (153)
47. Sarah Lawrence College (152)
48. George Mason University (151)
- 49t. Bowling Green State University (150)
- 49t. University of California-San Diego (150)
51. University of Washington-Seattle (148)
52. University of Texas-Austin [New Writers Project] (132)
53. Texas State University-San Marcos (130)
54. Oregon State University (127)
55. Virginia Commonwealth University (122)
56. Rutgers University-Newark (120)
57. University of Maryland (116)
58. University of New Hampshire (114)
59. University of Miami (107)
60. North Carolina State University (104)
61. San Francisco State University (98)
62. Emerson College (94)
- 63t. Columbia College Chicago (92)
- 63t. West Virginia University (92)
65. Portland State University (84)
- 66t. University of California-Riverside (79)
- 66t. University of San Francisco (79)
- 68t. Georgia College & State University (78)
- 68t. San Diego State University (78)
- 70t. American University (76)
- 70t. University of Memphis (76)
- 70t. University of South Carolina (76)
73. Boise State University (75)
74. University of Idaho (71)
75. Western Michigan University (69)
76. University of Pittsburgh (66)
77. University of New Mexico (62)
78. University of Kansas (59)
79. University of New Orleans (57)
80. Old Dominion University (55)
81. CalArts (54)
- 82t. Eastern Washington University (53)
- 82t. New Mexico State University (53)
84. Iowa State University (52)
85. Minnesota State University-Mankato (50)
86. University of Massachusetts-Boston (49)
87. School of the Art Institute of Chicago (48)
88. Mills College (45)
89. California College of the Arts (44)
90. University of British Columbia-Vancouver [CAN] (41)
- 91t. Saint Mary's College of California (38)
- 91t. Wichita State University (38)

- 93. Chatham University (35)
- 94t. City College of New York [CCNY] (33)
- 94t. Queens College [CUNY] (33)
- 94t. University of Georgia (33)
- 97. Northern Michigan University (32)
- 98t. Rutgers University-Camden (30)
- 98t. Temple University (30)
- 98t. University of Alaska-Fairbanks (30)
- 101t. Georgia State University (27)
- 101t. University of Central Florida (27)
- 103. California State University-Long Beach (26)
- 104. Northwestern University (25)
- 105t. Florida Atlantic University (24)
- 105t. NEOMFA (24)
- 105t. San Jose State University (24)
- 108t. Oklahoma State University (22)
- 108t. University of Missouri-Saint Louis (22)
- 110t. Florida International University (20)
- 110t. Otis College of Art & Design (20)
- 112. University of Utah (18)
- 113t. State University of New York-Stony Brook Southampton (16)
- 113t. University of Baltimore (16)
- 113t. University of Guelph-Humber [CAN] (16)
- 113t. University of Missouri-Kansas City (16)
- 113t. University of South Florida (16)
- 118t. Roosevelt University (13)
- 118t. Southern Connecticut State University (13)
- 120. California State University-San Bernardino (12)
- 121t. Adelphi University (11)
- 121t. California State University-Fresno (11)
- 121t. Naropa University (11)
- 124t. Chapman University (10)
- 124t. University of Victoria [CAN] (10)
- 126. Bard College (9)
- 127. Long Island University-Brooklyn (8)
- 128t. Butler University (7)
- 128t. Minnesota State University-Moorhead (7)
- 130. Hamline University (6)
- 131t. University of Central Arkansas (4)
- 131t. University of Texas-El Paso (4)
- 133t. Chicago State University (3)
- 133t. Kingston University [UK] (3)
- 133t. University of Central Oklahoma (3)
- 136t. Northern Arizona University (2)
- 136t. Rosemont College (2)
- 138t. Brigham Young University (1)
- 138t. Lindenwood University (1)
- 138t. Saint Joseph's College (1)

- 138t. Savannah College of Art & Design (1)
 138t. Simmons College (1) *
 138t. University of Glasgow [UK] (1)
 138t. University of Hong Kong [CHN] (1)
 138t. University of Texas-Pan American (1)
 138t. University of Washington-Bothell (1)
 138t. William Paterson University (1)
 148t. Brooks Institute [CA] (0) **
 148t. California Institute of Integral Studies (0)
 148t. California State University-Chico (0)
 148t. California State University-Fullerton (0) **
 148t. CALMAT (0)
 148t. The College of Saint Rose (0)
 148t. De la Salle University [PHI] (0)
 148t. Fudan University [CHN] (0)
 148t. Goldsmiths (University of London) [UK] (0)
 148t. Hofstra University (0)
 148t. Manhattanville College (0)
 148t. Pepperdine University (0)
 148t. Sam Houston State University (0)
 148t. School of Visual Arts (0)
 148t. Sewanee: The University of the South (0)
 148t. Shanghai University [CHN] (0) *****
 148t. Universidad Nacional de Colombia [COL] (0)
 148t. University of British Columbia-Okanagan [CAN] (0)
 148t. University of Canterbury [NZ] (0)
 148t. University College Dublin [IRE] (0)
 148t. University of Iowa (SCW) (0) ****
 148t. University of Saskatchewan [CAN] (0)
 148t. University of Southern California (0) ***

[$n = 2,519$].

* = Offers “Writing for Children” track only.

** = Offers Screenwriting only.

*** = Offers “Dramatic Writing” (defined as writing for stage, film, or television) only.

**** = Spanish Creative Writing program.

***** = All instruction is in Chinese.

Appendix D: Most Popular CNF MFA Programs

Between 2008 and 2013, the percentage of surveyed applicants reporting an intention of applying to graduate creative nonfiction (CNF) programs increased dramatically. Whereas in 2008 the ratio of fiction to poetry to creative nonfiction applicants had been approximately 6:4:1, by 2013 it was closer to 6:3:2, as fiction programs have retained their popularity even as poetry-program application lists—perhaps owing to the non-remunerative quality of a poetry-writing practice—began to dip in frequency among the surveyed cohort.

See Appendix C and Appendix S for more details on how the data below was compiled.

1. University of Iowa (116) *
2. University of Arizona (91)
3. University of North Carolina at Wilmington (82)
4. University of Minnesota (73)
5. Hollins University (72)
6. The New School (52)
- 7t. Hunter College [CUNY] (51)
- 7t. University of Wyoming (51)
9. George Mason University (44)
10. University of Montana (41)
11. University of Alabama (40)
12. Columbia University (39)
13. University of New Hampshire (38)
14. University of Notre Dame (36)
- 15t. Ohio State University (35)
- 15t. University of New Mexico (35)
17. University of Pittsburgh (32)
18. Oregon State University (29)
19. Sarah Lawrence College (28)
20. Georgia College & State University (24)
21. Eastern Washington University (21)
- 22t. Portland State University (20)
- 22t. University of Colorado at Boulder (20)
- 24t. Emerson College (18)
- 24t. University of Idaho (18)
- 26t. American University (17)
- 26t. University of Houston (17)
28. University of Memphis (16)

- 29t. Chatham University (14)
- 29t. University of San Francisco (14)
- 29t. West Virginia University (14)
- 32t. Old Dominion University (13)
- 32t. Rutgers University at Newark (13)
- 34t. California College of the Arts (12)
- 34t. University of California at Riverside (12)
- 36t. Arizona State University (11)
- 36t. University of South Carolina (11)
- 38t. Louisiana State University (10)
- 38t. University of New Orleans (10)
- 40t. Rutgers University at Camden (9)
- 40t. Vanderbilt University (9)
- 42. Iowa State University (8)
- 43t. Columbia College Chicago (7)
- 43t. Florida Atlantic University (7)
- 43t. Florida International University (7)
- 43t. Minnesota State University at Mankato (7)
- 47t. CalArts (6)
- 47t. Mills College (6)
- 47t. Northern Michigan University (6)
- 47t. Saint Mary's College of California (6)
- 47t. School of the Art Institute of Chicago (6)
- 47t. University of Central Florida (6)
- 53. University of Kansas (5)
- 54t. Florida State University (4)
- 54t. Hamline University (4)
- 54t. San Jose State University (4)
- 54t. University of Alaska at Fairbanks (4)
- 54t. University of South Florida (4)
- 59t. California State University at Fresno (3)
- 59t. NEOMFA (3)
- 59t. Stony Brook Southampton (3)
- 59t. University of Baltimore (3)
- 59t. University of British Columbia-Vancouver [CAN] (3)
- 64t. Boise State University (2)
- 64t. Butler University (2)
- 64t. Minnesota State University at Moorhead (2)
- 64t. Northwestern University (2)
- 64t. Roosevelt University (2)
- 69t. Chicago State University (1)
- 69t. City College of New York [CCNY] (1)
- 69t. Colorado State University (1)
- 69t. Johns Hopkins University (1)
- 69t. McNeese State University (1)
- 69t. Naropa University (1)
- 69t. New Mexico State University (1)
- 69t. San Diego State University (1)

- 69t. University of Georgia (1)
- 69t. University of Guelph-Humber [CAN] (1)
- 69t. University of Missouri at Kansas City (1)
- 69t. University of Texas at El Paso (1)
- 69t. University of Utah (1)
- 69t. University of Victoria [CAN] (1)
- 69t. University of Washington at Seattle (1)

Appendix E: Surveys of Current MFA Applicants

Additional information regarding applicants' values and perceptions with regard to the utility and purpose of graduate creative writing programs can be acquired by asking applicants directly why they are applying to graduate creative writing programs and what they expect to receive in return for their investment of time, energy, and—in some instances—substantial tuition dollars. Between 2008 and 2013, thousands of applicants were asked to reveal their thinking in applying to graduate creative writing programs; their responses are available below. While Appendix S contains a detailed description of how this data was compiled, each survey below is introduced with a brief recitation of its query, date of collection, and methodology.

Survey 1

Survey Year: 2009

Survey Query: “Which of these is most important to your decision about where to apply?”

Survey Options: “Location,” “Funding,” “Faculty,” “Reputation,” “Selectivity,” “Curriculum,” “None of the above.”

Additional Survey Instructions: Respondents were permitted to select multiple answers.

Survey Location: *The Creative Writing MFA Blog*

Survey Web Address: <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>

Survey Interface Application: Sponsored by Google

Results (Top Four Responses Only):

1. Funding (56%)
2. Reputation (45%)
3. Location (32%)
4. Faculty (18%)

[*n* = 502.]

Survey 2

Survey Year: 2010

Survey Query: “If you are a current creative writing MFA applicant, which of the following program features are among your top five reasons for choosing to apply to a particular program?”

Survey Options: “Alumni,” “Cost of Living,” “Curriculum,” “Duration,” “Faculty,” “Funding,” “Internship Opportunities,” “Location,” “Postgraduate Placement,” “Reputation,” “Selectivity,” “Student-to-Faculty Ratio,” “Size,” “Teaching Opportunities,” and “Other.”

Additional Survey Instructions: Respondents were permitted to select multiple answers.

Survey Location: *The Creative Writing MFA Blog*

Survey Web Address: <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>

Survey Interface Application: Sponsored by Google

1. Funding (68%)
2. Reputation (61%)
3. Location (59%)
4. Faculty (50%)
5. Teaching Opportunities (41%)
6. Curriculum (28%)
7. Cost of Living (23%)
8. Alumni (21%)
9. Duration (19%)
10. Size (13%)
11. Selectivity (13%)
12. Postgraduate Placement (11%)
13. Student-to-Faculty Ratio (10%)
14. Internship Opportunities (6%)
15. Other (5%)

[$n = 909$.]

Survey 3

Survey Year: 2011

Survey Query: “As part of your research into MFA programs, how many current or former MFA students or faculty have you spoken to?”

Survey Options: “0,” “1 to 2,” “3 to 5,” “6 to 10,” “11 or more.”

Additional Survey Instructions: Respondents were limited to one answer.

Survey Location: *The Creative Writing MFA Blog*

Survey Web Address: <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>

1. 1 to 2 (34%)
2. 3 to 5 (27%)
3. 0 (25%)
4. 6 to 10 (7%)
5. 11 or more (4%)

[$n = 686$].

Survey 4**Survey Year:** 2011**Survey Query:** “Have you received advice from an undergraduate creative writing faculty member in applying to MFA programs?”**Survey Options:** “Yes,” “No,” and “Not Yet, But I Plan To.”**Additional Survey Instructions:** Respondents were limited to one answer.**Survey Location:** *The Creative Writing MFA Blog***Survey Web Address:** <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>

1. Yes (59%)
2. No (30%)
3. Not Yet, But I Plan To (10%)

[*n* = 860].Survey 5**Survey Year:** 2011**Survey Query:** “On a scale of ‘1’ to ‘10,’ how important are (or were) print-published national creative writing MFA rankings to your decision regarding where to apply for your MFA? (‘1’ is ‘entirely irrelevant,’ ‘10’ is ‘singularly essential’).”**Additional Survey Instructions:** Respondents were limited to one answer.**Survey Location:** *The Creative Writing MFA Blog***Survey Web Address:** <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>**Survey Interface Application:** Sponsored by Google

1. 8 (17%)
2. 7 (15%)
3. 1 (12%)
4. 5 (10%)
5. 6 (9%)
6. 9 (9%)
7. 3 (8%)
8. 4 (6%)
9. 10 (6%)
10. 2 (3%)

[*n* = 519].

With selections grouped by “positive” [6-10], “neutral” [5], and “negative” [1-4] scores:

1. Positive (58.9%)
2. Negative (31.1%)
3. Neutral (10%)

[*n* = 519].

Survey 6**Survey Year:** 2011**Survey Query:** “What are the top ten things that turn you off to, and/or lead you not to apply to, a particular creative writing MFA program?”**Survey Options:** “Heavy Teaching Load,” “High Application Fee,” “High GRE Minimums,” “Impolite Admissions Staff,” “Language Requirements,” “Low National Ranking,” “No Cross-Genre Work,” “No Health Insurance,” “No Opportunity to Teach Creative Writing,” “Not CGSR Compliant,” “Not Selective Enough,” “Poor Funding,” “Poor Placement Record,” “Program Too Large,” “Program Too Small,” “Too Long Duration,” “Too Much Academics,” “Too Short Duration,” “Undesirable Faculty,” “Undesirable Location,” and “Other.”**Additional Survey Instructions:** Respondents were asked to select up to ten answers.**Survey Location:** *The Creative Writing MFA Blog***Survey Web Address:** <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>**Survey Interface Application:** Sponsored by Google

1. Poor Funding (79%)
2. Undesirable Location (65%)
3. Low National Ranking (42%)
4. High GRE Minimums (38%)
5. High Application Fee (33%)
6. Heavy Teaching Load (32%)
7. Undesirable Faculty (30%)
8. Impolite Admissions Staff (29%)
9. No Chance to Teach Creative Writing (28%)
10. Language Requirements (26%)
11. Too Much Academics (25%)
12. No Cross-Genre Work (25%)
13. No Health Insurance (25%)
14. Program Too Large (25%)
15. Poor Placement Record (23%)
16. Too Short Duration (18%)
17. Not Selective Enough (18%)
18. Too Long Duration (16%)
19. Not CGSR Compliant (13%)
20. Program Too Small (8%)
21. Other (8%)

[*n* = 395.]Survey 7**Survey Year:** 2011**Survey Query:** “What do you consider the most important factors in deciding which MFA programs to apply to?”

Survey Options: “Advice From Family,” “Advice From Friends,” “Advice From Other Applicants,” “Aesthetic Diversity of Students,” “Alumni: Publishing Success,” “Alumni: Quality/Aesthetics of Work,” “Alumni Self-Reporting,” “Application Requirements: App Fee,” “Application Requirements: GRE Test,” “Career Services/Advising,” “Cohort Quality: Selectivity,” “Cohort Quality: Talent,” “Community Service Opportunities,” “Cost of Living,” “Cross-Genre Opportunities,” “Curricular Emphasis,” “Curricular Flexibility,” “Curricular Intensity,” “Demographic Diversity of Students,” “Editing Opportunities,” “Faculty: Accessibility,” “Faculty: Quality/Aesthetics of Work,” “Faculty Self-Reporting,” “Faculty Teaching Aptitude,” “Faculty: Visiting Writers,” “Funding,” “Graduation Requirements: Foreign Language,” “Internship Opportunities,” “Location,” “Networking Opportunities,” “Other [Non-Listed],” “Presence of Reading Series,” “Program Duration,” “Program Fellowship Placement,” “Program Job Placement,” “Program Size,” “Program Visit,” “Program Website,” “Student Body: Program Atmosphere,” “Rankings: Applicant’s Genre,” “Rankings: Overall,” “Recommendations: Undergraduate Professors,” “Student-to-Faculty Ratio,” “Student Self-Reporting,” “Teaching Load,” “Teaching Opportunities,” and “Workshop Format.”

Additional Survey Instructions: Respondents were permitted to select multiple answers.

Survey Location: *The Creative Writing MFA Blog*

Survey Web Address: <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>

Survey Interface Application: Sponsored by Google

1. Funding (65%)
2. Location (53%)
3. Faculty: Quality/Aesthetics of Work (41%)
4. Student Body: Program Atmosphere (40%)
5. Cost of Living (40%)
6. Teaching Opportunities (37%)
7. Rankings: Applicant’s Genre (34%)
8. Faculty: Accessibility (34%)
9. Recommendations: Undergraduate Professors (33%)
10. Rankings: Overall (32%)
11. Alumni: Publishing Success (31%)
12. Faculty: Visiting Writers (31%)
13. Program Size (30%) Faculty 16 (17%)
14. Networking Opportunities (29%)
15. Cohort Quality: Talent (29%)
16. Curricular Flexibility (29%)
17. Alumni: Quality/Aesthetics of Work (28%)
18. Cross-Genre Opportunities (27%)
19. Editing Opportunities (25%)
20. Workshop Format (24%)
21. Faculty Teaching Aptitude (24%)
22. Program Duration (24%) Faculty 19 (10%)
23. Program Job Placement (24%)
24. Internship Opportunities (23%)
25. Student-to-Faculty Ratio (23%)
26. Application Requirements: GRE Test (22%)

27. Cohort Quality: Selectivity (21%)
28. Advice From Other Applicants (21%)
29. Teaching Load (21%)
30. Student Self-Reporting (20%) *
31. Program Fellowship Placement (19%)
32. Curricular Emphasis (19%)
33. Curricular Intensity (17%)
34. Alumni Self-Reporting (17%) *
35. Application Requirements: App Fee (17%)
36. Career Services/Advising (16%)
37. Program Website (15%)
38. Presence of Reading Series (13%)
39. Demographic Diversity of Students (12%)
40. Aesthetic Diversity of Students (12%)
41. Faculty Self-Reporting (10%) *
42. Graduation Requirements: Foreign Language (9%)
43. Advice From Friends (9%)
44. Advice From Family (6%)
45. Program Visit (5%)
46. Community Service Opportunities (4%)
47. Other [Non-Listed] (3%)

[$n = 603$.]

* = “Self-reporting” refers to accounts of the program provided by members of the listed group (variously, current students, alumni of the program, and current members of program faculty.)

Survey 8

Survey Year: 2011

Survey Query: “If you are a current creative writing MFA applicant, how old will you be when you begin your program, assuming you’re admitted this year?”

Additional Survey Instructions: Respondents were limited to one answer.

Survey Location: *The Suburban Ecstasies*

Survey Web Address: <http://www.sethabramson.blogspot.com/>

Survey Interface Application: Sponsored by Google

1. 23-24 (18%)
2. 25-26 (16%)
3. 21-22 (13%)
4. 27-28 (11%)
5. Older than 40 (10%)
6. 29-30 (8%)
7. 31-32 (6%)
8. 33-34 (5%)

- 9. 35-36 (4%)
- 10. 37-38 (3%)
- 11. 39-40 (2%)

[$n = 1,937.$]

Survey 9

Survey Year: 2011

Survey Query: “How old are you?”

Additional Survey Instructions: Respondents were limited to one answer.

Survey Location: *The Creative Writing MFA Blog*

Survey Web Address: <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>

Survey Interface Application: Sponsored by Google

9A:

- 1. 23-24 (24%)
- 2. 25-26 (19%)
- 3. 21-22 (17%)
- 4. 27-28 (13%)
- 5. 29-30 (8%)
- 6t. 31-32 (5%)
- 6t. Older than 40 (5%)
- 8t. 33-34 (3%)
- 8t. 39-40 (3%)
- 10t. Under 21 (1%)
- 10t. 35-36 (1%)
- 12. 37-38 (0%)

[$n = 75.$]

And if one year is added to the age of each survey respondent, to approximate matriculant age (as per Survey 8a):

9B:

- 1. 25-26 (21%)
- 2. 23-24 (19%)
- 3. 27-28 (16%)
- 4t. 21-22 (9%)
- 4t. 29-30 (9%)
- 6t. 31-32 (8%)
- 6t. Older than 40 (8%)
- 8. 33-34 (7%)
- 9. 35-36 (3%)

10t. 37-38 (0%)

10t. 39-40 (0%)

[$n = 75$.]

9C:

In 2006, Stanford University Lecturer and novelist Tom Kealey surveyed two dozen current creative writing MFA students to determine their present age. He reported their average age to be 28, suggesting an average matriculant age of between 26 and 27. In 2008, an informal poll of nearly eighty commenters at *The Creative Writing MFA Blog* revealed an average age of between 25 and 26 for full-residency applicants and 35 and 36 for low-residency applicants. These figures translate, respectively, to “26-27” and “36-37” for matriculants.

Survey 10

Survey Year: 2008-20212 (variable; see below)

Survey Query: “What is your primary genre?”

10A:

Survey Year: 2012

Survey Location: *MFA Draft Group 2012*

Survey Web Address: <http://www.facebook.com/>

Survey Interface Application: Sponsored by Facebook

1. Fiction (70%)
2. Poetry (30%)

[$n = 234$.]

10B:

Survey Year: 2011

Survey Location: *The Creative Writing MFA Blog*

Survey Web Address: <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>

Survey Interface Application: Sponsored by Google

1. Fiction (63%)
2. Poetry (37%)

[$n = 640$.]

10C:**Survey Year:** 2011**Survey Location:** *The Creative Writing MFA Blog***Survey Web Address:** <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>**Survey Interface Application:** Sponsored by Google

1. Fiction (53%)
2. Poetry (28%)
3. Nonfiction (15%)
4. Other (2%)

[$n = 701$].**10D:****Survey Year:** 2011**Survey Location:** *The Creative Writing MFA Blog***Survey Web Address:** <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>**Survey Interface Application:** Sponsored by Google

Isolating only the 578 poetry and fiction respondents to the above poll Question (10C), the results are as follows:

1. Fiction (65%)
2. Poetry (35%)

[$n = 578$].**10E:****Survey Year:** 2008-2011**Survey Location:** *The Creative Writing MFA Blog***Survey Web Address:** <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>**Survey Interface Application:** Sponsored by Google

Using all available, program-supplied hard data from 2008 to 2011, the “actual” breakdown of fiction and poetry applications (creative nonfiction excluded) was as follows:

1. Fiction (70%)
2. Poetry (30%)

[$n = 12,368$].

