

THE MFA PROGRAM FOR WRITERS

at WARREN WILSON COLLEGE

Final Semester

This culminating semester may feel like your speediest or your longest, and that feeling may change from day to day. A number of significant tasks still lie ahead, but by this point in the program you've proven in both your creative and critical work that you know how to meet the challenges that arise.

Below are key things to keep in mind as you move through this semester. It's not an exhaustive list; do review the Handbook, talk with your supervisor, and check in with the MFA office if you have questions.

Deadlines and dates to keep in mind:

- **March 6:** your supervisor-approved petition to graduate is due in the office. More on that below.
- **April 17:** your supervisor-approved course description should be submitted to the director.
- **Early May:** your supervisor must see the complete, ordered thesis in time to assess it for the final evaluation—in other words, no later than the final packet. There is no seventh packet exchange.
- **May 22:** submit your final evaluation to your supervisor.
- Last week of the term: the office will inform you of the members of your thesis interview committee and the committees on which you'll be serving.
- **May 29:** *all materials* (thesis, log, annotations or working journal, comprehensive bibliography) are due in the office.
- **Late May:** you'll receive your final pre-residency mailing and with it, word of when you'll do your graduation reading.
- **June 1:** Please provide the members of your thesis committee with your manuscript by this date.
- **By the end of July:** you'll receive your award-of-credit letter after the residency this time, as it reflects not only the completion of semester requirements but degree requirements and the award of your diploma.

Petition to Graduate

- Your path to graduation starts with your thesis petition. It should represent roughly one-third to one-half of what will be your thesis. For fiction writers, that means 2-3 stories or chapters (typically around 40 pages). Novelists, your selection should begin with page 1 of your work in progress. For poets, the petition should include 15-25 poems (a poem to a page, running no fewer than 15 pages total).
- **The petition is meant to be a “core sample” of the thesis**, comprising your *most finished, most representative* work, selections that are **certain of inclusion** (with no or very little further revision) in the final manuscript. Poets, please note that the petition is *not a chapbook*. It should not have a title or a table of contents; sequencing is not an element here (as it will be in the final thesis manuscript). The petition is an excerpt from a work-in-progress and will be regarded as such.
- The outside readers (one in each genre) are well-published graduates of our program. They will evaluate your petition's graduate-level achievement and will recommend for or against approval. The petition reports remain solely with the director and Academic Board Chair. The program will take this recommendation into account along with your supervisors' evaluations and will confirm approval by the end of March.

Thesis

- Your thesis is your opportunity to distill what you've learned into a coherent, polished, unified work. Review what you've done previously to determine what's worth keeping, developing, discarding. The work of selection and effective ordering/structuring of the manuscript (especially for poets) are important components of the semester's learning, valuable opportunities for discovery about your own processes and new perspectives on your habits of style.
- Please note that petition approval alone does not ensure that you'll receive your diploma; steady progress must continue. Your supervisor will assess this progress at the midterm and again in a post-midterm checkpoint to confirm with the office that you are on track to complete all degree requirements.
- How much new work should you write? That's up to you and your supervisor. Previous students' experiences vary widely. Some students have written a fair amount of new work; the process of thinking about your work as a manuscript can be quite generative. Others have focused largely or even entirely on revision. Most fall somewhere in between. Trust your instincts and set reasonable expectations.
- As you complete your thesis manuscript, keep in mind that it is only one component of the thesis volume which will be cataloged in an archival box in the Warren Wilson College library. The thesis volume will include a cover page, table of

contents, thesis manuscript, the degree essay, and your comprehensive bibliography. You'll submit your thesis volume during the January residency, typically after your thesis interview; that hour sometimes identifies typos to correct, etc.

- About that bibliography: you have been maintaining a running bibliography throughout your enrollment in the program, so this should be easily prepared. **Ensure the formatting meets MLA 9th-edition standards.** Documentation guidelines are available on the student-access site and in your handbook.
- See the handbook for thesis interview instructions and information. These guidelines have also been emailed to you twice since, are included in the residency packet, and can be accessed in the student area of the website.

Annotations and the Working Journal

- Final semester students complete the required number of annotations (12-15) or a working journal (50 pages minimum). The analytical component is a requirement of every term, regardless of the number of annotations already completed in previous semesters.
- Please consult the working journal guidelines and the samples online if you're interested in pursuing this option. **The director must approve the request**, and your supervisor and the program director may require a return to formal annotations if the working journal proves insufficiently focused and substantive.
- Both annotations and the working journal are well-suited to class preparation. Successive annotations or journal installments may ultimately provide the text for a lecture or the prepared-remarks portion of a discussion class.

Graduate Class

- As noted above, your course descriptions are due by April 17th; these will be included as submitted in the course descriptions document in the pre-residency mailing, so aim for a compelling and succinct (100-150 words) description. You've seen many examples over the past 3-4 semesters.
- Your faculty supervisor must sign off on the course description before you send it to the director. **The class must be prepared under faculty supervision and should be part of the packet conversation throughout the second half of the term, if not before.** Lecture drafts may count as part of your critical component.
- It's fine to be uncertain about your topic at the beginning of the semester. Valuable topics invariably emerge as a result of your final-semester reading, the dialogue with your supervisor, and the new perspectives on your own work that will arise as you revise and structure your thesis. Conversely, being locked into a topic at the outset of the term may prevent you from discovering one that may better serve your development. Begin annotating toward the planned topic but remain flexible to exploring new possibilities.
- You cannot substantially change your class proposal once submitted.

Public Reading and Graduation

- You'll learn when you'll read and for how long when you receive the pre-residency mailing in late May.
- The length of reading time varies depending on class size and scheduling, but is usually around 10-12 minutes.

For the July residency: you'll receive information about graduation guests in May.