Survey 11

Survey Year: 2010

Survey Query: “Why do you want to get a creative writing graduate degree?”

Survey Options: “Avoid Work,” “Community,” “Credential,” “Employability,” “Mentoring,” “Networking,” “Time to Write,” “Validation,” and “None of the Above.”

Additional Survey Instructions: Respondents were permitted to select multiple answers.

Survey Location: *The Creative Writing MFA Blog*

Survey Web Address: <http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/>

Survey Interface Application: Sponsored by Google

Top three responses only:

1. Time to Write (55 percent)
2. Employability (43 percent)
3. Mentoring (36 percent)

[$n = 253$.]

Appendix F: A Survey of Current MFA Faculty

In 2011, faculty at over a quarter of the world's (then) 162 full-residency MFA programs and 51 low-residency programs were interviewed by *Poets & Writers* to determine which program features faculty members felt should be most important in applicants' assessments of graduate creative writing programs. The results of this survey, outlined below, suggest a synchronicity between many of the priorities reported by applicants in a similar survey (see Appendix E). For instance, funding is the top priority among both survey groups, and location, quality of faculty members' published work, availability of teaching opportunities, program atmospherics, faculty accessibility, and curricular flexibility also are among the first fifteen priorities for both applicants and faculty. More broadly, there is a 60% correlation between applicants' and faculty members' top twenty priorities. Notably, neither applicants (#21) nor faculty (#11) rate "teaching aptitude" high on their list of priorities in assessing creative writing MFA programs. While the reason for this comparatively low valuation is unknown, one possible reason is that few graduate creative writing programs release contact information for current students to prospective applicants, so applicants often do not have access to current-student self-reporting regarding their faculty members' teaching aptitude.

The differences between the responses offered by the two groups—MFA applicants and current MFA faculty—are also substantial, however. For instance, the faculty cohort surveyed by *Poets & Writers* included "faculty self-reporting" among their first fifteen priorities in assessing a graduate creative writing program, while only 10% of applicants claim to use this sort of data. This may in part be explained by the fact that few MFA programs are known to permit prospective students to access contact information for full-time faculty prior to admission. Another area of divergence between applicant and faculty values is that faculty members indicate a strong preference that admitted students visit programs before matriculating; meanwhile, applicants generally place

“program visit” much lower on their own list of priorities. Nationally, fewer than ten MFA programs regularly provide admitted students with the funds to make a program visit—a possible explanation for this statistical disparity in the two surveys. Finally, while only 12% of current MFA faculty members explicitly advise applicants against relying on published “rankings” of programs, applicants are even more circumspect than this, with 40% (see Appendix E) expressing a neutral or negative attitude toward such assessments. Oddly, while only 2% of MFA faculty members explicitly urge applicants to get advice from undergraduate creative writing faculty members, 69% of applicants (see Appendix E) nevertheless avail themselves of this opportunity.

The survey below, structured as a qualitative study seeking narratives from current MFA faculty members as to how MFA applicants should select a program, has been reduced here to the quantitative by itemizing how frequently the MFA faculty members surveyed cited individual program elements as important. For more detail on the *Poets & Writers* methodology, see Appendix S. While there was substantial overlap between the program features mentioned by both MFA faculty members and MFA applicants in this survey and the preceding one (see Appendix E), three considerations mentioned by MFA applicants were mentioned by none of the 42 MFA faculty members surveyed by *Poets & Writers*: the cost of a program’s application (*Poets & Writers* studies published between 2009 and 2013 reveal that the cost of applying to a single program can range from a low of “free” to a high of \$150); the ranking of a program within an applicant’s genre; and recommendations provided to an applicant by other current applicants.

Survey 1

Survey Year: 2011

Survey Query: From *Poets & Writers*: “We asked directors, coordinators, and professors of full- and low-residency MFA programs to offer some advice for prospective students trying to decide which programs are right for them. Here’s what they said.”

Survey Location: *Poets & Writers* (September/October 2011, pp. 85-107 plus an online supplement at www.pw.org/magazine).

1. Funding (71%)
2. Faculty: Quality/Aesthetics of Work (69%)
3. Student Self-Reporting (60%) *
4. Student Body: Program Atmosphere (50%)
5. Faculty: Accessibility (41%)
6. Teaching Opportunities (38%)
7. Location (36%)
8. Editing Opportunities (31%)
9. Workshop Format (29%) **
10. Program Visit (26%)
11. Faculty: Teaching Aptitude (24%)
Curricular Flexibility (24%)
13. Alumni: Publishing Success (19%)
Faculty Self-Reporting (19%) *
15. Reading Series (19%)
16. Curricular Intensity (17%) ***
Program Size (17%)
18. Alumni Self-Reporting (12%) *
19. Cost of Living (10%)
Internship Opportunities (10%)
Program Duration (10%)
22. Curricular Emphasis (7%)
Faculty: Visiting Writers (7%)
Program Website (7%)
Cohort Quality (7%)
Cohort Quality (7%)
Student-to-Faculty Ratio (7%)
27. Career Services (5%)
Cross-genre Opportunities (5%)
Student Body: Aesthetic Diversity (5%)
Student Body: Demographic Diversity (5%)
Teaching Load (5%)
32. Alumni: Quality/Aesthetics of Work (2%)
Applicant Self-Reporting (2%) *****
Community Service Opportunities (2%)
Networking Opportunities (2%)
Program Emphasis (2%) ****
Recommendations: College Faculty (2%)
Thesis Protection (2%) ^

[$n = 42.$]

* = “Self-reporting” refers to accounts of the program provided by members of the listed group (variously, current students, alumni of the program, and current members of program faculty.)

** = Includes workshop size, tone, feedback type, and philosophy (e.g., a focus on publishability versus innovation or vice versa).

*** = Number, type, and academic challenge of required courses.

**** = Sample themes advertised by individual programs include International Writing, Writing on the Environment, and Writing for Children.

***** = Refers to an applicant's self-assessment as to whether he or she has the necessary motivation to complete an MFA, whether he or she is at the right age and in the right circumstances to benefit from an MFA, and whether he or she is willing and interested in applying to a large and diverse enough roster of MFA programs to make admission and a productive in-program experience likely.

^ = Whether a program embargoes theses or makes them freely available online.

Appendix G: A Listing of All Full-Residency MFAs

Prior to 2007, no tally of the total number of terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs worldwide had been conducted, nor any accounting made of their locations. While the Association of Writing Programs (later the Association of Writers and Writing Programs) maintained from the time of its founding a listing of member institutions, non-member institutions—including the significant number of terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs outside the United States—were excluded. The creation of a full listing of terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs enabled the subsequent creation of a chronological history of program creation (see Appendix A), which in turn allowed for macroanalytical assessments of how the discipline of creative writing evolved in terms of individual programs' location, curriculum, size, duration, funding scheme, and other factors. Charting the rapid pace of program creation also permitted comparative assessments to be made between the evolution of creative writing as an academic-institutional discipline and the concurrent evolution of other areas of graduate study such as the law, medicine, and engineering. Likewise, better understanding how many programs were in existence at each point in the eighty-year history of formalized creative writing programs allowed a contextualized history of national program assessment regimes (see Chapter 7) to be written, as well as the history of creative writing's internationalization over just the last twenty years.

Below is a listing of the 175 presently operating full-residency creative writing MFA programs in the United States and abroad (programs outside the U.S. are followed by a three-letter country code):

Adelphi University
 American University
 Arizona State University
 Bard College
 Boise State University
 Boston University

Bowling Green State University
Brigham Young University
Brooklyn College [CUNY]
Brown University
Butler University
California College of the Arts
California Institute of the Arts
California Institute of Integral Studies
California State University-Fresno
California State University-Long Beach
California State University-San Bernardino
CALMAT
Chapman University
Chatham University
Chicago State University
City College of New York [CUNY]
The College of Saint Rose
Colorado State University
Columbia College Chicago
Columbia University
Cornell University
Creighton University
De La Salle University-Manila
Eastern Washington University
Emerson College
Falmouth University [UK]
Florida Atlantic University
Florida International University
Florida State University
Fudan University [CHN]
George Mason University
Georgia College & State University
Georgia State University
Goldsmiths (University of London) [UK] *
Hamline University
Hofstra University
Hollins University
Hunter College [CUNY]
Indiana University
Iowa State University
Johns Hopkins University
Kingston University [UK]
Lindenwood University
Long Island University
Louisiana State University
Manhattanville College
McNeese State University
Mills College

Minnesota State University-Mankato
 Minnesota State University-Moorhead
 Mount St. Mary's College ****
 Naropa University
 NEOMFA
 New Mexico State University
 The New School
 New York University
 North Carolina State University
 Northern Arizona University
 Northern Michigan University
 Northwestern University
 Ohio State University
 Oklahoma State University
 Old Dominion University
 Oregon State University at Corvallis
 Otis College of Art & Design
 Our Lady of the Lake University
 Pepperdine University
 Portland State University
 Pratt Institute
 Purdue University
 Queens College [CUNY]
 Roosevelt University
 Rosemont College
 Rutgers University-Camden
 Rutgers University-Newark
 Saint Joseph's College
 Saint Mary's College of California
 Sam Houston State University
 San Diego State University
 San Francisco State University
 San Jose State University
 Sarah Lawrence College
 Savannah College of Art & Design
 School of the Art Institute of Chicago
 School of Visual Arts *
 Sewanee: The University of the South
 Shanghai University [CHN] **
 Simmons College ***
 Southern Connecticut State University
 Southern Illinois University
 Stony Brook Southampton [SUNY]
 Syracuse University
 Temple University
 Texas State University-San Marcos
 Universidad Nacional de Colombia [COL]
 University College Dublin [IRE]

University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa
University of Alaska-Fairbanks
University of Arizona
University of Arkansas
University of Baltimore
University of British Columbia-Vancouver [CAN]
University of British Columbia-Okanagan [CAN]
University of California-Irvine
University of California-Riverside
University of California-San Diego
University of Canterbury [NZ]
University of Central Arkansas
University of Central Florida
University of Central Oklahoma
University of Colorado-Boulder
University of Florida
University of Glasgow [UK]
University of Guelph-Humber [CAN]
University of Hong Kong [CHN]
University of Houston
University of Illinois
University of Idaho
University of Iowa (Iowa Writers' Workshop)
University of Iowa (Nonfiction Writing Program)
University of Iowa (Spanish Creative Writing Program)
University of Kansas
University of Kentucky
University of Maryland
University of Massachusetts-Amherst
University of Massachusetts-Boston
University of Memphis
University of Miami
University of Michigan
University of Minnesota
University of Mississippi
University of Missouri-Kansas City
University of Missouri-St. Louis
University of Montana
University of Nevada-Las Vegas
University of Nevada-Reno
University of New Hampshire
University of New Mexico
University of New Orleans
University of North Carolina-Greensboro
University of North Carolina-Wilmington
University of Notre Dame
University of Oregon
University of Pittsburgh

University of San Francisco
 University of Saskatchewan [CAN]
 University of South Carolina
 University of South Florida
 University of St. Andrews [UK]
 University of Surrey [UK]
 University of Tennessee-Knoxville
 University of Texas-Austin [New Writers Project]
 University of Texas-Austin [Michener Center]
 University of Texas-El Paso
 University of Texas-Pan American
 University of Utah
 University of Victoria [CAN]
 University of Virginia
 University of Washington-Bothell
 University of Washington-Seattle
 University of Wisconsin-Madison
 University of Wyoming
 Vanderbilt University
 Virginia Commonwealth University
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute [Virginia Tech]
 Washington University in St. Louis
 West Virginia University
 Western Michigan University
 Western Washington University
 Wichita State University
 William Paterson University

Notes: * = Art Writing only.
 ** = All instruction is in Chinese.
 *** = Writing for Children only.
 **** = “Weekend” MFA (all classes scheduled on weekends).

Appendix H: A Listing of All Low-Residency MFAs

Below is a listing of the 73 presently operating full-residency creative writing MFA programs in the United States and abroad (programs outside the U.S. are followed by a three-letter country code):

Albertus Magnus College
 Antioch University
 Arcadia University
 Ashland University
 Augsburg College
 Bard College
 Bay Path College
 Bennington College
 Carlow University
 Cedar Crest College
 Chatham University
 City University of Hong Kong [CHN]
 Converse College
 Drew University
 Eastern Kentucky University
 Eastern Oregon University
 Fairfield University
 Fairleigh Dickinson University
 Full Sail University ^
 Goddard College
 Goucher College **
 Hamline University
 Institute of American Indian Arts
 Lesley University
 Miami University (OH)
 Mississippi University for Women
 Murray State University
 Naropa University
 National University ^
 New England College
 New Hampshire Institute of Art
 New York University *
 Oklahoma City University
 Oregon State University at Cascades
 Pacific University
 Pacific Lutheran University
 Pine Manor College

Plymouth University [UK]
 Queens University of Charlotte
 Regis University
 School of the Art Institute of Chicago
 School of Visual Arts ***
 Seattle Pacific University
 Seton Hill University
 Sewanee: University of the South
 Sierra Nevada College
 Southern New Hampshire University
 Spalding University
 Stetson University
 University of Alaska-Anchorage
 University of Arkansas-Monticello ^
 University of British Columbia-Vancouver
 University of California-Riverside
 University of Georgia****
 University of King's College [CAN] **
 Transart Institute
 University of Houston-Victoria
 University of Nebraska-Omaha
 University of New Orleans
 University of Southern Maine
 University of Tampa
 University of Texas-El Paso
 Vermont College of Fine Arts
 Warren Wilson College
 West Virginia Wesleyan College
 Western Connecticut State University
 Western New England University
 Western State College of Colorado
 Whidbey Writers' Workshop
 Wilkes University

Notes: * = Residencies held in Paris, France.
 ** = Nonfiction only.
 *** = Visual Narrative only.
 **** = Narrative Nonfiction and Screenwriting only.
 ^ = Online-only program.

Appendix I: The Internationalization of the MFA

Tracking the development of terminal-degree creative writing programs outside the United States helps to underscore how closely the rise of the creative writing program has, and continues to be, associated particularly with the American academy. While the United Kingdom pioneered and substantially evolved the creative writing doctoral program—and there are still many more such programs in the U.K. than in the U.S., despite the much smaller population of the former (see Appendix J)—the creative writing Master of Fine Arts degree has for most of its history been a uniquely American invention. Indeed, in the first seventy years of the degree’s existence only two foreign universities developed creative writing MFA programs, suggesting an historically idiosyncratic association not just between a single degree and a single country but a single discipline and the nation in which it originated. Even today, aversion to the creative writing MFA remains palpable in Britain, the nation with the second-most graduate creative writing programs per capita; though the nation’s first doctoral creative writing program was founded in 1970, its first creative writing MFA program wasn’t founded until 2005. As the chart below details, however, recently there’s been a sea change in reception of the creative writing MFA abroad, especially in China and the United Kingdom, where four and three new MFA programs (respectively) have been founded in just the last five years. Still, with 248 creative writing MFA programs worldwide and only, as indicated below, 22 (9%) located outside the United States, it is clear that further research will be necessary to determine how and why the MFA has resisted export for so long, and how and why that decades-long circumstance may not slowly be coming to an end.

The foundation dates of nearly every full- and low-residency creative writing Master of Fine Arts program located outside the United States are listed below:

1960s (1; 0% low-residency)

1. University of British Columbia [CAN] (1965)

1970s (0)**1980s (1; 0% low-residency)**

2. De La Salle University [PHI] (1985)

1990s (0)**2000s (10; 10% low-residency)**

- 3t. Plymouth University [UK] (2005)
- 3t. University of British Columbia (2005) *
- 5. University of Guelph-Humber (2006)
- 6t. University College Dublin [IRE] (2007)
- 6t. Universidad Nacional de Columbia in Bogotá [COL] (2007)
- 8t. Goldsmiths (University of London) [UK] (2008)
- 8t. University of Glasgow [UK] (2008)
- 10t. Kingston University London [UK] (2009)
- 10t. University of Victoria [CAN] (2009)
- 12. University of British Columbia at Okanagan (200?)

2010s (10; 20% low-residency)

- 13t. City University of Hong Kong [CHN] (2010) *
- 13t. Fudan University [CHN] (2010)
- 15t. Shanghai University [CHN] (2011)
- 15t. University of Hong Kong [CHN] (2011)
- 15t. University of Saskatchewan [CAN] (2011)
- 18. University of Canterbury [NZ] (2012)
- 19. University of King's College, Halifax [CAN] (2013) *
- 20t. Falmouth University [UK] (2014)
- 20t. University of Surrey [UK] (2014)
- 22. University of St. Andrews [UK] (2015)

Appendix J: Creative Writing Doctoral Programs

It has long proved difficult to accurately tally the total number of creative writing doctoral programs worldwide, in part because so many are located in countries where the native language is not English—making it difficult to track down such programs using an English-language online search engine—and in part because many such programs are only infrequently employed, with new students either rarely accepted or never accepted at all. For instance, the creative writing doctoral program at University of Iowa is older even than the university’s storied MFA program, but has not accepted a new student for more than two decades; the creative writing doctoral program at University of Connecticut appears to be defunct but is still listed on the university’s website. Generally speaking, the presence of a creative writing doctoral program at a given university can be difficult to detect because the only distinction between such a program and a conventional Literary Studies Ph.D. is the permissive employment of a creative rather than critical dissertation. Some universities which do not formally advertise or even offer a creative writing doctoral program will nevertheless, on rare occasions, permit individual students to complete a creative dissertation, as happened at University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2014. Just so, at least one doctoral program, the Literary Studies Ph.D. at University of Wisconsin-Madison, permits its students to take significant creative writing workshops for credit even when it does not allow a student to complete a creative rather than critical dissertation for graduation. Generally speaking, Literary Studies doctoral programs do not allow their students to take more than one or two creative writing courses for Literary Studies Ph.D. credit; at University of Wisconsin-Madison, that number, instead, is six.

The above may explain, in part, why estimates of the number of creative writing doctoral programs in the United States have varied over the years. While the MFA Research Project has never established, in its three-year history, that fewer than 32 or more than 35 such programs have

existed in the United States in the present decade, estimates from the Association of Writers and Writing Programs have ranged from 37 (the number of programs AWP estimates existed in 2011) to 51 (the number estimated to have existed in 2013), with different AWP publications reciting different figures even for the same year.⁴⁵²

In the United Kingdom, the term “creative writing Ph.D.” means something quite different than it does in the United States, offering yet another obstacle to discussing cogently the popularity and spread of the degree over time. In the United States, creative writing doctoral students complete the same course of study their non-creative writing peers in the graduate English program do, with the exception that, as noted above, a number of creative writing workshops can be taken for credit; after taking a similar preliminary examination as their peers, however, creative writing Ph.D. students in the United States are permitted to write a creative rather than critical dissertation in fulfillment of their requirements for the degree. By comparison, creative writing Ph.D. students in the United Kingdom do very little—often no—coursework at all, receiving their doctorate after a two- or three-year course of study in which their only academic requirement is regular meetings with an academic advisor. On these grounds, arguably the creative writing doctorate in the United Kingdom is more analogous to a creative writing fellowship in the United States, though of course the professional value of a degree-granting program as compared to a fellowship program is notably different.

⁴⁵² For instance, while the 2012 AWP Director’s Handbook estimates that there were 38 creative writing doctoral programs within the ambit of its survey in 2012—some of which were non-member programs in England—by 2014 the 2012 estimate had been revised to 40, and the 2013 estimate given as a somewhat unlikely 51. These latter figures appeared in the organization’s 2014 Report on the Academic Job Market, which noted, following the table containing its Ph.D. program estimate, that “improvements to AWP’s website allow for more accurate record-keeping for the number of undergraduate degree programs, thus the significant fluctuations in recent data (as well as minor changes year to year in the number of graduate programs.” Whether this also explains the dramatic increase in AWP’s estimate of creative writing Ph.D. programs between 2012 and 2013 is unknown. More importantly, it can be said that a review of the creative writing Ph.D. programs identified by AWP in 2015 includes only 48 programs, nine of which—Baylor University, Claremont Graduate University, Duquesne University, Harvard University, Michigan State University, Morgan State University, Northeastern University, Rice University, and Wayne State University—are not, in fact creative writing doctoral programs but Literary Studies Ph.D. programs.

Below is a listing of the 96 presently operating full-residency creative writing doctoral programs in the United States and abroad (programs are ordered by host country:

United States (34; 35% of total program list)

Binghamton University
 Florida State University
 Georgia State University
 Illinois State University
 Ohio University
 Oklahoma State University
 State University of New York at Albany
 Texas A&M University
 Texas Tech University
 Union Institute & University
 University of California-Irvine *
 University of Cincinnati
 University of Denver
 University of Georgia
 University of Hawaii
 University of Houston
 University of Illinois-Chicago
 University of Kansas
 University of Louisiana-Lafayette
 University of Missouri-Columbia
 University of Nebraska-Lincoln
 University of Nevada-Las Vegas
 University of North Dakota
 University of North Texas
 University of Rhode Island
 University of South Dakota
 University of Southern California
 University of Southern Mississippi
 University of Tennessee-Knoxville
 University of Texas-Dallas
 University of Utah
 University of Wisconsin-Madison **
 University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
 Western Michigan University

* = Creative Nonfiction only.

** = Critical dissertation required.

United Kingdom (47; 49% of total program list)

Anglia Ruskin University
Bath Spa University
Brunel University at West London
Cardiff University
Edge Hill University
De Montfort University at Leicester
Essex University
Kingston University at London
Lancaster University
Loughborough University
Manchester Metropolitan University
Middlesex University
Newcastle University
Northumbria University
Nottingham Trent University
The Open University
Queen's University at Belfast
Roehampton University
Saint Mary's University College at Twickenham
Swansea University
University of Bedfordshire
University of Bolton
University of Bradford
University of Chester
University of Chichester
University of East Anglia
University of Edinburgh
University of Exeter
University of Glasgow
University of Gloucestershire
University of Kent
University of Leeds
University of London (Goldsmiths)
University of London (Royal Holloway)
University of Manchester
University of Nottingham
University of Plymouth
University of Reading
University of Saint Andrews
University of Salford
University of Southampton
University of Sussex

University of Wales at Aberystwyth
University of Wales at Bangor
University of Wales at Lampeter
University of Winchester
Warnborough College

Australia and New Zealand (13; 14% of total program list)

Deakin University
Flinders University
Monash University
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
Swinburne University of Technology
University of Adelaide
University of Melbourne
University of New South Wales
University of Queensland
University of Western Australia
University of Wollongong
Victoria University
Victoria University of Wellington

Canada (1; 1% of total program list)

University of Calgary

The Philippines (1; 1% of total program list)

University of the Philippines-Diliman

Appendix K: Most Popular Creative Writing Master's (M.A.) Programs

Creative writing M.A. programs are non-terminal, research-oriented programs that offer preparation for future study in a scholarly doctorate program—or future fine arts study in a creative writing MFA—but permit their students to take writing courses for credit and (in recent decades) produce a creative rather than critical thesis. Between 1937 and 1963, exponentially more creative writing M.A. programs were founded than creative writing MFA programs: zero creative writing MFA programs were founded, while at least five creative writing M.A. programs were. The creative writing M.A. model offered an alternative to the creative writing MFA by keeping creative writing administratively, and as a matter of curriculum, closely tied to its host English department. Literature courses were required at a higher rate than in creative writing MFA programs, and, at least in the early years of the degree, some students wrote critical rather than creative dissertations.

There is no reliable data on the number of creative writing M.A. programs nationally, in part because the only available tally, the tally conducted by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs, has varied so widely over the years that its accuracy cannot presently be relied upon. For instance, AWP reports that 11 creative writing M.A. programs closed their doors between 2004 and 2008, and another 30 between 2008 and 2011—even as its tally records 17 programs being founded from 2011 to 2012, and another 23 from 2012 to 2013.⁴⁵³ Cross-indexing this tally with the tally published by the organization just two years prior, in the 2012 AWP Director's Handbook, raises even more questions. According to the latter document, in 2009 there were 145 creative writing M.A. programs, a figure that suggests—if in fact the 2014 Report on the Academic Job Market is correct that there were 113 such programs in 2011—that in a twenty-four month period 32 creative writing M.A. programs, or nearly a quarter of all such programs then in existence, suddenly folded.

⁴⁵³ See 2014 AWP Report on the Academic Job Market, available at www.awp.org.

What can be said for certain is that many of the most popular creative writing MFA programs were once creative writing M.A. programs, and that the most popular M.A. programs (see below) share a number of traits with the most popular MFA programs, most notably the presence of full funding for all admitted students. Current MFA programs listed among the 75 most popular (see Appendix C) that were once M.A. programs include Boston University, Cornell University, Hollins University, Indiana University, Johns Hopkins University, University of Florida, and University of New Hampshire. Other MFA programs with this background include Northwestern University, Temple University, and University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

While it is difficult to capture the application decisions of creative writing M.A. applicants—as five years of surveys of applicants to graduate creative writing programs suggests that only one out of every fifteen such applicants is applying to even a single such program—listed below are the most popular programs among the applicant cohort surveyed between 2008 and 2013. Notable is the presence of several fully funded programs (including University of California-Davis, Miami University of Ohio, Ohio University, one-time M.A. program University of Tennessee-Knoxville, and Kansas State University) at the top of the list. As with the listing of most popular creative writing MFA programs (see Appendix A), the presence of fully funded programs atop the roster of most popular M.A. programs is telling because it suggests, apropos of the findings regarding MFA students’ limited interest in postgraduate job placement (see Appendix E), that the “vocational” element of creative writing instruction has waned over the years.

1. University of California-Davis (69)
2. University of Southern California (14)
3. Miami University [OH] (9)
- 4t. Ohio University (8)
- 4t. University of East Anglia [UK] (8)
6. Eastern Michigan University (7)
7. University of Tennessee-Knoxville (6)
- 8t. Bucknell University (4)
- 8t. Kansas State University (4)

- 8t. University of Maine-Orono (4)
- 8t. University of Toronto [CAN] (4)
- 12t. Bath Spa University [UK] (3)
- 12t. Concordia University [CAN] (3)
- 12t. Oxford University [UK] (3)
- 12t. University of Cincinnati (3)
- 16t. Ball State University (2)
- 16t. University of Edinburgh [UK] (2)
- 16t. University of Louisville (2)
- 16t. University of Hawaii-Manoa (2)
- 16t. University of Kent [UK] (2)
- 16t. University of Manchester [UK] (2)
- 16t. University of Stirling [UK] (2)
- 23t. California State University-Sonoma (1)
- 23t. Carnegie Mellon University (1)
- 23t. City University London [UK] (1)
- 23t. College of Charleston (1)
- 23t. Dartmouth College (1)
- 23t. DePaul University (1)
- 23t. Kennesaw State University (1)
- 23t. London Metropolitan University [UK] (1)
- 23t. Mississippi State University (1)
- 23t. Queen's University at Belfast [IRE] (1)
- 23t. Royal Holloway, University of London [UK] (1)
- 23t. Saint Louis University-Saint Louis [US] (1)
- 23t. Saint Louis University-Madrid [SPN] (1)
- 23t. Simon Fraser University [CAN] (1)
- 23t. Trinity University-Dublin [IRE] (1)
- 23t. University of Calgary [CAN] (1)
- 23t. University of Chicago (1)
- 23t. University of Exeter [UK] (1)
- 23t. University of New Brunswick [CAN] (1)
- 23t. University of Newcastle [UK] (1)
- 23t. University of North Texas (1)
- 23t. University of Oklahoma (1)
- 23t. University of Rhode Island (1)
- 23t. University of Roehampton [UK] (1)
- 23t. University of Southampton [UK] (1)
- 23t. University of Sussex [UK] (1)
- 23t. University of Warwick [UK] (1)
- 23t. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (1)
- 23t. Windsor University [CAN] (1)

[$n = 157.$]

Appendix L : Most Popular Low-Residency MFAs

A relatively recent invention—the first low-residency MFA program was founded in 1976, and as recently as 1996 there were only four in operation worldwide—low-residency programs now make up nearly half of all new MFA programs. As with the popularity of fully funded full-residency MFA and M.A. programs (see Appendices C and K), the dramatic rise in the popularity of low-residency MFA is both a reaction to the limited funding opportunities available for graduate creative writing students and the waning belief that such degrees can act as a professional credential. Low-residency MFA students remain in their present employment and are “on campus” for only several weeks each year. The recent popularization of distance learning pedagogies has made the operation of low-residency MFA programs both financially efficient and logistically practical. Along with the fact that there are no fully funded low-residency programs—in fact, no programs that are even half funded for all students—this explains, too, why low-residency MFA programs are seen as revenue-building programs for colleges and universities. The average age of a low-residency MFA matriculant is, according to surveys (see Appendix E), presently ten years older than the average age of a full-residency matriculant: 36.5 as compared to 26.5.

Below is a listing of the most popular low-residency MFA programs, as reported by more than 300 low-residency MFA applicants surveyed between 2008 and 2013. The numbers in parentheses following each school name correspond to the number of times the listed program appeared on the applicant list of a surveyed applicant.

1. Warren Wilson College (119)
2. Vermont College of Fine Arts (109)
3. Bennington College (89)
4. Pacific University (56)
5. Antioch University (51)
6. Lesley University (48)
7. Queens University of Charlotte (46)

- 8. University of Southern Maine (Stonecoast) (40)
- 9. Spalding University (31)
- 10. Goddard College (26)
- 11. Goucher College (14)
- 12t. Bard College (12)
- 12t. Pacific Lutheran University (11)
- 12t. University of Nebraska-Omaha (11)
- 15t. Pine Manor College (9)
- 15t. University of Alaska-Anchorage (9)
- 15t. University of New Orleans (9)
- 18t. Murray State University (8)
- 19t. University of British Columbia [CAN] (7)
- 19t. University of California-Riverside (7)
- 21t. Naropa University (6)
- 21t. New England College (6)
- 21t. Seton Hill University (6)
- 24t. Fairleigh Dickinson University (5)
- 24t. Hollins University (5)
- 26t. Converse College (4)
- 26t. Drew University (4)
- 26t. Hamline University (4)
- 26t. Seattle Pacific University (4)
- 26t. University of Texas-El Paso (4)
- 31t. Sewanee School of Letters (3)
- 31t. University of Tampa (3)
- 33t. Carlow University (2)
- 33t. Eastern Kentucky University (2)
- 33t. Fairfield University (2)
- 33t. Southern New Hampshire University (2)
- 33t. Western Connecticut State University (2)
- 33t. Wilkes University (2)
- 39t. Ashland University (1)
- 39t. Chatham University (1)
- 39t. Sierra Nevada College (1)
- 42t. Albertus Magnus College (0)
- 42t. Arcadia University (0)
- 42t. Cedar Crest College (0)
- 42t. City University of Hong King [CHN] (0)
- 42t. Full Sail University [Online] (0)
- 42t. Lancaster University [UK] (0)
- 42t. National University [Online] (0)
- 42t. Oklahoma City University (0)
- 42t. West Virginia Wesleyan University (0)
- 42t. Western State College of Colorado (0)
- 42t. Whidbey Writers' Workshop (0)
- 42t. William Paterson University (0)

[$n = 302$.]

Appendix M: Post-MFA Job Placement Data

As reported by *Poets & Writers* in methodology articles for its annual MFA program assessment (see Appendix S), fewer than 1% of MFA program graduates in fiction and poetry can expect to be hired into a full-time job teaching creative writing at the university level. This research underscored not only the shift away from creative writing MFA programs as vocational training for full-time university employment, but also the research yet to be done on MFA program's post-graduate outcomes. Discussion of the institutionalization and professionalization of creative writing at times suggests that graduates of creative writing MFA programs become permanently institutionalized authors; as the figures below confirm, even the creative writing MFA programs most successful at placing their graduates in full-time university teaching positions are in fact sending only the smallest fraction of their alumni into continued employment in academia.

In the chart below, each MFA program is assigned a job placement score by dividing the number of reported full-time university hires of that program's alumni between 2009 and 2013 and the size of the program's annual matriculating class. Only a small percentage of all MFA programs—63 of the 248 now extant, or 25%—were reported to have placed even a single graduate in full-time university employment. Data for this chart was taken from the highest-traffic online data archive for academic hiring in creative writing in the United States, *The Academic Jobs Wiki*.

1. University of Wisconsin at Madison (1.200)
2. University of Iowa (1.075)
3. University of Florida (1.000)
4. University of Virginia (0.900)
5. Cornell University (0.875)
6. University of Texas at Austin [Michener Center] (0.667)
7. Johns Hopkins University (0.600)
8. University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa (0.555)
9. Ohio State University (0.533)
10. University of Massachusetts at Amherst (0.500)

- 11t. Syracuse University (0.500)
- 11t. Washington University in Saint Louis (0.500)
- 13. University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (0.500)
- 14. Indiana University (0.417)
- 15t. Bowling Green State University (0.400)
- 15t. Brown University (0.400)
- 17t. University of California at Irvine (0.364)
- 17t. University of Notre Dame (0.364)
- 19. University of Pittsburgh (0.286)
- 20. Southern Illinois University (0.273)
- 21. Boston University (0.250)
- 22. University of Oregon (0.250)
- 23t. Purdue University (0.250)
- 23t. University of Mississippi (0.250)
- 25. University of Washington at Seattle (0.222)
- 26. New York University (0.200)
- 27t. Eastern Washington University (0.200)
- 27t. University of Montana (0.200)
- 29. Colorado State University (0.182)
- 30. University of Houston (0.167)
- 31. University of Minnesota (0.167)
- 32. University of Miami (0.167)
- 33. George Mason University (0.158)
- 34. University of Michigan (0.150)
- 35. University of Arizona (0.148)
- 36t. Virginia Polytechnic Institute [Virginia Tech] (0.143)
- 36t. University of New Mexico (0.143)
- 38. Brooklyn College [CUNY] (0.136)
- 39. University of Maryland (0.125)
- 40t. Georgia College & State University (0.125)
- 40t. Western Michigan University (0.125)
- 42. CalArts (0.111)
- 42. University of South Carolina (0.111)
- 44t. Arizona State University (0.100)
- 44t. McNeese State University (0.100)
- 44t. University of Idaho (0.100)
- 44t. West Virginia University (0.100)
- 44t. Wichita State University (0.100)
- 49. University of North Carolina at Wilmington (0.092)
- 50. Texas State University at San Marcos (0.091)
- 51. Hollins University (0.083)
- 52. University of New Orleans (0.080)
- 53. Emerson College (0.074)
- 54. University of Central Florida (0.063)
- 55. Columbia University (0.059)
- 56. Sarah Lawrence College (0.057)
- 57t. American University (0.050)
- 57t. University of Alaska at Fairbanks (0.050)

59. San Francisco State University (0.042)
60. School of the Art Institute of Chicago (0.037)
61. University of San Francisco (0.032)
62. Stony Brook Southampton [SUNY] (0.030)
63. The New School (0.009)

[$n = 293$.]

Appendix N: Gender and Creative Writing Jobs

Between 2008 and 2012, the most popular online discussion board for creative writing job-seekers pursuing full-time employment at the university level, *The Academic Jobs Wiki*, listed 353 full-time positions available for poets and fiction writers which resulted in confirmed hires. Data on the individuals ultimately hired for these openings was available for 198 of these 353 listings (56%). Based on research into the educational credentials of the individuals ultimately hired for these positions, an ordered listing was created to indicate which graduate creative writing programs' alumni enjoyed the most success on the academic job market over these four hiring cycles. Five-year data regarding the gender of these 220 hires was also compiled, and is summarized below:

2008-2009 Hiring Season (68 confirmed hires, hire info for 62%)

Female: 24 (57%)

Male: 18 (43%)

2009-2010 Hiring Season (84 confirmed hires, hire info for 52%)

Female: 25 (57%)

Male: 19 (43%)

2010-2011 Hiring Season (75 confirmed hires, hire info for 79%)

Female: 29 (49%)

Male: 30 (51%)

2011-2012 Hiring Season (146 confirmed hires, hire info for 36%)

Female: 26 (49%)

Male: 27 (51%)

2008-2012 Hiring Seasons (353 confirmed hires, hire info for 62%)

Female: 104 (53%)

Male: 94 (47%)

Appendix 0: Post-MFA Fellowship Placement

One type of data that helps us understand the role of academic-institutional creative writing in the lifetimes of creative writers is post-graduate placement data. As noted in Appendix M, a full-time creative writing teaching position is available, at the university level, for less than 1% of annual graduates of creative writing MFA programs. This raises a necessary question as to what career and artistic path degreed poets and writers are taking upon graduation from their MFA programs.

Between 2003 and 2013, all known creative writing fellowships specifically designed for post-MFA poets and writers, 40 in all, were surveyed to determine the alma maters of those poets and writers who received such fellowships. More than 900 fellowship-placement “events” were catalogued, during a timespan in which more than 20,000 poets and writers (see Appendix P) graduated from terminal-degree creative writing programs. This suggests that well under 5% of the annual graduates of MFA programs are receiving further institutional support post-MFA via creative writing fellowships.

In the chart below, each listed institution has been assigned a score in a fashion similar to that described in Appendix M: the number of placement events involving individuals from a given MFA program are divided by the annual cohort size of that program in fiction and poetry. Creative nonfiction graduates and creative writing doctorate-holders were not considered for this assessment, and where two programs received the same score the tie was broken in favor of the program with more total placements. Programs without extant graduating classes for the entirety of the assessment period receive pro-rated scores based on the performance of their eligible graduating cohorts.

The following forty creative writing fellowships were considered for this assessment: The Akademie Schloss Solitude Fellowship Program in Stuttgart, Germany; The Axton Fellowship at University of Louisville in Kentucky; the Bard Fiction Prize and Residency at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; the Bennett Fellowship and Writer-in-Residence at Phillips

Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire; the Gaius Charles Bolin Fellowship at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts; Bread Loaf Writers' Conference Fellowships ("Waiterships") at Middlebury College in Vermont; the Amy Clampitt Residency Award at the Amy Clampitt House in Lenox, Massachusetts; the Eva Jane Coombe Writer-in-Residence Program at Seven Hills School in Cincinnati, Ohio; the Daehler Fellowship/Writer-in-Residence Program at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, Colorado; the Emory Creative Writing Fellowship in Atlanta, Georgia; the Fine Arts Work Center Fellowship in Provincetown, Massachusetts; the Gettysburg Emerging Writer Lectureship at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania; the Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University in New Jersey; the Hugo House Writer-in-Residence Program at the Richard Hugo House in Seattle, Washington; the HUB-BUB Artist-in-Residence Program in Spartansburg, South Carolina; the Jack Kerouac House Residency in Orlando, Florida; the Kelly Writers House ArtsEdge Residency at University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia; the Kenan Visiting Writer Program at University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill; the Kenyon Review Fellowships at Kenyon College in Ohio; the Herbert W. Martin Postgraduate Fellowship in Creative Writing and Diversity at Dayton University in Ohio; the James Merrill Writer-in-Residence at the James Merrill House in Stonington, Connecticut; the Jenny McKean Moore Writer-in-Residence Program at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.; the Moseley Fellowship in Creative Writing at Pomona College in California; the Olive B. O'Connor Fellowship at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York; the Dobie Paisano Fellowship Program at University of Texas in Austin; the Charles Pick Fellowships at University of East Anglia in Norwich, United Kingdom; the Madeleine P. Plonsker Emerging Writer's Residency Prize at Lake Forest College in Illinois; Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowships from the Poetry Foundation in Chicago, Illinois; the Philip Roth Residency at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania; the Writer-in-Residence Program at The Saint Albans School in Washington, D.C.; the Southern Review Resident Scholar Program at Louisiana State University in

Baton Rouge; the Stadler Fellowship at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania; the Steinbeck Fellowship for Fiction-Writers at the Center for Steinbeck Studies at San Jose State University in California; the Stegner Fellowship at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California; the Elma Stuckey Liberal Arts and Sciences Emerging Poet-in-Residence Program at Columbia College in Chicago; the Tickner Fellowship at The Gilman School in Baltimore, Maryland; Vermont Studio Center Fellowships at the Vermont Studio Center in Johnson; the Wisconsin Creative Writing Institute Fellowship at University of Wisconsin in Madison; the David T.K. Wong Fiction Fellowships at University of East Anglia in Norwich, United Kingdom; and the Writer-in-Residence Fellowships at the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts in Nebraska City, Nebraska.

1. University of Wisconsin at Madison (5.922)
2. University of Texas at Austin [Michener Center] (3.100)
3. Cornell University (2.500)
4. University of Iowa (2.350)
5. University of Virginia (2.167)
6. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2.100)
7. University of Michigan (1.75)
8. University of Oregon (1.330)
9. University of Houston (1.170)
- 10t. Brown University (1.000)
- 10t. Washington University at Saint Louis (1.000)
12. University of Minnesota (0.9167)
13. Johns Hopkins University (0.9000)
14. Purdue University (0.8750)
15. University of Montana (0.8000)
16. University of Arizona (0.6800)
17. University of North Carolina at Greensboro (0.6700)
18. Vanderbilt University (0.6667)
19. University of Washington at Seattle (0.6471)
20. New York University (0.6250)
21. University of Massachusetts at Amherst (0.6000)
22. University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (0.600)
23. Hunter College [CUNY] (0.5833)
24. Ohio State University (0.5333)
25. University of Maryland (0.5000)
26. University of Florida (0.5000)
- 27t. Arizona State University (0.5000)
- 27t. Bowling Green State University (0.5000)
29. Boston University (0.4583)

- 30t. University of California at Irvine (0.4545)
- 30t. Virginia Commonwealth University (0.4545)
- 32. University of South Florida (0.4444)
- 33. University of Pittsburgh (0.4286)
- 34. Indiana University (0.4167)
- 35. University of Notre Dame (0.4000)
- 36. Florida International University (0.4000)
- 37. Georgia College & State University (0.3750)
- 38. Emerson College (0.3500)
- 39. George Mason University (0.3421)
- 40. University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa (0.3333)
- 41. University of Mississippi (0.3325)
- 42. Columbia University (0.3069)
- 43. University of Kansas (0.3000)
- 44. Louisiana State University (0.2858)
- 45. Syracuse University (0.2500)
- 46. University of New Mexico (0.2400)
- 47t. Saint Mary's College of California (0.2272)
- 47t. University of Utah (0.2222)
- 49. Florida Atlantic University (0.2000)
- 50. University of Massachusetts at Boston (0.2000)
- 51t. Boise State University (0.2000)
- 51t. University of California at San Diego (0.2000)
- 53. University of North Carolina at Wilmington (0.1818)
- 54. Sarah Lawrence College (0.1800)
- 55. CalArts (0.1667)
- 56. Old Dominion University (0.1667)
- 57. University of Miami (0.1667)
- 58. Brooklyn College [CUNY] (0.1600)
- 59. Oregon State University (0.1482)
- 60. Florida State University (0.1411)
- 61. Texas State University at San Marcos (0.1364)
- 62t. West Virginia University (0.1250)
- 62t. Western Michigan University (0.1250)
- 64t. American University (0.1000)
- 64t. Minnesota State University at Mankato (0.1000)
- 66t. Hamline University (0.1000)
- 66t. McNeese State University (0.1000)
- 66t. New Mexico State University (0.0100)
- 69. Colorado State University (0.0909)
- 70. Southern Illinois University (0.0909)
- 71. San Francisco State University (0.0800)
- 72. University of California at Riverside (0.0784)
- 73t. Hollins University (0.0769)
- 73t. San Diego State University (0.0769)
- 75. School of the Art Institute of Chicago (0.0741)
- 76. Rutgers University at Newark (0.0682)
- 77t. Adelphi University (0.0667)

- 77t. University of New Hampshire (0.0667)
- 79. Mills College (0.0625)
- 80. Portland State University (0.0600)
- 81. University of Memphis (0.0556)
- 82. The New School (0.0533)
- 83. California State University at Fresno (0.0500)
- 84. City College of New York [CCNY] (0.0400)
- 85. University of British Columbia [CAN] (0.0300)

[$n = 901$].

Appendix P: National Applicant Pool Size

Using application-list data compiled by Poets & Writers magazine from 2008 to 2013, it is possible to estimate with some accuracy the size of the annual MFA applicant pool in fiction and poetry, in creative nonfiction, and in the sphere of low-residency programs. Knowing the size of the annual applicant pool for terminal-degree creative writing programs helps us understand how popular these programs are, how selective they are, and how many such programs actually draw interest from a national base of aspiring poets and writers. Other uses of this information include gauging the appropriate sample-size for future surveys of MFA applicants—as only by knowing the total size of the applicant pool for MFA programs can a reasonable sample-size be selected for surveying—and tracking the relative popularity of the creative writing MFA degree from year to year. This latter information can then be used to cross-index application trends with, for example, changes in the domestic economy or significant alterations to the funding, curricular, or residency structures of graduate creative writing programs. And of course, like any data-set with far-reaching implications, there are utilities for the hard data below that researchers may not yet have devised.

To create a range of estimates for the annual applicant-pool size in creative writing, the frequency with which each full-residency MFA program appeared on surveyed fiction and poetry applicants' application lists (see Appendix C and below) was determined by dividing the total number of application-list appearances for a particular program in both fiction and poetry by the total number of applicants in these two genres surveyed during the 2010–2011 admissions cycle (640). Because recent applicant-pool hard data is available for thirty-nine full-residency MFA programs—that is, because thirty-nine full-residency programs have thus far made available recent data regarding their annual applicant pool size—a function of these two data-points was used to

estimate the annual applicant pool for full-residency, terminal-degree fiction and poetry programs for the 2010–2011 admission cycle.

While such an extrapolation as is described above presumes that the users of *The Creative Writing MFA Blog*, from which the application lists for 2010-2011 were retrieved, were and are demographically similar to those individuals who did not use *The Creative Writing MFA Blog* to research programs during the polling period (and that those who supplied their application lists to *The Creative Writing MFA Blog* were demographically similar to those who were patrons but did not), this sampling was used because (1) demographic data for full- and low-residency applicants is not presently known or knowable, and (2) there is no particular reason to suspect dramatic demographic differences between the various subgroups cited above, as *The Creative Writing MFA Blog* is a public website easily accessible by networked computer and was, at the time all this data was collected, instantly discoverable via even the most cursory online search for any topic involving graduate creative writing programs (see Appendix S). Likewise, because Google's individuated user accounts allow website patrons to manage the amount of personal information they release to the public, there is no particular reason for any subset of applicants to feel chilled from casting a vote for whichever programs they favor.

While the general tenor of discourse on *The Creative Writing MFA Blog* in 2010 and 2011 was consistent with the applicant-demographic polling described in Appendix E—for instance, the community generally favored more selective over less selective programs, more popular programs over less popular ones, programs with better student-faculty ratios over those with worse ones, programs in cities and towns popular among younger Americans versus those in less talked-about locales, funded over unfunded programs, and programs with a longer duration over those with a shorter one—these attitudes are consistent with the present conventional wisdom expounded upon at length in media accounts of the creative writing MFA, as well as the sort of advice about

important program features that creative writing professors give to their MFA-aspirant students every day (see Appendix F). At first blush, at least, there appears to be nothing remarkable about the demographics of those who patronize a free, public, lightly-moderated website like *The Creative Writing MFA Blog*.

According to a 2009 estimate by AWP, there are “more than 13,000 applicants to [full- and low-residency] MFA programs each year.” This estimate is markedly different from the estimates offered below, perhaps in part because the AWP estimate appears to tally applications rather than applicants. While even the methods detailed in this Appendix cannot determine with certainty the total number of applicants annually to full-residency programs in the United States, based on the available data the present median estimate for solely full-residency programs (that is, excluding creative writing M.A. and Ph.D. programs, as well as low-residency MFA programs) this figure is **2,797**. The mean estimate is **3,253**. Subtracting the two lowest and two highest outliers from the 39 data-points below used to render this estimate results in an “adjusted mean” of **3,042**.

Similar calculations conducted during the 2009–10 admissions cycle produced similar results at those outlined above. In 2009-10, the median estimate for the full-residency MFA applicant pool was **3,116**; the mean was **3,478**; and the adjusted mean, which dropped the lowest and highest outliers from a data-set that included 63 data-points, was **3,276**. These numbers suggest that the 2011 *Poets & Writers* MFA issue, for instance, surveyed more than 15% of the annual applicant pool to full-residency MFA programs, while the 2012 *Poets & Writers* MFA issue surveyed more than 20% of this population.

To arrive at the full-residency applicant-pool estimates listed in this Appendix, the following equation was used:

$$(640 / \# \text{ of application-list appearances by a program in the 2010–11 Poets \& Writers applicant survey}) \\ \times (\text{the } \# \text{ of poetry/fiction applicants actually reported by that program during the 2010–11 admissions cycle})$$

Using the equation above, it can be seen that 26 of the 39 data-points used to issue final estimates for the annual full-residency applicant pool (67%) fell within approximately 1,000 applicants of the above-cited mean of 2,797, and 32 estimates (82%) fell within 1,500. This suggests that while the figures provided above do carry with them a notable margin of error, under no circumstances could that margin of error elevate these estimates to the levels formerly published by AWP.

Of the ten programs listed below with the highest upward deviation from the adjusted mean—that is, the programs whose popularity was most likely to have been under-tabulated by the *Poets & Writers* survey, thereby pushing their projected pool estimate higher than other programs’ corresponding estimates—not one is fully-funded, and in fact only one funds even half of its students. In addition, most of these programs are of shorter duration and located in one of four high-cost-of-living locales: Boston, New York City, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. This may explain why the pool estimates arrived at using these programs’ hard data were substantially higher than the estimates produced by looking at other programs.

Conversely, of the twenty programs with the largest downward deviation from the adjusted mean—that is, the programs whose popularity was most likely to have been over-tabulated by the *Poets & Writers* survey, thereby pushing their projected pool estimate lower than other programs’ corresponding estimates—eighteen (90%) are fully funded. Of the remaining two programs, one is 70% fully funded, and one received an “Honorable Mention” citation for funding in the 2012 *Poets & Writers* MFA issue. These programs are also largely three years in duration and located at public universities: two other program indicators generally favored by the applicant cohort whose application lists were surveyed for the 2012 *Poets & Writers* MFA issue.

Below, then, is a series of full-residency applicant-pool estimates derived from a) applicant survey data collected by *Poets & Writers* in 2011, and b) admissions hard data supplied by 39 MFA programs in 2010 or 2011. These estimates are order from lowest to highest, meaning that the lowest estimates for the annual fiction/poetry full-residency applicant pool in the United States appear at the top of the list. It was these data-points that were used to produce the means, adjusted means, and medians listed on the preceding pages.

McNeese State University: **1,176**
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute: **1,580**
 Purdue University: **1,697**
 University of Minnesota: **1,758 ***
 University of South Carolina: **1,768**
 University of California in San Diego: **1,824**
 Louisiana State University: **1,874**
 University of Miami: **1,920**
 University of Colorado-Boulder: **1,996 ***
 Indiana University: **2,116**
 Cornell University: **2,201**
 Arizona State University: **2,352**
 Johns Hopkins University: **2,369**
 University of Iowa: **2,424**
 University of Florida: **2,600**
 Syracuse University: **2,601**
 University of Nevada-Las Vegas: **2,618**
 University of Wisconsin-Madison: **2,640**
 Hollins University: **2,685 ***
 University of Mississippi: **2,797**
 Brown University: **2,800**
 University of Virginia: **2,869**
 Pennsylvania State University: **2,891 ***
 University of Michigan: **3,104**
 University of Texas-Austin [Michener]: **3,220**
 University of Wyoming: **3,303 ***
 University of Oregon: **3,469**
 University of California-Irvine: **3,491**
 Georgia College & State University: **3,576**
 New York University: **4,106**
 University of Maryland: **4,185**
 Colorado State University: **4,221**
 University of Montana: **4,292 ***

Hunter College [CUNY]: **4,364** *
 George Mason University: **5,007** *
 Brooklyn College [CUNY]: **5,493**
 Boston University: **5,847**
 North Carolina State University: **7,200**
 San Francisco State University: **10,435**

* = Publicly released applicant-pool data included all three genres. A two-genre estimate—using the U.S.-average 6:3:2 distribution of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction MFA applications—was used to generate this extrapolated figure.

The variation in the figures above may reflect the differing application practices and values of applicants who conduct substantial research into programs via online communities and those who do not. The list reflects, for example, that Boston University's MFA program is probably more popular among the total national applicant pool than it is among the 640 applicants surveyed by *Poets & Writers* via *The Creative Writing MFA Blog*. That the Iowa Writers' Workshop, whose reputation and name recognition in the field of graduate creative writing is the most likely of any program to be equivalent across all applicant groups, is only 360 applicants off the median applicant pool estimate of 2,797 suggests that the Writers' Workshop was one of the most "neutrally tabulated" programs in the *Poets & Writers* survey these rankings—as no obvious reason exists for individual groups of applicants to be more or less familiar with the much-lauded 75 year-old program. Other programs within one standard deviation of the median include the well-known, longstanding programs at Brown University (0% off median), University of Virginia (3%), Hollins University (4%), Syracuse University (7%), and University of Michigan (11%).

As the annual applicant pool estimates provided above relate only to fiction and poetry applicants, the traditional 6:3:2 genre ratio (see Appendix S; 18.1% of all MFA applicants nationally are nonfiction applicants, though among the applicant community at *The Creative Writing MFA Blog* this figure was 15.3% when last surveyed) can be used to estimate the median and mean number of

nonfiction applicants per annum. According to this equation, the median estimate is **622** (567 in 2010), the mean is **723** (632 in 2010), and the adjusted mean is **676** (596 in 2010). These estimates cross-check, broadly speaking, with estimates extrapolated from those nonfiction MFA programs with known recent admissions data for nonfiction—estimates whose median is 291, and whose mean is 345.

Programs with Nonfiction Hard Data

University of Iowa: **278**
 University of Wyoming: **253**
 Sarah Lawrence College: **561**
 Rutgers University-Camden: **842**

*Programs with Extrapolated Nonfiction Hard Data**

Hollins University: **127**
 University of Arizona: **130**
 University of North Carolina-Wilmington: **208**
 University of Wyoming: **217**
 George Mason University: **260**
 Pennsylvania State University: **270**
 University of Notre Dame: **283**
 University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa: **291**
 University of Minnesota: **296**
 American University: **314**
 Hunter College [CUNY]: **441**
 University of Colorado-Boulder: **477**
 Ohio State University: **527**
 Columbia University: **652**
 University of Montana: **676**

* = These programs have known three-genre applicant-pool sizes; the nonfiction applicant pool for these programs was extrapolated using the U.S.-average 6:3:2 ratio for fiction, poetry, and nonfiction MFA applicants.

While these estimates cannot fix with certainty the annual nonfiction MFA applicant pool, that every estimate above is between 125 and 725, with a super-majority falling between 250 and 550, suggests that the correct figure is likely well under a thousand.

Added to the adjusted median and mean data for fiction and poetry, these nonfiction figures suggest an annual three-genre applicant pool, across all full-residency programs in the United States, of somewhere between **3,088** (the median) and **3,597** (the mean). A more cautious approach would be to propose a range: the annual three-genre full-residency applicant pool is likely between 3,000 and 3,750, a drop of several hundred the estimate of 3,500 to 4,000 produced by *Poets & Writers* in 2011.

Appendix Q: Most Popular Creative Writing PhDs

In recent years, a clear majority of full-time creative writing hires have been holders of creative writing doctorates. And yet, the number of such programs in the U.S. has remained constant over the past decade, with no new programs opening their doors.⁴⁵⁴ While the *2014 Report on the Academic Job Market* produced by AWP shows a fluctuation in the number of creative writing Ph.D. programs worldwide between 2004 and 2014—with a low of 37 estimated in 2008 and 2011, and a high of 51 estimated in 2013—a review of the *AWP Guide to Creative Writing Programs* reveals that AWP's varying policies with regard to the inclusion of international creative writing doctoral programs explains these disparities.⁴⁵⁵ In the U.S., the *MFA Research Project* confirms the total number of such programs holding steady at 35.

Officially, the creative writing Ph.D. is co-terminal with the creative writing MFA, though surveys of creative writing applicants from 2007 through 2013 show that it is vanishingly rare—that is, it occurs with a less than 1% frequency among surveyed applicants—for an applicant without a creative writing MFA to apply directly to a creative writing doctoral program, though on very rare occasions the latter programs have been known to admit such applicants.

Below, the application decisions of 282 applicants to creative writing doctoral programs between 2007 and 2013 are itemized. Data from 2007 through 2009 is from the *Poets & Writers* website; from 2010 to 2012, *The Creative Writing Ph.D. Blog*; and in 2013, the *Facebook MFA Draft '13 Group*.

1. University of Denver (107)
- 2t. Florida State University (89)

⁴⁵⁴ See *Creative Writing Jobs Wiki 2013*, *Creative Writing Jobs Wiki 2014*, and *Creative Writing Jobs Wiki 2015*.

⁴⁵⁵ See AWP's *2014 Report on the Academic Job Market* and the *AWP Guide to Writing Programs*, both available via www.awp.org.

- 2t. University of Illinois at Chicago (89)
4. University of Utah (88)
5. Ohio University (82)
6. University of Southern California (78)
7. University of Houston (76)
8. University of Cincinnati (73)
9. University of Missouri (69)
10. University of Nebraska at Lincoln (58)
11. University of Georgia (53)
12. Texas Tech University (50)
13. Western Michigan University (47)
14. University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee (41)
15. University of Tennessee at Knoxville (38)
16. Georgia State University (37)
17. State University of New York at Albany (32)
18. Binghamton University (30)
19. University of Louisiana at Lafayette (27)
20. Illinois State University (21)
21. University of Nevada at Las Vegas (20)
22. University of Wisconsin at Madison (19) ^
- 23t. University of Kansas (17)
- 23t. University of Southern Mississippi (17)
25. University of North Texas (16)
- 26t. Oklahoma State University (10)
- 26t. University of Hawaii (10)
- 28t. University of North Dakota (8)
- 28t. University of Texas at Dallas (8)
30. University of South Dakota (6)
31. Texas A&M University (5)
32. University of California at Irvine (4) *
33. Union Institute & University (0) ^^

[$n = 282.$]

* = Program offers a creative nonfiction genre specialization only.

** = All other U.S. and U.K. doctoral programs received a total of fourteen mentions out of 1,248 total program mentions from the 282 doctoral applicants surveyed.

^ = Program offers an internal minor in creative writing. Students complete a critical rather than creative dissertation, but can take up to six for-credit workshops in fiction or poetry with students in the University of Wisconsin-Madison MFA program, the workshop equivalent of three years of MFA study. Applicants must be separately admitted to the internal minor following admission to, and

matriculation with, the University's Literary Studies doctoral program.
Creative portfolios may be submitted with Literary Studies applications.

^^ = Low-residency program.

Appendix R: MFA Program Acceptance Rates

Fewer than five full- or low-residency creative writing MFA programs in the United States annually release their admissions data, though in many other fields—for instance, in undergraduate education, or in law, business, engineering, and medical programs—these data are compiled and published by at least one media outlet annually. Over the past seven years, the *MFA Research Project* has gradually compiled a substantial archive of yield-exclusive acceptance rates (“yield-exclusive” meaning that these rates signify the number of annual matriculants at a program divided by the program’s annual applicant pool figure; the likelihood of admitted candidates accepting their offers of admission is not considered in this measure, as there are no creative writing MFA programs in the United States that release “yield” information). The yield-exclusive rates below, listed here from lowest to highest, were gathered between 2011 and 2013 through official program information.

1. Vanderbilt University (0.93%)
2. University of Texas at Austin [Michener Center] (1.12%)
3. Cornell University (1.17%)
4. Brown University (1.19%)
5. University of Virginia (1.21%)
6. University of Wisconsin at Madison (1.29%)
7. Syracuse University (1.66%)
8. University of Oregon (1.66%)
9. University of California at Irvine (1.82%)
10. University of Michigan (1.83%)
11. Washington University in St. Louis (1.98%)
12. Louisiana State University (2.18%)
13. McNeese State University (2.22%)
14. Virginia Polytechnic Institute [Virginia Tech] (2.31%)
15. University of Florida (2.40%)
16. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2.44%)
17. Johns Hopkins University (2.60%)
18. Oregon State University (2.63%)
19. University of Minnesota (2.64%)
20. University of Wyoming (2.75%)
21. University of Mississippi (2.84%)
22. Indiana University (2.92%)

23. University of Montana (3.25%)
24. Hunter College [CUNY] (3.27%)
25. University of Iowa [IWW] (3.45%)
26. University of Massachusetts at Amherst (3.48%)
27. University of California at San Diego (3.57%)
28. Arizona State University (3.61%)
29. University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa (3.70%)
30. Brooklyn College [CUNY] (3.83%)
31. Colorado State University (3.97%)
32. University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (4.00%)
33. Purdue University (4.00%)
34. Ohio State University (4.21%)
35. University of North Carolina at Greensboro (4.34%)
36. West Virginia University (4.67%)
37. University of Nevada at Las Vegas (4.80%)
38. Hollins University (4.98%)
39. University of Notre Dame (4.98%)
40. Western Michigan University (5.33%)
41. University of Houston (5.43%)
42. Southern Illinois University (5.50%)
43. University of Colorado at Boulder (5.56%)
44. University of Washington at Seattle (5.90%)
45. Boston University (5.92%)
46. New York University (5.96%)
47. University of South Carolina (6.00%)
48. North Carolina State University (6.67%)
49. University of Miami (6.67%)
50. University of Iowa [NWP] (7.50%)
51. University of Guelph-Humber [CAN] (8.00%)
52. University of North Carolina at Wilmington (8.33%)
53. Virginia Commonwealth University (8.33%)
54. Georgia College & State University (8.42%)
55. Florida State University (8.61%)
56. Bowling Green State University (8.70%)
57. University of New Mexico (8.85%)
58. University of Arizona (9.38%)
59. University of Maryland (9.41%)
60. New Mexico State University (9.80%)
61. University of Texas at Austin [New Writers Project] (9.90%)
62. Bard College (10.00%) *
63. University of Massachusetts at Boston (10.10%)
64. Portland State University (10.67%)
65. Texas State University at San Marcos (11.00%)
66. Wichita State University at San Marcos (11.39%)
67. University of New Hampshire (11.63%)
68. George Mason University (11.69%)
69. University of Kansas (12.31%)
70. Iowa State University (12.35%)

71. Warren Wilson College (12.50%) *
72. Northern Michigan University (12.50%)
73. University of San Francisco (12.81%)
74. Saint Mary's College of California (13.13%)
75. American University (13.61%)
76. Old Dominion University (13.64%)
77. University of Idaho (14.17%)
78. CalArts (15.13%)
79. Rutgers University at Newark (16.00%)
80. The New School (16.11%)
81. University of Alaska at Anchorage (16.39%) *
82. Sarah Lawrence College (16.58%)
83. Bennington College (16.97%) *
84. University of Missouri at Saint Louis (17.50%)
85. University of California at Riverside (17.90%)
86. School of the Art Institute of Chicago (19.85%)
87. University of South Florida (20.00%)
88. Temple University (20.46%)
89. Emerson College (21.12%)
90. Rutgers University at Camden (21.43%)
91. Savannah College of Art & Design (22.73%)
92. Otis College of Art & Design (22.86%)
93. University of Pittsburgh (24.14%)
94. University of British Columbia at Vancouver [CAN] (24.17%)
95. Eastern Washington University (25.00%)
96. University of Missouri at Kansas City (25.00%)
97. Vermont College of Fine Arts (25.00%) *
98. Lesley College (25.00%) *
99. University of British Columbia at Vancouver [CAN] (25.00%) *
100. San Francisco State University (25.36%)
101. Queens University of Charlotte (25.47%) *
102. Fairleigh Dickinson University (25.58%) *
103. Long Island University at Brooklyn (25.71%)
104. Columbia University (26.12%)
105. Naropa University (30.26%)
106. California College of Arts (32.35%)
107. University of Central Florida (32.65%)
108. Antioch University (34.04%) *
109. University of Nebraska at Omaha (34.62%) *
110. Butler University (35.00%)
111. Ashland University (40.00%) *
112. Hofstra University (43.18%)
113. New England College (43.30%) *
114. University of California at Riverside (47.37%) *
115. Goddard College (47.53%) *
116. Western Connecticut State University (47.62%) *
117. Hamline University (48.08%)
118. Pacific Lutheran University (48.72%) *

- 119. Hollins University [Children's Literature MFA] (51.02%) *
- 120. Goucher College (51.16%) *
- 121. Spalding University (53.43%) *
- 122t. Chapman University (55.00%)
- 122t. Pine Manor College (55.00%) *
- 124. Sewanee: University of the South (60.00%) *
- 125. Seton Hill University (64.29%) *
- 126. Naropa University (78.57%) *

* = Low-residency program.

Appendix S: The *Poets & Writers* Methodology

In 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013, *Poets & Writers* published annual online “methodology articles” to run alongside their print-edition syntheses of *MFA Research Project* hard data. Each article was titled one year ahead to reflect the fact that it would primarily be used in the winter and spring following its fall publication; for instance, the version of the article published in 2013 refers repeatedly to the “2014 Poets & Writers MFA Index,” which was published by the magazine in the fall of 2013. I wrote these articles myself, and have included below a copy of the last of these to be published by *Poets & Writers*, though this version specifically excludes any information already contained in one of the preceding or following appendices. The complete documents for all five years *Poets & Writers* published comprehensive assessments of terminal-degree graduate creative writing programs are available at www.pw.org.

The methodology article for the *Poets & Writers* assessment chart published in the fall of 2013 reads as follows (bolding and italics in original):

2014 MFA Index: Further Reading

The 2014 MFA Index comprises two tables: one of seventy-eight full-residency MFA programs and one of twenty-six low-residency MFA programs. Full-residency MFA programs are assessed on the basis of twenty measures: ten listings of survey results, and ten listings of other important program features. While the ten surveys detailed in the full-residency table cannot be classified as scientific, all are predicated upon sufficient hard data to be substantially probative. A scientific survey of full- or low-residency creative writing MFA programs is not presently possible, as more than half of the nation’s full- and low-residency graduate creative writing programs do not publicly release the data necessary for such an assessment.

Five of the ten full-residency MFA surveys are based on a survey of a large sample of current MFA applicants. In each of these five surveys, programs are ordered on the basis of the number of times they appeared on applicants' application lists; the resulting numeric ordering therefore assesses only the popularity of individual programs among a large sample of well-researched aspiring poets and writers, and is not an assessment of overall program quality. While prospective MFA students have a wide range of resources at their disposal in selecting where to apply—including not only quantitative data but also programs' promotional materials; first-hand interviews with program staff, faculty, and current and former students; large online communities of fellow applicants, many of which are devoted to MFA research, discussion, and application advising; their own past experiences in undergraduate and non-institutional workshop settings; the literary oeuvres of current faculty members and recent alumni; previous program assessments in various online and print media, including first-hand accounts from, and interviews with, current and former faculty and graduates; and in some instances program visits or prior first-hand experience workshopping with selected faculty members—there is necessarily some information that is impossible for prospective MFA students to access unless and until they become matriculants. Once a student has matriculated, however, they may develop subjective attachments to their alma mater, which makes objective assessments of their own experiences, as opposed to the provision of definitionally “self-serving” survey responses, difficult or even impossible; for this reason, and others discussed in more detail below, current MFA students are not asked to self-report on their programs, nor are they considered to have a broader, more accurate, or more timely knowledge of programs they do not attend than those unmatriculated applicants who are currently researching a wide variety of program options

In the remaining five surveys in the full-residency table, programs are noted by their relative numeric placement within the data-sets compiled. The five hard data-based survey columns in the full-residency program table are as follows: selectivity, funding, student-faculty ratio, fellowship

placement, and job placement. These categories appear in the table in the chronological order in which applicants to graduate creative writing programs encounter them: a program's selectivity determines, all things being equal, an individual applicant's likelihood of securing admission; the funding category indicates, all things being equal, what aid package will be attached to that program admission if and when it comes; student-faculty ratio gestures toward, all things being equal, a student's ability to access individual faculty members while in-program; fellowship placement generally measures the success of individual programs in placing recent graduates in post-MFA fellowships; job placement generally measures the success of individual programs in placing graduates who have already achieved some measure of fellowship/publishing success in full-time creative writing teaching positions in higher education.

These survey results are scientific to the extent that they order programs on the basis of quantitative data publicly released by the programs themselves, and unscientific to the extent that not every program has released data for every category of assessment. These five columns therefore constitute an ordering of all publicly known data rather than an ordering of all extant data. A full complement of funding and admissions data is available for well over half of the nation's full-residency MFA programs; the remaining programs are generally smaller, newer, lightly advertised, nondomestic, or regional in terms of their applicant base. As all of these programs have websites, however, and as all enjoy exclusive dominion over their online presence, the absence of any specific funding or selectivity data in these programs' online promotional materials is taken as one indication that these programs would be unlikely to place within the top half of all programs in the funding and selectivity categories. The full-residency table is based in part on the presumption that it would be counterintuitive for a program providing full funding to a substantial percentage of its student body to not indicate as much in its promotional materials, or that a program among the most selective in the country would fail to designate itself as such. Program websites are regularly reviewed to

determine whether a program has added information to its online profile. Program administrators can also e-mail *Poets & Writers Magazine* directly, at editor@pw.org, to draw attention to any substantive website, program-policy, or funding/admissions changes.

Based on the data presently available, it is not anticipated that any of those programs without a full complement of funding and admissions data available in some form online would have appeared in the top half of full-residency programs in the funding category. These programs, given the incompleteness of their promotional materials, are also much less likely to attract sufficient applications to place in the top half of the selectivity listing. At present, a program's yield-exclusive acceptance rate would have to be 10 percent or less to place it in the top half of this category. As to the two placement-related surveys, these do not rely on programs' promotional materials or on their willingness to release internal data to individual applicants or groups of applicants, so all programs nationally, both full- and low-residency, are equally eligible for a top-half placement in the fellowship and job placement categories. Data sufficient to calculate student-faculty ratios for virtually every MFA program in the United States were also readily available.

By definition, quantitative surveys of any kind—whether in the field of education or any other field—perform poorly when it comes to assessing unquantifiable program features and/or features that can only be assessed subjectively by an individual experiencing them firsthand. That such features are most assuredly a vital element of every graduate creative writing program does not and should not preclude the possibility of statistics-based assessment measures operating alongside the primary mechanism programs have to introduce applicants to unique curricular features: their own websites and promotional materials. Programs at all times bear the primary responsibility for educating prospective applicants regarding program offerings, and no program assessment or series of program assessments could or should usurp this responsibility—especially as no applicant applies to a program without first researching it online or by other means. Indeed, programs have a captive

audience of hundreds if not thousands for their online and hard-copy promotional materials. Some programs may worry that neither the full-residency table nor any other series of surveys or hard-data assessments could adequately capture each graduate creative writing program's most unique elements; these fears are understandable, but misplaced. The applicants surveyed for the full-residency table discussed in this Article had access to individual program websites and promotional material at all times before, during, and after their formation of a list of where they intended to apply.

If specific, unquantifiable program features do not lead to programs excelling in the hard-data measurements or the applicant popularity surveys, it is neither because the 2014 MFA Index did not consider such features nor because the applicants surveyed for the Index did not. Interviews with hundreds of MFA applicants conducted as part of this program assessment project indicate that applicants can and do take into account a host of unquantifiable program features in deciding where to apply. What may be the case, instead, is that certain unquantifiable program features are less popular among applicants than among those program faculty and administrators who first brainstormed and implemented them. By surveying current applicants rather than individual program faculties and administrators, the 2014 MFA Index ensures that the class of persons surveyed for the program assessment is one likely to have recently accessed the very program websites which (presumably) prominently advertise those features of which programs are most proud. In contrast, students, faculty, or administrators at one program are highly unlikely to be visiting the websites of other programs on a regular basis; consequently, they are far less likely to be aware of peer programs' idiosyncratic, online-advertised features.

The approach to compiling the 2014 MFA Index was devised with the following goals in mind: (1) To better inform applicants of their program options by offering the nation's first complete listing of graduate creative writing programs; (2) to more widely disseminate hard data

regarding objective but non-exhaustive/non-conclusory measures of program quality, which often play a role in applicants' application and matriculation decisions; (3) to be responsive to, and reflective of, the opinions, interests, concerns, and values of current applicants to graduate creative writing programs; (4) to emphasize the importance of both inputs and outputs in assessing individual graduate creative writing programs; and (5) to enhance the transparency of the admissions process for present and future applicants to graduate creative writing programs.

Survey Locus

In the twelve months between April 16, 2012, and April 15, 2013, 304 full-residency MFA applicants were surveyed on The MFA Draft 2013 Group, hosted by Facebook.com. Created by a group of then-current MFA applicants in the early spring of 2012, the Draft at its peak had more than 1,500 members during the survey period, and featured dozens of new MFA-related conversation threads—some garnering up to a thousand individual responses—each day. The Draft was created and is moderated entirely by the applicants themselves; admission of new members was and is determined entirely by applicants; and decisions regarding the production of personal or program information for purposes of media research were likewise made entirely by applicants. The site was promoted via several methods: Word-of-mouth; links and references in the MFA Draft 2012 Group, the predecessor to the MFA Draft 2013 Group (and there is also, now, a well-attended MFA Draft 2014 Group); and links and references on The Creative Writing MFA Blog, founded by novelist Tom Kealey (and described in detail in the methodology article for the 2012 MFA Index). The author of this Article was at no time a moderator in the Draft, nor did the Author play any role in the creation or promulgation of the community in the MFA Draft 2013 Group. The Draft was the only survey locus used for the one-year applicant popularity survey described above; the five-year

survey is a compilation of the data from this one-year survey and the past four years of *Poets & Writers Magazine* program assessments.

Individual users on the MFA Draft 2013 Group were distinguished by their proper names, as reflected by the full names (first and last) associated with their Facebook accounts. Internet research was conducted to verify applicants' identities as and when authenticity was in question. The document in which Draft 2013 applicants voluntarily compiled their application decisions was part of an application that tracks all changes to uploaded documents by editors' full names/Facebook accounts. This application ensured that any and all changes to the document were traceable to specific users. Users were permitted to amend their application lists in real-time; though less than 15 percent of users elected to make amendments to their lists once posted, all changes to applicants' lists were accounted for by both the one-year and five-year applicant surveys appearing in the program tables. Substantial additional security measures were taken to ensure the authenticity of compiled application lists.

As noted, surveyed applicants voluntarily listed the programs to which they had applied or intended to apply, and were permitted to adjust these lists at any point during the survey period.

Period of Data Collection

Only recently collected data is of use to applicants. The one-year full-residency survey uses no survey data predating April 16, 2012; the five-year full-residency survey uses no survey data predating April 16, 2008; the low-residency survey uses no data predating April 16, 2007. The longer survey periods for low-residency MFA programs were necessitated by the significantly smaller applicant pools for these degrees.

The MRP Index

Eligibility for inclusion in the 2014 MFA Index was determined using the “MRP Index,” available for review at www.mfaresearchproject.wordpress.com. The Index tracks how programs place in seven survey areas: popularity among applicants, selectivity, funding, student-faculty ratio, fellowship placement, job placement, and location. Programs are categorized by the number of survey areas in which they place in the top half of all programs a) eligible for the category, and b) with data publicly available. The number of programs considered eligible for each category of assessment varies by the category; in some instances (such as fellowship placement and job placement) newer programs cannot yet be added to the pool of eligible programs because they have yet to graduate any poets or writers, whereas in other instances (such as selectivity, funding, and student-faculty ratio) certain programs may not yet have released the data necessary for them to be assessed in these areas. For the popularity and location surveys, all contemporaneously extant programs were automatically made members of the pool of eligible programs. Otherwise, the pool of eligible programs was 121 for the selectivity survey, 161 for the funding survey, 144 for the student-faculty ratio survey, 94 for the fellowship placement survey, and 94 for the job placement survey. For the fellowship and job placement surveys, only programs known to have graduated at least five classes of poets and writers by the beginning of data collection in these categories (2009) were considered to have had a full opportunity to place in these categories, with the result being that the number of MFA programs founded prior to fall 2001 was used as the “eligible pool” figure for this measure (but note that, in order not to disadvantage programs founded after this time, such programs were nevertheless included in the survey if they successfully placed a graduate in an eligible fellowship or teaching position). As 94 full-residency programs were founded prior to fall 2001, the size of the pool for the job placement measure was set at 94.

Programs appearing in the top half of three or more of the seven survey areas listed above were included in the 2014 MFA Index.

Survey Questionnaires and Program Response Rates

Graduate degree programs in creative writing respond to assessment-related inquiries at a lower rate than do programs in almost any other field of study in the United States. This is one of several reasons the MFA Index does not seek to survey the opinions of program faculty and administrators as to the features and efficacy of peer programs.

The following response rates were reported for questionnaires sent pursuant to the 2012 *U.S. News & World Report* program assessments (in each instance, the field of study is followed by the response rate from all programs surveyed in the field): Engineering (98 percent); Business (91 percent); Criminology (90 percent); Education (90 percent); Medicine (84 percent); Healthcare Management (76 percent); Statistics (67 percent); Law (66 percent); Public Health (61 percent); Audiology (57 percent); Library and Information Studies (56 percent); Pharmacological Sciences (56 percent); Social Work (56 percent); Occupational Therapy (53 percent); Veterinary Medicine (48 percent); Nursing (47 percent); Computer Science (46 percent); Physician Assistance (45 percent); Sociology (43 percent); Speech-Language Pathology (42 percent); Public Affairs (40 percent); Rehabilitation Counseling (40 percent); Fine Arts (39 percent); Political Science (37 percent); Economics (34 percent); Mathematics (34 percent); Physical Therapy (33 percent); English (31 percent); Physics (31 percent); Earth Sciences (29 percent); Clinical Psychology (28 percent); Chemistry (25 percent); Psychology (25 percent); History (23 percent); and Biological Sciences (15 percent). Respondent institutions in each of these academic fields were aware that their questionnaire responses would not be kept confidential, and that their participation in surveys

sponsored by *U.S. News & World Report* would result in publication of a substantial stock of program-specific data regarding each university queried.

Every two years, the Association of Writers and Writing programs (AWP) sends a questionnaire to programs in the field of creative writing—a field whose administrators and faculty are no longer surveyed (and whose programs are no longer assessed) by *U.S. News & World Report*—in much the same way *U.S. News & World Report* does for the thirty-five fields of study listed above. A crucial difference between the two questionnaires, however, is that the AWP questionnaire guarantees anonymity to its respondents; AWP releases no program-specific data or survey results pursuant to its biennial questionnaire. It is worth noting, too, that AWP estimates (as of its 2009 Annual Report) that 34 percent of programs in the field of creative writing have thus far declined to become members of AWP. These programs are not subject to AWP questionnaires. According to AWP's publicly released summary of the program questionnaire it distributed in 2007, between 40 and 60 percent of AWP's member programs declined to answer AWP's queries regarding internal admissions and funding data. Specifically, 47 percent of programs declined to reveal how many assistantships they offered annually to incoming students, 61 percent declined to reveal the stipend offered to teaching assistants, 56 percent declined to reveal whether they offered a full-tuition waiver to teaching assistants, 49 percent declined to reveal how many scholarships were offered to incoming students, 55 percent declined to reveal their annual number of applicants, and 52 percent declined to reveal the size of their annual matriculating class. AWP did not distinguish between low-residency and full-residency programs on the questionnaire.

Avoidance of Respondent Bias

The most extensive program assessment system in the United States, the higher education

surveys published annually by *U.S. News & World Report*, produce assessments almost exclusively by individuals with no firsthand experience attending or teaching in the programs they are being asked to assess. For the magazine's much-lauded law school assessment, for instance, judges, lawyers, and law firm hiring coordinators are asked to assess the academic quality of programs others have attended, and that they have encountered only to the same extent an MFA applicant encounters the graduates of individual creative writing programs in the course of his or her in-genre reading (or, alternately, in a social or professional context). In fact, all of the program assessments published by *U.S. News & World Report* use the same basic methodology, as stated in the 2011 edition of the magazine containing its graduate school program assessments: "[These assessments] are based on the results of surveys sent to academics...[t]he individuals rated the quality of the program at each institution from marginal (1) to outstanding (5). Individuals who were unfamiliar with a particular school's programs were asked to select 'don't know.'" This last provision merely ensures that survey respondents have some basic familiarity with the programs they are assessing; it does not ask or encourage respondents to submit an institutional (or personal) self-assessment.

As is the case with the methodology described above, national educational-institution assessment schemes have historically sought out unbiased observers to assess accredited degree programs, with self-reporting of interested observers implicitly or explicitly disallowed. The *Poets & Writers Magazine* 2014 MFA Index improves on this model by surveying individuals who not only are in a position to gauge the professional performance of individual programs' graduates and professors (i.e., by reading their published work), but who also have access to—and a natural interest in—a large stock of hard data regarding the programs they are being asked to consider.

The 2014 MFA Index makes a further improvement on the *U.S. News & World Report* methodology by eschewing overall program quality assessments altogether, and by stating explicitly that neither its constituent surveys nor its hard-data listings in any sense constitute an overall

assessment of program quality. Overall assessments of program quality—in any field of study—are impossible, as such determinations differ depending upon the student, a large slate of unquantifiable program features, the period of time in which that student matriculates (as faculty turnover ensures program characters change over time), and a host of chance-based factors that no methodology ever devised could hope to or even wish to encapsulate. While the data provided in 2014 MFA Index is hopefully invaluable to applicants—especially given the historic opacity of graduate creative writing programs—it is no substitute for an individual applicant’s subtle, many-factored assessment of which program is best for him or her. The 2014 MFA Index should be used as one tool among many.

Survey Cohort Demographics

Online surveys conducted in 2010 using a Google-sponsored survey application suggest that the online MFA applicant community, including the community at The Creative Writing MFA Blog and the MFA Draft 2012 Facebook Group, subscribes to the current conventional wisdom (as first laid out in the 2005 edition of Tom Kealey’s *Creative Writing MFA Handbook*) regarding the most important considerations in applying to and matriculating at an MFA program. [NB: See Appendix E.]

In 2011, the application lists of a random sampling of three hundred 2010–2011 MFA applicants were analyzed to determine the frequency of different list sizes. The results were as follows (the first number is the number of programs on an applicant’s application list, while the second is the number of such lists in the analyzed sample; the third figure is the percentage of the total sample with an application list of the stated size):

1: 10 (3 percent)
 2: 6 (2 percent)
 3: 10 (3 percent)
 4: 18 (6 percent)
 5: 23 (8 percent)
 6: 30 (10 percent)
 7: 26 (9 percent)
 8: 31 (10 percent)
 9: 31 (10 percent)
 10: 29 (10 percent)
 11: 24 (8 percent)
 12: 15 (5 percent)
 13: 14 (5 percent)
 14: 14 (5 percent)
 15: 7 (2 percent)
 16: 4 (1 percent)
 17: 2 (1 percent)
 18: 4 (1 percent)
 19: 0 (0 percent)
 20: 0 (0 percent)
 21: 1 (0 percent)
 22: 1 (0 percent)

The *Poets & Writers Magazine* 2014 MFA Index does not use the above survey data [NB: See Appendix E] to create a weighting system for the columns of information it provides. There is a presumption, instead, that applicants' own application lists best reflect the extent to which they take into account funding, location, reputation, selectivity, faculty, curriculum, and other applicant-specific factors in choosing which programs to apply to and attend.

Were the above data used to create a weighting system for the data presented in the 2014 MFA Index, or were the applicant survey to be removed from the MFA Index altogether, many of the nation's most prominent and popular programs would disappear from the table altogether—as programs widely admired by applicants (and working poets and novelists) do not always perform superlatively in hard-data measures. A program assessment missing critical application-trend data would constitute a poor reflection of the present national consensus on which programs are most

popular among applicants and working authors alike. For instance, under the applicant survey's current methodology a popular but largely-unfunded MFA program in a major urban center might still appear in the top half of the one-year and five-year surveys because even a relatively low standing in the funding, selectivity, student-faculty, fellowship placement, and job placement categories can be counterbalanced by a program's popularity due to its location, faculty, and/or other unquantifiable factors. The popularity of a program's location and faculty is best reflected by privileging applicants' application lists rather than a confluence of these lists and publicly accessible hard data. To redesign the 2014 MFA Index to deprivilege current applicant mores would be to ensure that virtually no nonfully funded and/or big-city programs (with only a handful of exceptions) would appear in the table, nor many (if any) nonfully funded programs whose appeal lies in large part in the composition of their faculty rosters.

While it's fair to assume that program popularity going forward may be directly affected by a higher or lower relative placement in the funding, selectivity, student-faculty ratio, fellowship-placement, and job-placement categories, the pace of this trend is arrested, rather than hastened, by the current program assessment. The present methodology both registers the relative decline or stagnation in the popularity of certain programs while allowing for these programs to improve their funding, selectivity, student-faculty ratio, and placement statistics before losing their positions (in part as a result of applicant consensus) in 2014 MFA Index altogether.

Genre of Survey Respondents

[NB: See Appendix E.]

These surveys suggest that the potential survey cohort at The Creative Writing MFA Blog is similar in its constitution, in terms of genre affiliation, to the national MFA-applicant cohort. Hard data from twenty MFA programs with available admissions data for both genres (constituting a total of twenty-four data-sets ranging in age from the 2008–2009 admissions cycle to the 2010–2011 admissions cycle) generates a total data-set of 12,368 applicants, 8,730 of these being fiction applicants (70 percent) and 3,638 poetry applicants (30 percent). The genre breakdown for the one-year applicant survey published in 2014 MFA Index is nearly identical to this figure: Between poets and fiction writers, 67 percent of the members of the surveyed cohort were fiction writers and 33 percent were poets. For the 2013 applicant survey published in September 2012 by *Poets & Writers Magazine*, the genre breakdown was 70 percent fiction writers and 30 percent poets; for the 2011 applicant survey, the genre breakdown was 63 percent fiction-writers and 37 percent poets.

Applicant survey respondents for the 2014 MFA Index were self-selected, and it is the particular and express design of the survey methodology that this survey cohort be self-selected. Just as a survey aimed at determining popular car manufacturers might use a self-selecting cohort to only compile the responses of the best-researched car buyers—for instance, those who had spent time on websites that allow consumers to compare various available car brands and styles—the one-year and five-year applicant popularity surveys do not intend to sample a generic cohort of MFA applicants. Instead, it is their aim to primarily if not exclusively catalogue application decisions made by the best-researched MFA applicants, which class of applicants is considerably more likely to be found in a massive, real-time applicant community in which scores of data-points regarding individual programs are researched, shared, and discussed daily.

National Full-Residency Applicant Pool Size

[NB: See Appendix P.]

Data Sources

For those program measures not subject to applicant surveys, such as recitations and ordered listings of admissions, curricular, placement, student-faculty ratio, and funding data, only data publicly released by the programs—either to individual applicants, to groups of applicants, in a program’s promotional literature, or via a program website—have been included in the 2014 MFA Index. All data were updated regularly to reflect programs’ most recent public disclosures. Many of the nation’s full- and low-residency MFA programs decline to publicly release internal data. Programs unable or unwilling to release data regarding their funding and admissions processes are necessarily disadvantaged by a program assessment that relies on transparency. Yet no program that fails to release this data for applicants’ consideration can avoid being judged, by applicants and other observers, through the lens of such nondisclosures. As research for these surveys and listings is based entirely on publicly available, publicly verifiable data, the accuracy of the data of which the MFA Index is comprised can be readily confirmed by any party.

The Nonfiction Survey

Because fewer than half (47 percent) of full-residency MFA programs offer a dedicated nonfiction or creative nonfiction track—defined as a curricular track which permits a master’s thesis in the genre—nonfiction and creative nonfiction applicants have been surveyed separately from

poetry and fiction applicants. These survey responses do not factor, in any sense, into either the one-year or five-year popularity surveys published in the 2014 MFA Index.

For the nonfiction/creative nonfiction survey, the designation “n/a” indicates that a given program does not offer a nonfiction track or concentration.

LOW-RESIDENCY SURVEY

Structure

Low-residency programs were assessed in twelve categories, nine of which are either applicant surveys or ordered listings of hard data—six of these employing unscientific but probative surveying of the sort described above, and three based upon publicly-available hard data. Low-residency programs have not been assessed with respect to their funding packages because these programs generally offer no or very little financial aid to incoming students. The reason for this is that low-residency programs presume their students will continue in their present employment during the course of their graduate studies.

Cohort

Over the course of six successive application cycles, a total of 304 low-residency applicants were surveyed as to their program preferences, with these preferences exhibited in the form of application lists. The locus for this surveying was (between April 16, 2007 and April 15, 2011) the *Poets & Writers Magazine* online discussion board, the Speakeasy Message Forum, widely considered the highest-trafficked low-residency community on the Internet; from April 16, 2011 to April 15,

2013, the survey locus was the MFA Draft 2012 and MFA Draft 2013 Facebook Groups described in detail above. The relatively small cohort used for this surveying accounts for the following: (1) The annual applicant pool for low-residency programs is approximately one-eighth the size of the full-residency applicant pool; (2) low-residency applicants do not congregate online in the same way or in the same numbers that full-residency applicants do; and (3) low-residency programs are subject to a “bunching” phenomenon not evident among full-residency programs, with only nine of 53 eligible programs nationally appearing on even 10 percent of survey respondents’ application lists, and only three appearing on 20 percent or more.

One explanation for the bunching phenomenon may be that low-residency programs are less susceptible to comparison than full-residency programs, as many of the major considerations for full-residency applicants, including location, funding, cohort quality, class size, program duration, student-faculty ratio, job placement, and cost of living, are not major considerations for low-residency applicants due to the structure and mission of low-residency programs. Generally speaking, low-residency programs are assessed on the basis of their faculty and pedagogy, neither of which are conducive to quantification. It is worth noting, too, that a significant number of the world’s sixty-three low-residency MFA programs were founded within the last eight to ten years; applicant familiarity with these programs may still be relatively low.

The six-year low-residency surveying described above has been further broken down into year-by-year survey results. The survey cohort for the 2012–2013 annual survey was twenty-three; for the 2011–2012 annual survey, forty-six; for the 2010–2011 survey, thirty-six; for the 2009–2010 survey, eighty-nine; for the 2008–2009 survey, fifty-six; and for the 2007–2008 survey, fifty-three. If and when individual Speakeasy account-holders applied to programs in more than one admissions cycle, their application lists from each cycle were treated as separate survey responses; repeat applicants accounted for less than 10 percent of the survey cohort, however. Full-residency

applicants on The Creative Writing MFA Blog who applied to one or more low-residency programs as part of their overall slate of target programs (see “Structure” and “Cohort”) were also included in the low-residency survey; due to the exceedingly small number of such survey responses, these entries were manually compared both to one another and to existing low-residency application lists to ensure duplicate lists were avoided.

While surveys with larger cohorts are, all other things being equal, more reliable than those with smaller ones, the fact that the annual applicant pool for low-residency programs is likely between 350 and 400 suggests that the total survey cohort for the 2014 MFA Index of low-residency programs likely represents more than 80 percent of a single-year national applicant pool for this sort of degree program. Moreover, as is the case with the 2014 MFA Index of full-residency programs, cross-checking applicant survey responses across a period of six years reveals substantial consistency in the responses and quickly unearths any significant anomalies or outliers. Of the ten most popular low-residency programs listed in 2014 MFA Index, eight (80 percent) were among the ten most popular programs—according to applicants—in all six years of surveys, while the other two programs were among the fourteen most popular low-residency programs in all six of the application cycles studied (and in both cases missed the ten-most-popular grouping in two or fewer admissions cycles).

An “n.d.” notation signifies that a program has not released the requisite data. An em-dash indicates that the program did not place in that category. Only fifteen of the nation’s sixty-three low-residency MFA programs earned a positive score in either of the two placement surveys, which considered placement data for full- and low-residency programs in a single assessment. In order to better acknowledge the achievement, in the placement categories, of these fifteen low-residency programs relative to their low-residency peers, and in recognition of the fact that low-residency graduates are substantially less likely to seek postgraduate fellowships or even postgraduate

university teaching positions (largely because they do not give up their present employment when they matriculate), the national placement data collected for the low-residency MFA Index have been reconstituted as an ordered, low-residency-only listing.

Low-Residency Applicant Pool Size

A realistic estimate for the annual number of low-residency MFA applicants is four hundred. Added to the adjusted mean for annual full-residency poetry, fiction, and nonfiction applicants, the estimate for the annual number of low-residency applicants suggests a total annual applicant pool to creative writing MFA programs—across all genres and types of residency, and gauging discrete applicants only—of somewhere between 3,500 and 4,250.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

Special Note on International Programs

The Poets & Writers Magazine full- and low-residency program tables have always considered, and will continue to consider, international MFA programs. However, international programs are unlikely to fare as well as they otherwise might in the surveys for several reasons: (1) Nearly all non-U.S./non-Canadian graduate creative writing programs are (by U.S. accreditation standards) nonterminal (that is, they are M.Phil, M.St., or MA degrees, as opposed to the terminal MFA degrees considered by the Poets & Writers Magazine tables); (2) non-U.S./non-Canadian applicants are less likely to frequent U.S./Canadian-based MFA-related websites like The MFA Draft 2013 Facebook Group and The Creative Writing MFA Blog, and therefore non-U.S./non-Canadian programs are

less likely to appear on the application lists of those surveyed for the *Poets & Writers Magazine* tables (and Canadian applicants applying to Canadian programs may be less likely to patronize the aforementioned websites than American applicants applying to American programs); (3) unlike U.S. and Canadian MFA programs, overseas programs are rarely fully funded for nondomestic students (U.S./Canadian MFA programs less frequently distinguish between domestic and international applicants with respect to funding eligibility), and therefore are less likely to be popular amongst the U.S. and Canadian applicants that frequent The MFA Draft 2013 Facebook Group and/or The Creative Writing MFA Blog; and (4) due to the exceedingly small number of non-U.S. terminal-degree MFA programs now in operation (well over 90 percent of all creative writing MFA programs now extant are located in the United States, and more than half of those in operation outside the United States were founded within the last five years), programs in Canada and elsewhere simply have fewer entrants into the international MFA system with which to achieve a relatively high placement in the applicant popularity surveys (as compared to any of the hard-data categories in the *Poets & Writers Magazine* tables—for instance, funding, selectivity, and postgraduate fellowship or job placement).

NON-TERMINAL CREATIVE WRITING MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMS

Special Note on MA, MPW, M.Phil, and M.St. Programs

Over the past five years the present MFA Research Project (MRP) has catalogued nearly three thousand MFA applicants' application lists. One abiding trend is that only a small number of nonterminal master's degree programs in creative writing can be found on application lists otherwise comprised entirely of terminal-degree MFA programs. Consequently, and due to the distinct

curricular and structural differences between creative writing MAs and MFAs, non-terminal master's degrees in creative writing have not been included in either the one-year or five-year full-residency applicant surveys. Instead, a separate listing of the ten most popular programs in this category (according to the application lists of 157 applicants to such programs) is provided below. The methodology for this applicant popularity survey is identical to the methodology employed for the full-residency and low-residency applicant surveys. Applicant mores seem to indicate that the most popular of the programs in this class are now considered on par with MFA programs in educational quality—if not in the critical feature of terminality.

[NB: See Appendix K.]

Many of those who attend MA programs in creative writing subsequently apply to terminal-degree creative writing MFA or doctoral programs upon graduation. Despite an ongoing dialogue as to whether MPW (Master's of Professional Writing) degrees are considered terminal degrees in the marketplace, for the moment the two such degrees tracked by the MFA Research Project are included in the class of non-terminal creative writing master's degrees rather than in the one-year or five-year full-residency applicant surveys. As there is little evidence yet on the question of whether or not MPWs enjoy the same regard in the field of creative writing (as to terminality) as the MFA, it has been deemed fairer to these programs and their students to assign the MPW to that class of degrees within which it is most competitive; MPW programs tend to appear on the application lists of non-terminal MA applicants more often than those of terminal-degree MFA applicants.

Two other types of nonterminal creative writing master's degrees, the M.Phil and the Master of Studies (M.St.), are unknown in the United States, but offered at several universities in the United Kingdom.

*THE 2014 MFA INDEX: FULL-RESIDENCY PROGRAM CATEGORIES**Funding*

Nothing in the MFA Index funding assessments is intended to impugn the motives or character of professors, administrators, or staff at any of the nation's graduate creative writing programs. The presumption of the funding listing is that all of these groups have and do militate, with varying degrees of success, for more funding for their students—and that, given the choice, every program would choose to be fully funded. Still, there is no question that some programs require virtually no financial outlay by admitted students, and others are institutionally structured to induce students to take out substantial student loans. The 2014 MFA Index takes this into account, as funding is an important factor among the current MFA applicant pool when deciding where to apply—and is also rated the number one consideration by MFA faculties themselves.

Program funding packages were calculated on the basis of annual cost-of-living-adjusted stipend values for programs with full tuition waivers, and on the basis of annual cost-of-living-adjusted stipend values less annual tuition for programs offering only partial tuition waivers.

Programs were further divided into categories on the basis of the percentage of each incoming class offered full funding. “Full funding” is defined as the equivalent of a full tuition waiver and an annual stipend of at least \$8,000/academic year. No program offering full funding to less than 100 percent of its incoming class placed ahead of any program fully funded for all students. Likewise, no nonfully funded program placed, in the numeric ordering of programs, ahead of any program in a higher “coverage” bracket. The one exception to this rule is that programs whose funding coverage is known but unaccompanied by hard data have been reordered as indicated below.

The fifteen coverage brackets acknowledged by the hard-data funding assessment are as follows, with each number corresponding to the percentage of incoming students who are fully funded in an average admissions cycle: 100 (with hard funding data available); 90 (with hard funding data available); 100 (without hard funding data available); 100 (at a funding level below fully funded); 70 to 89 (with hard funding data available); 70 to 89 (without hard funding data available); 40 to 69 (with hard funding data available); 40 to 69 (without hard funding data available); 33 to 39 (with hard funding data available); 33 to 39 (without hard funding data available); 20 to 33 (both with and without hard funding data available); 10 to 20 (both with and without hard funding data available); 5 to 10 (both with and without hard funding data available); 0 to 10 (both with and without hard funding data available); and 0. The reason both “5 to 10” and “0 to 10” brackets were used is to distinguish between programs with variable funding lines that nevertheless fully fund some percentage of their incoming class each year, and programs with variable funding lines that in some years offer full funding to none of their incoming students.

Programs that fully fund 33 percent or more of their admitted students were considered eligible for “package averaging.” If and when programs meeting this criterion were revealed to offer funding packages of differing value to different students, the total stipend value of all full-funding packages was divided by the number of such packages to determine average annual stipend value. Because some programs do not advertise special funding offerings available only to select students, not every program benefited from this feature of the MFA Index. Consistent with the structure and conceit of the table, programs exhibiting maximum transparency with respect to their promotional materials were most likely to receive a comprehensive assessment of their total funding package. The funding category does take into account duration of funding, as programs’ funding packages were assessed for this category by multiplying average annual package value by the duration of each program in years. Other than for the deduction of outstanding tuition costs (as described above), the

varying amount of tuition charged at individual programs was disregarded, as students receiving full funding do not, by definition, pay tuition.

Applicants should be aware that many programs deduct administrative fees—almost always less than a thousand dollars, and usually less than five hundred dollars—from their annual stipends. These fees were not considered in the funding listing. Moreover, some programs offer health insurance to all admitted students and some do not. Programs that offer health insurance to all admitted students include, but are not limited to, the following: University of Texas in Austin [Michener Center]; Cornell University in Ithaca, New York; University of Michigan in Ann Arbor; Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge; Ohio State University in Columbus; University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa; Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Virginia Tech) in Blacksburg; Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri; Arizona State University in Tempe; Iowa State University in Ames; Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana; University of Minnesota in Minneapolis; McNeese State University in Lakes Charles, Louisiana; Pennsylvania State University in University Park; University of Iowa in Iowa City; University of Wyoming in Laramie; Vanderbilt University in Nashville; University of Wisconsin in Madison; University of Texas in Austin [English Department]; University of Virginia in Charlottesville; University of California in Irvine; University of Oregon in Eugene; University of Central Florida in Orlando; University of New Mexico in Albuquerque; Rutgers University in Camden, New Jersey; and Oklahoma State University in Stillwater.

Selectivity

As fewer than five full- or low-residency programs nationally publicly release “yield” data—the percentage of those offered admission to a program who accept their offers and matriculate—the acceptance rate figures used for the MFA Index’s selectivity category are necessarily yield-

exclusive. Most have been calculated using the simplest and most straightforward method: Taking the size of a program's annual matriculating cohort in all genres and dividing it by the program's most recently reported total annual applicant pool across all genres.

The relative paucity of data available for the selectivity listing—acceptance rates are available for 126 of the 234 MFA programs worldwide (54 percent; however, dozens of these data-unavailable programs were too new to have produced reliable admissions trends yet)—is partly attributable to programs' continued reticence in releasing the sort of internal admissions and funding data regularly released by colleges, universities, and most professional degree programs. Hundreds of interviews with MFA applicants between 2006 and 2013 suggest that a program's acceptance rate is one of the five pieces of information applicants most frequently seek out when researching a graduate creative writing program. Fortunately, all but five of the 78 programs with an MRP Index of three, four, five, six, or seven (thus, 94 percent of such programs) have made their annual acceptance rates public either directly or indirectly.

The small number of low-residency programs with publicly accessible acceptance rates makes crafting a selectivity listing for such programs difficult. Of the 24 programs (38 percent of all low-residency programs) with available data, several have available admissions data only from the 2007–2008 admissions cycle or earlier. Fortunately, of the 16 programs in this group most popular among applicants, 14 (88 percent) have available admissions data. Moreover, the three most popular programs (in the view of applicants) have all released data from one of their past three admissions cycles.

Student-Faculty Ratio

Using data on individual programs' total student-body sizes, along with recitations of full

time core faculty in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry from program websites and the Poets & Writers MFA Programs database, student-faculty ratios were calculated for the 140 full-residency MFA programs (82 percent of all such programs) with both sets of data available. Tiebreakers in student-faculty ratio were awarded (where necessary and where possible) to the program with the higher number of total core faculty members. Note that this listing, unlike others in the MFA Index, takes into account any and all fiction, poetry, and nonfiction faculty and students at individual programs, not merely faculty and students in the former two genres.

Student-faculty ratio is treated, here, as a presumptively orderable program element. Just as a large percentage of applicants report that they prefer, all things being equal, a more selective program, or a better-funded program, or a program that performs better at placing its graduates in fellowships and full-time jobs post-graduation, generally speaking creative writing graduate students prefer a lower student-faculty ratio to a higher one—the better to have immediate and meaningful access to those charged with instructing, mentoring, and advising them.

Fellowship Placement

Programs' postgraduate fellowship placement records were assessed by determining how many individual "placement events" a given program's current students or (much more commonly) graduates achieved during the past decade (2003 to 2013). Only a limited number of fellowships and residencies are available to MFA graduates while in-program or immediately postgraduation, and fewer still are specifically targeted at current MFA students and/or recent MFA graduates. Most of these make publicly available the names and biographical data of their fellows and residents. The focus for this year's fellowship placement listing was on forty of the fellowships and residencies in this group—generally speaking, the nation's most prestigious post-MFA fellowships and residencies.

For low-residency programs, the number of fellowships surveyed was forty-two—the forty surveyed for full-residency programs plus two additional residencies whose extremely brief duration implicitly caters to individuals working full-time.

[NB: See Appendix O.]

As simply ordering programs by the number of their students or graduates subject to placement events between 2003 and 2013 would unfairly favor larger programs (which naturally have more graduates on the fellowship market annually), programs have instead been ordered on the basis of a placement score, calculated as follows: A program's total number of placement events between 2003 and 2013 was divided by the size of the program's annual incoming cohort. The resulting scores ranged from 5.92 to 0.03. In several instances, programs identical both in size and in their number of placement events received identical placement scores; where possible, these ties were broken by privileging the program with the higher number of total placement events. Programs founded during the assessment period had their scores pro-rated on the basis of how many years (out of the last ten) they had had a full class of graduated students on the postgraduate fellowship market.

Because fellowships and residencies draw no distinction between full- and low-residency programs, this is the only measure in which full- and low-residency programs were combined in a single measure. This said, low-residency programs were subsequently granted their own numeric ordering, in recognition of the fact that these programs are hampered by the decreased likelihood that their graduates will seek fellowships or residencies in the first instance (as by definition low-residency students already have full- or part-time employment).

Job Placement

Between 2008 and 2013, the most popular online discussion board for creative writing job-seekers pursuing full-time employment at the university level, The Academic Jobs Wiki, listed 437 full-time positions available for poets and fiction writers. Data on the individuals ultimately hired for these openings was available for 294 of these 437 listings (67 percent). Based on research into the educational credentials of the individuals ultimately hired for these positions, an ordered listing was created to indicate which graduate creative writing programs' alumni enjoyed the most success on the academic job market over these four hiring cycles. The following figures may be of academic interest to those tracking employment opportunities for creative writers in higher education: [NB: See Appendix N.] In the 2012–2013 hiring season, eighty-four positions were available, with hire information available for 79 percent of these; the male/female split for those positions with available data for final hires was 53 percent female, 47 percent male.

While the number of available creative writing positions in higher education appears to be gradually increasing, given that the world's 234 full- and low-residency MFA programs, and 33 doctoral programs in creative writing, graduate more than 2,000 poets and 2,000 fiction writers every year, along with between 500 and 1,000 nonfiction writers (some of whom have qualifications and prior publications in fiction and/or poetry), the data above suggests that each year full-time teaching positions at the university level are available for, on average, well less than 1 percent of graduate creative writing program alumni. Even if graduates were only required to compete for employment against those in their own annual cohort, and even assuming only between 10 and 20 percent of nonfiction program graduates can or do compete for positions advertised for poetry and/or fiction, this figure would be less than 4 percent. Realistically, however, each year's graduate creative writing

program alumni are competing against an ever-increasing stock of unemployed, underemployed, and employed-but-still-job-hunting alumni from previous years.

While surveys of MFA applicants suggest that only about half of the nation's creative writing program graduates wish to teach, even this statistic—if it is used to amend the figures provided above—cannot bring an individual degree-holding poet or writer's employment chances (all things being equal) higher than, at best, 8 percent. Consequently, those graduate creative writing programs with the best track records in terms of job placement—the ten highest-placing programs in this measure achieved full-time job-placement rates, during the period assessed, of between 10 and 25 percent—are offering to students significant value-added as they pursue postgraduate employment. Whether higher job placement rates at certain schools are due to stronger alumni networks, better career placement services, better teaching, or simply more talented and/or better-published graduates is unclear, though there appears to be a high correlation between a program's standing in this measure and its standing in other cohort-assessment indicia.

Program Duration

A program's duration is measured by the average length of its curriculum in years. Some programs allow students to petition to extend their stay; because such petitions are granted on a case-by-case basis, and because the granting of such petitions often results in only an additional unfunded, non-tuition-remitted year of study, individual programs' program-extension policies have not been considered in calculating program duration. Nationally, only one full-residency MFA program is known to be one year in duration, and only two programs are four years in duration. The remaining 168 full-residency programs are either two or three years in duration, with a notable trend being the increasing popularity of three-year programs among applicants.

Assessments of program duration do not consider the availability of postgraduate fellowships, or automatic postgraduate placements, unless these opportunities are guaranteed to all rising third-years in good standing in the program. As applicable, nonguaranteed postgraduate funding opportunities are formally acknowledged in program funding calculations, provided the average number of opportunities available each year is known. This said, at least two programs, Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, so consistently offer a postgraduate lectureship to all or nearly all of their graduating students that they may nominally be considered (in the case of Cornell University) a three-year program (though some students receive a fourth-year lectureship as well) or, in the case of the three-year program at University of Michigan, a four-year program. Another program, University of Iowa in Iowa City, is known to offer postgraduate fellowships or lectureships to as many as 33 percent of its graduates. In the MFA Index, these three programs have had a “+” appended to their program duration to indicate the frequent availability of program-sponsored postgraduate fellowship and employment opportunities.

Program Size

In the 2014 MFA Index, the size of a program’s annual incoming cohort is expressed using the usual acronyms for magnitude: XS (Extra-Small, an average total of 2 to 9 students, per matriculating class, across all genres combined); S (Small, 10 to 19 students); M (Medium, 20 to 30 students); L (Large, 31 to 49); XL (Extra-Large, 50 to 75 students per year); and XXL (76 or more students per year). Because many programs do not include their matriculating class size on their websites, in some instances this data has been extrapolated from other available information. One program, University of Wisconsin in Madison, was by necessity granted a special dispensation in

several categories, as it is the only MFA program in the United States or abroad to admit fiction and poetry students in alternating years. This required two methodological accommodations: (1) using statistical extrapolation for the one-year and five-year applicant surveys (the program's previous-year percentage of survey responses in the "off-year" genre—that is, the percentage of all fiction-applicant responses compiled for the 2011–2012 application cycle that University of Wisconsin's fiction program received—is multiplied by the number of respondents in that genre in the current year; this is then added to the actual number of applicant responses attributable to the program in the "on-year" genre); and (2) averaging the class-size figures for the program. Because the program accepts six poets and six fiction writers every two years, the program is treated as having an average annual matriculating class size of six.

Full Funding

While not listed in the 2014 MFA Index, one of the seven areas of MRP Index assessment was "full funding," which is defined as the equivalent of a full tuition waiver and a minimum \$8,000/academic year stipend. Where the tuition waiver offered is less than 100 percent, the program's stipend value is reduced by the amount an admitted student is asked to pay in tuition annually. All stipend values are adjusted for cost of living. Cost of living assessments were made using the website Sperling's Best Places (www.bestplaces.net/COL/default.aspx). Healthcare costs, administrative fees, and student relocation costs were not estimated or considered, nor was the cost of tuition—as students receiving full funding, by the definition of the term used by the MFA Research Project, do not pay tuition.

The program assessment acknowledges that MFA students receiving the minimum full-funding stipend may still find themselves borrowing a *de minimis* amount (defined as less than

\$3,000/academic year) to help defray the costs of program attendance. For the purposes of this article, the de minimis borrowing level has been set at that rate of borrowing that both puts an applicant out of range of pro-rated EITC coverage and yet results in less than \$10,000 in total federal debt during a three-year MFA program. Of the nation's forty fully funded full-residency programs, only five are known to offer cost-of-living-adjusted stipends of less than \$10,000/academic year.

Cost of Living

The cost of living in the various programs' listed host locations was determined using Sperling's Best Places (www.bestplaces.net/COL/default.aspx). All cost-of-living data were then compared to a randomly selected national-average-range constant, in this case Ann Arbor, Michigan. Notations used for cost of living are as follows: Very Very Low (25 percent or more below Ann Arbor, Michigan, the national-average-range constant for the 2013 MFA Index); Very Low (between 16 percent and 24 percent below); Low (between 6 and 15 percent below); Average (between 5 percent below and 5 percent above); High (between 6 and 15 percent above); Very High (16 percent or more above); and Very Very High (25 percent or more above the cost of living in Ann Arbor). While some students may choose to live outside the boundaries of their program's host location, commuting to an MFA program rather than living near campus includes hidden costs of its own, indeed costs of both a pecuniary and nonpecuniary nature. For this reason, only a program's host location was assessed for this measure. Cost-of-living adjustments were also used to determine the package value at individual programs for the funding and "full funding" categories.

Teaching Load

While individual applicants' interest in teaching composition, rhetoric, literature, or creative writing to undergraduates will vary, generally speaking the most popular teaching load is a 1/1 (one course to be taught in the fall semester, one in the spring semester). The teaching loads of individual programs have not been ordered in a vertical hierarchy per se, yet this 1/1 standard has been used to determine whether a given program's teaching load is considered Low ("L"), Average ("A"), or High ("H"). That is, because the 1/1 load is the most popular amongst applicants—though it is not the most common teaching load at MFA programs—average annual teaching loads of 0/0, 0/1, 1/0, and 1/1 have been denominated "Low" by the MFA Index. An average annual teaching load of 2/1 or 1/2 (the most common teaching load) is termed "Average," while an average annual teaching load of 2/2 is considered "High." Note that the term "load" is not used here pejoratively; some applicants will wish to teach more rather than less, even as other applicants prefer to do no teaching whatsoever. At present the MFA Index takes no position whatsoever on the academic or professional value of teaching a large or small number of undergraduate sections per academic year, nor on the effect such teaching may or may not have on individual students' personal writing practices.

The term "average" is used here in two different senses: First, to denote a category of teaching load; second, to indicate that all programs are assessed by their "average" teaching load. Because many programs offer different teaching-load packages to different students, and/or increase or decrease teaching load over the duration of the program, the average (mean) number of courses taught per year per student in each program is used. In some instances, students may request and/or get assigned—once admitted to a program—a larger and therefore better-compensated teaching

load. Such additional teaching sections are by no means guaranteed, however, and therefore are not noted in or considered by the MFA Index.

Some programs fund a small enough percentage of admittees through teaching assistantships that to assign such programs an “average teaching load” would be to wrongly imply that admitted students are likely to receive an assistantship. For this reason, programs that offer assistantships to less than one-third of their incoming cohort received an em-dash (“—”) in the “teaching load” column. Programs eligible for a “teaching load” designation, but which do not publicly disclose the teaching load they assign their teaching assistants, are indicated with a “no data available” (“n.d.”) notation.

CGSR Compliance

The Council of Graduate Schools Resolution, also known as the “April 15th Resolution,” states that graduate programs that are signatories to the Resolution shall keep funded offers of admission open through April 15 of each application cycle. Colleges and universities that adhere to the Resolution represent that all of their constituent programs and departments adhere to the terms of the Resolution, which include mailing a copy of the Resolution with all acceptances. Under the terms of the Resolution, programs may neither rescind nor threaten to rescind offers of admission to which any funding whatsoever is attached prior to April 15, nor may they explicitly or implicitly indicate to such accepted candidates, in writing or in person or via telephone, that there is any deadline for their matriculation decision other than April 15. Historically, MFA applicants have reported widespread noncompliance with the Resolution, which is problematic for applicants because CGSR-violative programs often require final matriculation decisions from applicants well before they have heard admissions responses from the other programs to which they applied.

Applicants increasingly see such acceptances as excessively restrictive of their options and opportunities.

At present, only two CGSR signatories are believed to be noncompliant with the contract they and more than a hundred other universities signed and published for prospective applicants. This said, the CGSR Compliance category does not distinguish between programs known to have already violated the Resolution and those nonsignatories that simply could do so without running afoul of their host universities' administrative policies. Therefore, while applicants should exercise due diligence and caution in applying to programs that are not CGSR compliant, they should also not presume violations will occur. The best policy is to contact nonsignatory programs directly and inquire regarding their CGSR-related policies; needless to say, some programs will welcome such queries more than others, as of late the question of the CGSR's viability for creative writing MFA programs has been hotly contested by certain nonsignatory programs.

Any signatory to the CGSR found to be in violation of that contract will be listed as noncompliant, whether or not the program's host college or university continues to be a CGSR signatory. Compliance inquiries are initiated on the basis of applicant self-reporting; since 2006, fully 100 percent of applicant complaints regarding programs' CGSR-related policies have been found, following an investigation, to be meritorious. Indeed, in all but one instance the offending program ultimately admitted the violation.

GRE Required

This category indicates whether or not a program requires applicants to submit Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test scores as part of their applications. Generally, programs that offer a substantial portion of incoming students some form of financial aid require these scores,

and so applicants are advised to take this test prior to applying in order to avoid artificially limiting their application options. In most instances, student scores are only lightly scrutinized (or simply ignored altogether) by the programs themselves, and instead reviewed—where they are reviewed—by individual universities' Graduate Colleges, which often have minimum GRE-score requirements (typically very generous ones). Creative writing MFA applicants should not avoid the GRE General Test for fear of the Mathematics portion of the exam; even those programs that do give minor weight to standardized test scores in their admissions processes generally look only at applicants' Verbal and Analytical Writing scores. At present no programs require the GRE Subject Test in English Literature, though one program (Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore) strongly suggests that applicants sit for and submit their scores from this exam. Applicants should also be aware that certain university-wide fellowships and grants require the submission of GRE scores. Applicants who do not submit such scores with their applications cannot be considered for these forms of financial aid.

Language Required

This category indicates whether or not a program requires applicants to exhibit proficiency in a foreign language prior to graduation. Some programs with a foreign-language requirement allow applicants to place out of this requirement through the submission and application of prior foreign-language course credits at the college level; other programs require that applicants take an exam (often a reading-knowledge-only translation exam) to show proficiency, regardless of their prior foreign-language experience. At present only a small minority of programs—nine of the 78 listed in the MFA Index, or 12 percent—have a foreign-language requirement as part of their curriculum.

However, the category is presented here due to applicants' great interest in, and sometimes anxiety about, such prerequisites for graduation.

Cross-Genre

Certain MFA programs require that individuals who apply and are admitted in a particular genre take only workshops in this “declared” genre while in-program. Other programs permit, or even require, matriculated students to take out-of-genre workshops—and among this latter group are two further subcategories of programs, those that permit students to take as many out-of-genre workshops as they wish, and those that permit or require only a limited number of out-of-genre workshops.

The past six years of online, public discussions between and amongst MFA applicants suggest that the availability of cross-genre study has become one of the top concerns for applicants seeking additional curricular information about the programs to which they wish to apply. Many applicants already write in more than one genre, and hope to have their multifaceted talents as literary artists shepherded, rather than impeded, by the curricula of programs on their chosen application list; other students are merely curious about genres other than their own, and view their in-program time as a rare opportunity to experiment with modes of literary art other than those with which they are already conversant. A smaller—but growing—subset of the applicant pool is comprised of self-styled “literary artists” rather than simply “poets” or “writers,” and these individuals already incorporate so many different aesthetic traditions into their work that to be limited to either “poetry workshops” or “prose workshops” would (in their view) be a betrayal of their artistic vision. Because the availability of cross-genre study is such a prominent concern amongst the applicant class, it is listed as a separate category here. All data for this category were

taken directly from program websites; any program that permits or requires applicants to take out-of-genre workshops, in whatever number, has been listed in this column as a “yes” (“Y”). Programs that explicitly prohibit such study are indicated with a “no” (“N”). Because the tradition, among MFA programs, has been to disallow cross-genre study, programs whose websites were silent on the question of such study were also treated as and are listed in the MFA Index as a “no” for this measure.

Years of Establishment

Reciting the years of establishment for the nation’s full-residency MFA programs offers a critical historical context for the full-residency MFA Index, the institutions profiled and assessed in the MFA Index, and the very degree that is the focus of both the table and the institutions whose attributes the table’s surveys and hard-data measurements catalogue. This column of data does not apply to nonterminal, academic master’s programs in creative writing (with or without the option of a creative thesis), which are different in form and function from their longer, generally better-funded, more studio-oriented, terminal, art-degree MFA peers.

Previous survey methodologies used in assessing terminal-degree creative writing programs have leaned heavily on the somewhat tendentious factor of program visibility. When programs are assessed by individuals already within the system, the natural result is that older programs—whatever their selectivity, financial resources, faculty resources, curriculum, pedagogy, or student outcomes—move into positions of prominence due to their profile advantage. Yet applicants report only limited interest in programs’ historical pedigrees, as pedigree itself is often considered a suspect quantity in the national literary arts community. By publishing the years of establishment of 78 of the nation’s 173 full-residency MFA programs (with the years of establishment of the other 95

available on the MFA Research Project website), the 2014 MFA Index permits applicants and other consumers of these data to both disassociate historical pedigree from the distinct question of program quality, while also better understanding the historical context in which the creative writing MFA has achieved such cultural prominence.

Creative writing as an academic discipline originated in the late nineteenth century, yet by January of 1964 there was still only one MFA-conferring graduate creative writing program in the world. In fact, though the first MFAs in any field were granted in the 1920s, and the MFA-conferring Iowa Writers' Workshop was founded in 1936, the MFA as a degree would have no abiding place in the national literary arts community until the 1980s. The 1940s, 1950s, and much of the 1960s were marked by attempts to find alternative models to the one provided by the Iowa Writers' Workshop: first, in the degree-granting, relatively nonselective, grade-free creative writing program at Black Mountain College, which was founded in the 1930s but had its heyday in the late 1940s and early to mid-1950s; second, in the undergraduate-only creative writing program at Stanford University (founded in 1947 by Wallace Stegner) and other undergraduate programs modeled closely upon this one; third, in institutional but non-degree-granting programs like the Writers' Program at University of California in Los Angeles, founded in 1964; fourth, in non-institutional workshops such as the Black Arts Movement's Umbra Workshop, founded in Manhattan's Lower East Side in 1962; and fifth, in nonterminal MA programs in creative writing founded at a number of institutions, including Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore (1946), University of Denver in Colorado (1947), Cornell University in Ithaca, New York (1948), Indiana University in Bloomington (1948), University of Florida in Gainesville (1948), and Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia (1960). Some of these latter programs initially required academic theses of their students rather than creative ones.

Ultimately, certain elements of the Iowa Writers' Workshop MFA model became ascendant—after these and other elements had been experimented with by the types of degree programs listed above—because of a grass-roots campaign by working creative writers (among both faculties and student bodies at various institutions) to gain greater administrative, pedagogical, and creative autonomy from the academy to which they had previously been attached. Most of the early MFA programs appear to have been founded only after years—in some cases several decades—of struggle between creative writers and university bureaucrats, with the two primary bases for the latter's objection to the MFA being that it cost much more than the MA to administer (due to the need for greater faculty resources, and the necessity of awarding tuition remission-eligible assistantships to many terminal-degree candidates) and permitted universities less immediate oversight over their resident literary artists. Far from a “cash cow” warmly embraced by U.S. universities, the creative writing MFA was for decades rejected by America's universities—and often their English department faculties—as too exotic, too expensive, and too distant from the traditional academic functions of an American English department.

At the beginning of the 1980s there were still fewer than two dozen creative writing MFA programs in the world. It was not until the turn of the century that the rate of MFA-program creation significantly increased, as indicated by the table below, which catalogues MFA programs' dates of establishment by decade: [NB: See Appendix A.] By prorating the number of programs founded in the first thirty months of this decade, it can be estimated that 120 new creative writing MFA programs will be founded in the 2010s—the busiest decade for MFA program creation in the history of the degree.

Location Assessments

While not listed in the 2014 MFA Index, one of the seven areas of MRP Index assessment was “location.” A program received acknowledgment by the MRP Index for its location if its location appeared (or if its location was within thirty miles of a location that appeared) in any one of the following eight national media assessments of the best places for individuals (particularly students and young professionals) to live and work: Bloomsberg/*Businessweek* (“America’s 50 Best Cities,” 2011); *U.S. News & World Report* (“10 Great College Towns,” 2011); *Parents & Colleges* (“Top 10 Best College Towns,” 2011); *Travel + Leisure* (“America’s Coolest College Towns,” 2009); The American Institute for Economic Research (“Best College Towns and Cities,” 2011); StudentUniverse (“Top 10 Cities to Visit in Europe,” 2011); MoneySense (“Canada’s Best Places to Live,” 2012); or ELM (“2011 Top Cities to Live and Work Abroad in Asia,” 2011).

The suitability of a given program location to a given student is of course a personal assessment which can only be made by the student himself/herself; however, given the importance of location to prospective MFA students and the financial difficulties aspiring MFA students encounter in investigating prospective program locations in person pre-matriculation, media assessments of program locations have been employed by the MRP Index as one non-exhaustive measure of program location quality. A full recitation of the criteria for each media assessment can be found via links to the assessments on the MFA Research Project website (www.mfaresearchproject.wordpress.com; see “Program Location Surveys”). Some of the criteria used by the listed media organizations included: Which towns and cities have the highest index of student-centered restaurants, bars, museums, pedestrian malls, bicycle paths/lanes, parks, hiking trails, sporting events, theaters, and concert venues; the total number of restaurants, bars, and museums per capita; the total number of colleges, libraries, and professional sports teams; income,

poverty, unemployment, crime, and foreclosure rates; the percent of the local population with bachelor's degrees; park acres per 1,000 residents; and air quality.

Application Fee

The application fee column lists each program's application fee for the most recent application cycle. These data are taken from program websites.

The relevance of these data has increased in recent years, as three distinct but related phenomena have been observed in the MFA admissions system over the past six admissions cycles: Acceptance rates at the nation's most competitive programs are steadily declining; applicants are responding to this trend by applying to a larger and larger number of programs each year (the conventional wisdom in 2005 was that the average applicant should apply to eight to ten programs; now, applicants are regularly advised to apply to between twelve and fifteen programs, and more if financially feasible; and the amount of money the average applicant has available to pay application fees has either remained steady or declined, with the vast majority of applicants reporting that they have less than a thousand dollars available for all MFA-application-related costs.

Given the cost of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test (\$160), the cost per GRE "score report" to be sent to individual programs (\$23), and the cost per transcript ordered from an alma mater (costs as high as \$50 per transcript at some institutions, and rarely if ever less than \$5 per transcript; some applicants, particularly nontraditional and international applicants, must order transcripts from multiple alma maters), applicants are increasingly unable to afford to apply to programs with high application fees. And because of the importance of applicant surveys to the MFA Index, programs with higher application fees are likely to receive fewer applications per annum and thus place lower in the one-year and five-year applicant popularity surveys than they otherwise

would. The table's recitation of application fees is consequently intended to benefit programs as much as applicants; most programs constantly revisit their administrative fee schedules, and in doing so the following data may be of assistance.

LOW-RESIDENCY MFA INDEX: ADDITIONAL PROGRAM MEASURES

Genre Availability

Genre Availability measures the number of genres in which a given low-residency program offers either a formal track or an informal concentration or focus. As many programs occasionally offer courses in genres for which they do not offer a track or concentration, it can be difficult to assess which genres are sufficiently supported at a given program that the program is likely to receive creative portfolios in that genre. The aim of the Genre Availability category is to include only those genres in which a program is likely to attract an appreciable number of applicants—as opposed to a genre offered only as an occasional brief-residency course lacking substantial nonresidency, academic-year faculty support.

Residency

Residency measures the number of days per year a low-residency student in the program is required to be on campus. While at present there is no conventional wisdom as to the value of a long residency versus a shorter one, low-residency programs' residencies are typically the only opportunity for students to interact in person with their professors and to meet their classmates; consequently, many applicants to low-residency programs may prefer longer residencies.

Appendix T: Full-Res MFA Student-Faculty Ratios

The study of full-residency MFA student-faculty ratios that appears below was conducted in 2012. It takes into account all fiction, poetry, and nonfiction faculty and students at individual programs. However, only core, full-time, terminal-degreed faculty hired specifically to serve in the college or university's Creative Writing Department are included; visiting faculty, lecturers, writers-in-residence, and adjunct faculty are not considered toward a program's faculty count, nor are new hires made outside the timeframe during which a program's student-faculty ratio was assessed. The only exception to the rule regarding "full-time" faculty concerns programs with a dedicated faculty position reserved for invited, semester-long full-time faculty from other graduate creative writing programs. Programs with a regularly rotating sabbatical schedule are treated as having the number of non-sabbatical faculty for purposes of student-faculty ratio. Some programs permit, on a regular basis, a selected number of graduating students to remain for an additional year of funded coursework; where possible, this foreseeable cadre of "extra-year" students have been considered as part of total program size figure.

In the listing that follows, student-faculty ratio was determined using the following equation: annual cohort size times program duration in years divided total number of qualifying faculty at the program. Equivalent student-faculty ratios were resolved in favor of the program with more qualifying faculty.

1. Cornell University (1.33:1)
2. University of Wisconsin at Madison (1.71:1)
3. Brown University (1.82:1)
4. University of Wyoming (2.00:1)
- 5t. University of Miami (2.00:1)
- 5t. Vanderbilt University (2.00:1)
7. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2.25:1)
8. University of Texas at Austin [Michener Center] (2.40:1)
9. Louisiana State University (2.40:1)

10. Washington University in Saint Louis (2.50:1)
11. University of California at San Diego (2.67:1)
12. Otis College of Art & Design (2.73:1)
13. University of North Carolina at Greensboro (2.75:1)
14. Arizona State University (2.82:1)
15. Northern Michigan University (2.83:1)
16. Johns Hopkins University (2.86:1)
17. Boston University (3.00:1)
18. University of Central Arkansas (3.00:1)
19. Chatham University (3.00:1)
20. University of California at Riverside (3.08:1)
21. University of South Carolina (3.20:1)
22. University of Washington at Seattle (3.33:1)
23. University of Notre Dame (3.33:1)
- 24t. California State University at Long Beach (3.43:1)
- 24t. Hollins University (3.43:1)
- 24t. Purdue University (3.43:1)
- 24t. Virginia Polytechnic Institute [Virginia Tech] (3.43:1)
28. University of Virginia (3.57:1)
29. University of Minnesota (3.60:1)
30. Oregon State University (3.60:1)
31. University of New Mexico (3.71:1)
32. University of Central Florida (3.75:1)
33. Savannah College of Art & Design (3.75:1)
34. University of Texas at El Paso (3.89:1)
- 35t. CalArts (4.00:1)
- 35t. Hunter College [CUNY] (4.00:1)
- 35t. Indiana University (4.00:1)
- 38t. University of Kansas (4.00:1)
- 38t. University of Mississippi (4.00:1)
- 40t. Bowling Green State University (4.00:1)
- 40t. Chicago State University (4.00:1)
42. Rosemont College (4.17:1)
- 43t. Georgia College & State University (4.29:1)
- 43t. Iowa State University (4.29:1)
- 43t. Old Dominion University (4.29:1)
- 43t. University of Idaho (4.29:1)
- 43t. West Virginia University (4.29:1)
48. University of Michigan (4.36:1)
49. Colorado State University (4.44:1)
50. Syracuse University (4.50:1)
51. University of Oregon (4.50:1)
52. Boise State University (4.50:1)
53. Oklahoma State University (4.75:1)
- 54t. California State at San Bernardino (4.80:1)
- 54t. North Carolina State University (4.80:1)
56. University of Pittsburgh (4.88:1)
57. Florida State University (5.00:1)

- 58t. University of Arizona (5.00:1)
- 58t. University of Montana (5.00:1)
- 60. University of New Hampshire (5.00:1)
- 61. Rutgers University at Newark (5.00:1)
- 62. Rutgers University at Camden (5.00:1)
- 63t. Hamline University (5.00:1)
- 63t. New Mexico State University (5.00:1)
- 63t. Southern Illinois University (5.00:1)
- 63t. Virginia Commonwealth University (5.00:1)
- 67. Queens College [CUNY] (5.00:1)
- 68. University of Florida (5.14:1)
- 69. University of South Florida (5.40:1)
- 70. Wichita State University (5.40:1)
- 71. University of California at Irvine (5.50:1)
- 72. San Diego State University (5.57:1)
- 73t. Saint Mary's College of California (5.63:1)
- 73t. University of Maryland (5.63:1)
- 75. University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (5.71:1)
- 76. University of Houston (6.00:1)
- 77t. Adelphi University (6.00:1)
- 77t. Georgia State University (6.00:1)
- 77t. University of Colorado at Boulder (6.00:1)
- 80. Southern Connecticut State University (6.00:1)
- 81. Ohio State University (6.33:1)
- 82. Florida Atlantic University (6.43:1)
- 83. Columbia College Chicago (6.46:1)
- 84. Texas State University at San Marcos (6.50:1)
- 85. Portland State University (6.50:1)
- 86. Sarah Lawrence College (6.52:1)
- 87. University of Memphis (6.67:1)
- 88. University of North Carolina at Wilmington (6.73:1)
- 89. School of the Art Institute of Chicago (6.75:1)
- 90. University of Missouri at Saint Louis (7.00:1)
- 91. University of British Columbia [CAN] (7.25:1)
- 92. University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa (7.50:1)
- 93. Eastern Washington University (7.50:1)
- 94. George Mason University (7.60:1)
- 95. University of New Orleans (7.67:1)
- 96. Florida International University (8.14:1)
- 97. Emerson College (8.17:1)
- 98. Western Michigan University (8.33:1)
- 99. University of Nevada at Las Vegas (8.40:1)
- 100t. American University (8.57:1)
- 100t. Brooklyn College [CUNY] (8.57:1)
- 100t. University of Massachusetts at Amherst (8.57:1)
- 103. University of Iowa (8.73:1)
- 104. Northwestern University (8.75:1)
- 105. University of Missouri at Kansas City (8.75:1)

- 106. Chapman University (8.80:1)
- 107. University of Utah (9.00:1)
- 108t. University of Baltimore (9.00:1)
- 108t. University of Texas-Pan American (9.00:1)
- 110. Butler University (9.38:1)
- 111. California College of the Arts (9.43:1)
- 112. NEOMFA (10.00:1)
- 113. California State University at Fresno (10.00:1)
- 114. Minnesota State University at Mankato (10.00:1)
- 115t. Lindenwood University (10.00:1)
- 115t. University of Massachusetts at Boston (10.00:1)
- 117. McNeese State University (10.00:1)
- 118. San Francisco State University (11.11:1)
- 119. University of Guelph-Humber [CAN] (12.00:1)
- 120t. New York University (12.50:1)
- 120t. San Jose State University (12.50:1)
- 122. City College of New York [CCNY] (13.33:1)
- 123. School of the Art Institute of Chicago (13.60:1)
- 124. University of San Francisco (14.00:1)
- 125. Mills College (15.83:1)
- 126. University of Washington at Bothell (18.00:1)
- 127. The New School (30.29:1)
- 128. Columbia University (30.75:1)

Appendix U: Policies on Cross-Genre Writing

Below is an alphabetical list of full-residency MFA programs that regularly permit cross-genre work as part of their curriculum, according to curricular descriptions on their program websites. This list is exhaustive with respect to programs appearing among the seventy-five most popular in the United States, per the 2012 Poets & Writers survey of that measure. As to programs not appearing in this listing of seventy-five programs, the below roster is non-exhaustive.

With 51 programs appearing in the list below, we can conclude that, at a minimum, 29% of full-residency MFA programs permit cross-genre study—51 of 176—along with nearly all low-residency MFA programs (of which there are, at present, 72). Low-residency programs are not included in the list below because their approach to the study of multiple literary genres is almost always determined by the individual student.

American University
 Boise State University
 Boston University
 Bowling Green State University
 Brooklyn College [CUNY]
 Brown University
 Columbia College Chicago
 Columbia University
 Emerson College
 Florida State University
 George Mason University
 Georgia College & State University
 Hollins University
 Indiana University
 Iowa State University
 Louisiana State University
 Ohio State University
 Old Dominion University
 Oregon State University
 Portland State University
 Purdue University

Rutgers University-Newark
San Diego State University
San Francisco State University
Southern Illinois University
University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa
University of Arizona
University of Arkansas
University of California-San Diego
University of Colorado-Boulder
University of Florida
University of Houston
University of Idaho
University of Kansas
University of Memphis
University of Minnesota
University of Mississippi
University of Montana
University of Nevada-Las Vegas
University of New Hampshire
University of North Carolina-Wilmington
University of Notre Dame
University of Texas-Austin [Michener Center]
University of Washington
University of Wisconsin-Madison
University of Wyoming
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Polytechnic Institute [Virginia Tech]
Washington University in St. Louis
West Virginia University
Western Michigan University

Appendix V: Full-Residency Curriculum Types

In 2012, *Poets & Writers* surveyed the programs appearing among the top fifty in its “popularity” measure to determine whether they offered students a “studio-oriented” or “academics-oriented” curriculum. According to the definitions used by the magazine, a program is considered “studio-oriented” if more than two-thirds of its credit requirements can be met through workshops, thesis hours, internships, or independent study. A program is considered “academics-oriented” if it does not meet this standard. Academics-oriented programs in which students take only two courses per semester, one of which is a workshop, are indicated in the print edition of the magazine with an “A” and an asterisk. One of the programs listed below, Pennsylvania State University, has since closed its MFA program permanently.

Programs With a Studio-Oriented Curriculum (S)

Brooklyn College [CUNY]
 Colorado State University
 Hollins University
 Louisiana State University
 Ohio State University
 Rutgers University-Newark
 Southern Illinois University
 University of Arizona
 University of Florida
 University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign
 University of Iowa
 University of Massachusetts-Amherst
 University of Michigan
 University of Minnesota
 University of Montana
 University of New Hampshire
 University of North Carolina-Greensboro
 University of Notre Dame
 University of Oregon
 University of Texas-Austin
 University of Wisconsin-Madison
 University of Wyoming

Washington University in St. Louis

Programs with an Academics-Oriented Curriculum and a Low-for-Field Course Load (A*)

Brown University
 Johns Hopkins University
 New York University
 University of California-Irvine
 University of Virginia

Programs with an Academics-Oriented Curriculum and a Field-Average Course Load (A)

Arizona State University
 Boston University
 Columbia University
 Cornell University
 Florida State University
 George Mason University
 Hunter College [CUNY]
 Indiana University
 The New School
 Pennsylvania State University
 Purdue University
 Sarah Lawrence College
 Syracuse University
 Vanderbilt University
 University of Alabama
 University of Houston
 University of Maryland
 University of Mississippi
 University of Nevada-Las Vegas
 University of North Carolina at Wilmington
 University of Washington
 Virginia Polytechnic Institute [Virginia Tech]

A different methodology for classifying program pedagogies, one less tied to quantitative analysis of program credit distribution, has been used by AWP since it published its Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs and Teachers of Creative Writing in 1979. According to that document, the three program types may be titled and described as follows:

Studio writing programs place primary emphasis on the student's writing experience within the program. In this way, they most closely parallel studio programs in music, dance, and the visual arts. Most of the degree work is done in workshops, independent writing projects or tutorials, and thesis preparation. The study of contemporary literature and the forms, craft, themes, and aesthetics of writing may be incorporated into workshops or offered through separate seminars. Faculty members of such programs are selected for their achievement in the creative or artistic genres of literature and not for scholarly work. Students are admitted to such programs almost wholly on the basis of a writing sample, and in turn, the significant degree criterion is the quality of the thesis manuscript.

Studio/Research writing programs usually place equal emphasis, in their curricula, on the student's writing and literary scholarship, with the belief that the study of literature is crucial to one's development as a writer. Seeking a balance between literary scholarship and literary artistic practice, these programs vary in the structure and amount of literature requirements, but they frequently rely on the regular English department faculty, noted for scholarly achievement, for many of the literature course offerings, while writers on the program faculty offer form, craft, and theory courses, workshops, and thesis direction. Studio/Research programs often require comprehensive examinations, and candidates are expected to be equally well-prepared in literature and in writing. Admission is determined primarily by the quality of the original manuscript.

Research/Theory/Studio writing programs emphasize literary scholarship and the study and practice of literary theory. These programs also offer writing workshops, independent studies, seminars on contemporary literature and the craft of writing, and the opportunity to complete a creative thesis, but these programs require that a majority of the degree-candidate's course work will be completed in literary scholarship and theory, usually in seminars taught by English department faculty. The course of study typically spans three or more centuries of literature from three or more continents, and proficiency in another language besides English is usually required in earning the degree. Such programs align themselves both with academic traditions of literary research and with anti-traditional modes of cultural criticism that have become prevalent since the 1970s. These programs actively use the same criteria for admission and degree award that are applied to candidates in literary scholarship, including the comprehensive examinations, grade point averages, and previous undergraduate course work in literature.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁶ See Guidelines (1979); bolding in original.

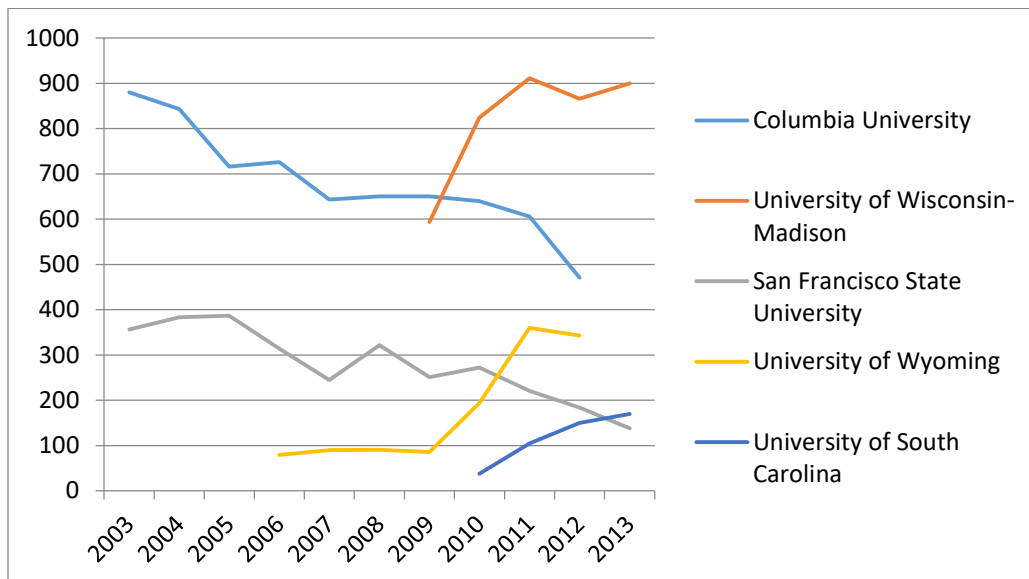
Appendix W: Foreign Language Requirements

In much the same way that creative writing MFA programs differ dramatically from scholarly graduate programs in English in their treatment of the GRE Subject Test—not one MFA program in the United States required prospective students to take the GRE Subject Test as a prerequisite for admission, as of 2013—MFA programs approach the mastery of language very differently than do their peer programs with a scholarly emphasis. Below is an alphabetical list of full-residency MFA programs that have a foreign language requirement as part of their curriculum. This list is exhaustive with respect to programs appearing among the 75 most popular in the 2012 applicant survey conducted by *Poets & Writers*. With just nine programs on the list, we can conclude that a curricular requirement of foreign language mastery is vanishingly rare (present at just 12% of all programs) at the most competitive creative writing MFAs.

Boston University
 Georgia College & State University
 Johns Hopkins University
 Purdue University
 University of Colorado-Boulder
 University of Houston
 University of Kansas
 University of South Carolina
 University of Washington-Seattle

Appendix X: Admissions Trends at Four Programs

One of the metanarratives within creative writing over the last decade has been the growing popularity, among MFA applicants, of fully funded programs located in low-cost, small-city environments—and the concurrent flight of applicants from high-cost programs in high-cost urban areas. Whether this suggests a long-term shifting of creative writing subcultures from historical loci like New York and San Francisco to cities and towns in the central and southern United States remains to be seen. The chart below traces recent applicant-pool trends at five well-known full-residency MFAs with a large stock of year-to-year admissions data available. Historically, Columbia has been one of the two largest full-residency MFAs in New York—the other being The New School—while San Francisco State University not only has one of the oldest graduate creative writing programs in the country but is also the largest MFA in one of the nation’s most literary cities. The MFAs at University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Wyoming, and University of South Carolina, meanwhile, are all relatively new and have fared well in *Poets & Writers* surveys.



Changes in Applicant Pool Size for Five Creative Writing MFAs with Available Historical Data, 2003-2013

Appendix Y: *Poets & Writers* Rankings Response

“We are disheartened to have read the open letter written on behalf of creative writing teachers and program directors protesting our publishing the 2012 rankings of MFA and PhD programs. We do, of course, respect the signatories’ right to express their complaints, and we take them with the utmost seriousness.

Our mission is and always has been to serve writers. *Poets & Writers Magazine* is published by the forty-year-old literary nonprofit Poets & Writers, Inc., which gives more money directly to writers to give readings and facilitate workshops—many in underserved communities—than any other nonprofit in the country. While the magazine’s editorial integrity has been called into question around the issue of the rankings, I can say with conviction that our editorial staff has worked tirelessly to ensure that our magazine adheres to the highest journalistic standards.

In publishing the rankings it is precisely these editorial standards that we are striving to uphold. Our ethical obligation is to be transparent to our readers about the source of the rankings and how they were derived, which we have done consistently and without reservation. We lay out our methodology explicitly in a four-page FAQ section that precedes the actual rankings in print, dealing directly with many of the issues raised in the open letter. The first question in the FAQ is: “Should I rely on these tables to choose where to apply?” We answer unequivocally in the negative, giving afterward an explanation of why this would be a bad idea. To characterize this as a “disclaimer” that we posted only on our website is, to say the least, an oversimplification. But then to state, “Regrettably, it appears on a separate page,” further misrepresents our clear intentions, and also disregards our readers’ ability to think critically. Do the letter’s signers seriously think that anyone contemplating a writing life will not have the desire, common sense, or attention span to read beyond the rankings?

We know our readers. They are writers, some of them emerging or unpublished, but all of them individuals who believe in the written word and identify themselves as committed to it. They actually read our magazine thoroughly. And our responsibility is to serve them and their particular needs—in this case, providing a comparative overview of leading programs' features, plus other articles on the issues pertaining to graduate creative writing programs.

So let's raise the tone. Reasonable people can disagree on methodology, and there is surely more than one way to skin this particular cat. But we have labored mightily to contextualize the material put before our readers, presenting the rankings along with guidance for how we think they should be used, plus other advice—much of it the same as that offered by the signers of the open letter—about how students can determine which programs are best for them. Since undertaking this work, we have carefully considered the criticisms we've received. The advocacy organization for creative writing programs, the Association of Writers and Writing Programs, for example, criticized us for not taking faculty enough into account. We maintain that faculty quality is too complex to assess because an excellent teacher for one student is not necessarily a good fit for another. But we considered the criticism and decided to address it by including coverage of notable new faculty hires. Subsequently, we have directed readers from our pages to our free online MFA database, which includes a list of core faculty for each program. In response to criticism that our coverage did not include the perspective of program representatives, we included in this year's issue a 3,000-word feature (an expanded 7,000-word version appears online) of advice directly from this group, some of whom took the opportunity to criticize the rankings.

While we readily consider reasoned criticisms of our work, we cannot in good conscience make editorial decisions in response to outside pressure from those groups and individuals who disagree with our coverage, much less those that threaten to withdraw advertising as a means of

influencing editorial content. Our responsibility is to our readers. And we would hope that, as writers, our critics would understand and respect this obligation.

Why did we decide to publish rankings in the first place? With the proliferation of MFA programs, whether or not to attend one has become a growing question among our readership. We began to see more and more users visiting the MFA thread in our Speakeasy Message Forum hosted on pw.org, where we discovered a burgeoning community of individuals exchanging sound advice and wisdom about creative writing programs. Users shared their online research about program features, inside information from students, and advice from mentors. We saw too that there was a growing need for this information to be more widely distributed—many users posted questions asking which programs were strongest and why, while many others expressed their frustrations at not being able to easily navigate some programs' websites.

We engaged Seth Abramson to assist us in sharing this information. Abramson has been collecting data about applicants' preferences and about MFA programs for five years, and we stand behind his integrity. In order to tap into the collective wisdom of as many applicants as possible, we turned to the Creative Writing MFA Blog, a website founded by Stanford University professor Tom Kealey, author of *The Creative Writing MFA Handbook* (Continuum, 2005). We decided to survey “readers of one blog,” as Deborah Landau puts it in the press release that accompanied the open letter, because it is arguably the most highly trafficked website about creative writing programs. Like our MFA thread, it is a gathering place where students, applicants, and creative writing teachers engage in conversation, sharing the information and advice they receive from online research, mentors, and one another. It's hardly a group whose opinions don't matter. Instead, it represents a well-researched sample of the annual pool of applicants to creative writing programs. Reporting on the trends of where this group is applying is valuable information to share with our readers.

Why didn't we survey MFA faculty and students about the quality of MFA programs? To continue the analogy Leslie Epstein used to describe our approach in the press release, that would be like asking diners who only frequent their favorite restaurant to assess the quality of *all* restaurants. While applicants are not experts on creative writing programs, they do have a vested interest in researching the various qualities of a number of programs and comparing them. They are advised by their teachers and mentors. And those who have joined online communities focused on creative writing programs are informed by the research shared there. Students and faculty affiliated with any one program do not necessarily have a vested interest in researching other programs, and it makes sense that they'd be biased toward their own. In fact, in some cases, promoting his or her program is a requirement of a faculty member's job. How can they be expected to be fair about assessing their own program or informed about assessing any other?

But along with the popularity ranking, we include in our coverage five other categories of rankings—all of which are based on hard data, plus eleven other categories about program features. While we must stand strong in expressing our right to pursue an editorial project such as this, we do not stand in opposition to the many hardworking teachers and administrators who may feel slighted by our work. We have already reached out to some teachers and administrators, and will continue to do so, in order to learn more about their concerns and deepen the conversation. In the meantime, I invite anyone who is interested in sharing a civil and productive conversation on the subject to call or e-mail me directly.

Sincerely,

Mary Gannon

Editorial Director

Appendix Z: AWP Response to *Poets & Writers*

Following the publication of the *Poets & Writers* MFA rankings in 2011, AWP Director David Fenza issued a public letter of condemnation that unfortunately is no longer publicly available online. The organization also, simultaneously, began advertising its own “MFA rankings” via Google. For a period of many months in late 2011 and early 2012, Google searches for “mfa rankings”—or related words and search phrases—brought up the following document on the Association’s official website (bolding and italics in original):

For Prospective Students—

AWP’s 2011 Ranking of MFA Programs

Sorry, but AWP provides no rankings of creative writing programs because such rankings are misleading.

Good advice on choosing a writing program should help you discover your own literary affinities, but no magazine’s centerfold of academic rankings is up to that task. Although AWP values *Poets & Writers* as a peer, *Poets & Writers*’ annual rankings of writing programs cheapen their usual standards. Rankings of writing programs simulate literary affinities; one should never confuse that simulation with finding one’s own authentic literary ties. Such rankings do for creative writing what pornography does for love. The rankings are provocative and good for commerce, but the heart of the matter resides elsewhere, in your own preferences as a reader, in your own sensibility as a writer, in your own love for certain books—and not in the dubious statistics of *Poets & Writers*’ polling. If you are applying to graduate schools in creative writing, it is crucial that you begin with a

survey of our programs, but that survey must largely be your own, and it must be based on your own personal appraisal of the writers who teach in our programs.

One Artistic Decision among Many

You should approach your choice of a writing program as an artistic choice. Word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, or stanza by stanza—you will make millions of such choices as a writer; and, ultimately, each choice must be your own. As a writer, you will find more kinship with some authors than with others. Now that you plan to apply to a few programs, you should identify which contemporary writers you admire most and find out where they teach. In choosing a program, you are choosing a community for your artistic mentorship. Choosing that mentorship is far more idiosyncratic an enterprise than choosing a business school or other courses of vocational training.

If you plan to write a historical novel related to the snubbing of women's careers in science and medicine, for instance, you should probably choose a program where a strong practitioner of the historical novel is in residence along with those writers who are experts in feminist narratives and criticism. Or, if you wish to write experimental poetry, you might only be punishing yourself if you unwittingly go to a highly ranked program staffed mainly by practitioners of traditional verse. Your years of study in a creative writing program will be more fruitful if you can work with those writers whose works hold some affinities with your own subject matter and with your own aesthetics. Whose advice do you think would be most useful to you in helping you shape your first book?—that's the big overwhelming question. Specious rankings of MFA programs cannot answer that for you.

Please see the introduction to our guide to writing programs for more advice in choosing the program best for you. For a continued explanation of why the rankings in *Poets & Writers* are not in your best interest as a prospective student, please read on.

A Guide to the Dubious Methodology behind the Rankings

A few components to *Poets & Writers*' 2011 rankings warrant some commentary because they are so misbegotten. The producer of the rankings, Seth Abramson, has deposited on the Web a long and tedious defense of the methodology behind his rankings, but his lugubrious exegesis does nothing to bolster the credence of the rankings. The rankings are fallacious for at least three reasons: (1) because they rely on the wrong sample of individuals to survey, (2) because they privilege mass-appeal over one's own artistic choice of mentors, and (3) because they emphasize money over literary and artistic sustenance.

1. The Wrong Survey Subjects

The most egregious aspect of *Poets & Writers*' survey is that it relies on a misleading sample, a polling of 527 prospective students. The programs were rated mainly by those who have not yet attended a workshop or seminar or met the faculty of those programs. Is this the best way to confirm where the best teachers reside? Or the best curricula and program philosophies? Previous rankings of writing programs, like those produced by *U.S. News & World Report* and by the *Atlantic* magazine, relied on appraisals by graduates and faculty in peer programs. Apparently, Abramson preferred a methodology that elevates inexperience far above first-hand knowledge. In book reviews, we expect the critics to have read the books they have evaluated for us. But it seems in rating programs, it is okay to rate them without actually studying in them. Seth Abramson and *Poets & Writers* have simplified the production of criticism. Perhaps next they will produce restaurant ratings

by critics who have never eaten in those restaurants—or movie reviews by critics who have never actually seen the movies, only their promotional materials.

2. The Misinformation of Mass Appeal

Those 527 prospective students behind the rankings were selected by Abramson among the many visitors to the MFA Blog, a popular website, which received 410,000 unique visitors over the polling period, according to Abramson. Abramson advises prospective students to be on guard against “sacrificing their unique aesthetics on the altar of consensus” at the same time he argues that his survey gains authority from the popular consensus of the MFA Blog. The fault line of this reasoning quakes with laughter. Abramson argues that the rankings are done in order to bring greater transparency to the programs at the same time his popularity contest obscures the artistic choices by which one should choose a program.

3. Money over Honey

One laudable goal of Abramson’s exertions is “less overall debt among MFA graduates.” This is generally a good thing, and most MFA programs are working towards providing more financial support for more of their students, although, with the decline of university endowments, this has become more challenging in the current recession. Nonetheless, the promise of a free ride through an MFA program should not persuade you to discount your own artistic preferences, nor should it persuade you to cheapen the value of graduate study with accomplished writers. The promise of money should not replace the promise of the best literary sustenance. Some programs have important features—literary magazines, editorships, publishing labs, literary centers, strong screenwriting or playwriting components, advocacy for social service and social justice—that rankings do not acknowledge.

When I chose the first of two writing programs that I attended, I chose a program that did not offer me a teaching assistantship, a fellowship, or an MFA; it was an MA program, and I had to borrow money to attend. In spite of the expense, I chose that program because I admired the writers and scholars who taught there. It took me years to pay off that student loan, but I am still certain that program was the best choice for me. It was worth the cost. At that expensive MA program, I found inspiration and literary friends. I would do it all over again.

It might be best for you, too, to choose literary honey over money. Writing is a difficult art; it might be best simply to choose the best possible literary sustenance, if you can afford to do so. The free ride that Abramson extols is not necessarily the best ride.

The Best Choice in a Creative Writing Program

If you are looking into attending a creative writing program, you know by now that an artist must often stand aloof from crass considerations, or away from the shallows of a spreadsheet. The rankings of colleges and universities are annual features of a few magazines partly because such rankings combine mass-appeal and cash-appeal. Rankings sell advertising; rankings sell magazines. But rankings are superficial indicators of what may be best for your own artistic development. In the novel *Letters* by John Barth, a character writes, "...the world is richer in associations than in meanings, and...it is the part of wisdom to distinguish between the two." Rankings of writing programs are rich in associations, but they lack meaningful ties to help you down your own path as a writer. You must discern on your own who might provide those affinities for a fruitful mentorship. If you haven't read many of the contemporary authors who teach in our programs, start now and savor the challenge before you. One must become an expert reader before one can hope to become an accomplished writer. In today's world, with its cascades of superficial imagery, arriving at what is

authentic is hard work. As a writer, that difficulty will be inseparable from your daily work, so don't seek the easy way out now, as seductive as that might be.

Make a short list of programs based on your appreciation of the works of the authors who teach at those programs. Then, narrow that list by your financial needs and by your other personal preferences. Do some soul-searching about who you would like to become as an artist, rather than defer to academic rankings. The more solitary choices you make, the more success you will likely enjoy in the development of your own audience. That's your cherished paradox as a writer: you help to build a literary community through solitary work. The more independent decisions you make, the more likely it will be that you will have a great experience at the creative writing program of your choice.

D.W. Fenza

Executive Director

The Association of Writers & Writing Programs

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