Creative Writing at Brandeis

2016-2017

Overview

Participation in the Program

The Major and Minor

Faculty

Brandeis is one of a select number of American universities to offer a B.A. in Creative Writing (as distinct from the B.A. in English). Our program, unlike those of many comparable schools, is taught and administered entirely by established authors. The major combines writing workshops, literature courses, and studio art, promoting creative work of high caliber, as well as a grasp of canonical, multicultural, and contemporary literature. It also offers—to highly qualified students—two different honors options.

The English department has a long history of welcoming writers and writing classes. J.V. Cunningham, a well-known poet and Renaissance scholar, was a founding member of the department in 1949, and Creative Writing workshops have been offered at Brandeis since 1951. Allen Grossman, poet, and scholar, was a shaping force of Creative Writing from 1960 to 1991. Among those who have studied in workshops at Brandeis are Ha Jin; the poets Linda Pastan, Alicia Ostriker, and Mary Leader; playwright and screenwriter Theresa Rebeck; Ross Martin, poet and Senior VP for programming at mtvU; poet, fiction writer and memoirist Shirley Geok-Lin Lim; *NY Times* bestselling memoirist and journalist Daniel Smith; fiction writer Elisa Albert; poets Amaranth Borsuk, Melissa Buckheit, Joseph Wood, and Nicole Steinberg; and Maria Pinto, Rebecca Mahoney, and Kendra Fortmeyer, several recent graduates whose manuscripts have found representation and are being considered by publishers.

All Brandeis students, whether majors or not, may apply to one of the ten to thirteen workshops offered annually. Many choose to pursue a minor. Workshop size is limited to fourteen, and admission is based on work samples submitted to professors. The Registrar’s *schedule of classes* webpage provides important application guidelines for each course.

**Fannie Hurst and Jacob Ziskind Writers in Residence:** Every year, two distinguished authors join the Creative Writing faculty as the Fannie Hurst Fiction Writer and the Jacob Ziskind Poet. Over the years we have welcomed an impressive roster of visiting faculty, among them Alice Walker, Nobel Laureate Saul Bellow, Poet Laureate

*The School of Night* reading series brings several outstanding writers to campus annually to read their work and meet with students: J.M. Coetzee, Lorrie Moore, Li Young Lee, Denis Johnson, Amy Bloom, A. J. Verdelle, Russell Banks, Ha Jin, Eleni Sikelianos, Gish Jen, Louise Glück, Grace Paley, Jessica Hagedorn, Anne Waldman, Li Young Lee, Robert Creeley, Junot Diaz, Caleb Crain, Tess Taylor, and Elizabeth McCracken, to name a few.

**Majors** have received graduate fellowships at Harvard, Cornell, Syracuse, Michigan, Arizona, Oregon, and Washington Universities. Mytili Jagannathan was awarded a $50,000 Pew Fellowship in the Arts for her poetry. Some have taught at Tufts, Rhode Island School of Design, Columbia, Emerson, The New School, and Bentley College. Yael Shinar, 2003, and Cynthia Shur, 2004, won a St. Botolph Club Literary award upon graduation. Maria Pinto, 2008, was twice awarded a fellowship by The Writer's Room of Boston.

**Participation in the Program**

Our structure allows flexible participation by a diverse body of students. We are excited to have had students from fields as varied as neuroscience, Judaic studies, economics, psychology, African and Afro-American studies, fine arts, law, biology, chemistry, women’s, gender, and sexuality studies, sociology, and classics as workshop participants, minors, or double majors.

Students also participate informally by attending readings and other public events, by submitting work to campus literary publications, or by seeking out the writers on our faculty for consultation.

All Directed Writing courses require a *manuscript submission*, generally of four to seven pages in the genre of the course being applied for. These are emailed to the relevant instructor immediately prior to or early in each registration period as a single .doc/docx attachment. **Majors and minors are not guaranteed entry to such courses outside the selection process of each.** Directed Writing courses are offered exclusively on a Credit/No Credit basis (with the exception of THA 71a).

**The Minor**

Any student may minor in Creative Writing by fulfilling the following requirements:

A. Three semester courses in Directed Writing
B. Two literature electives in the Department of English.
C. **Transfer credits, cross-listed courses, and Advanced Placement exam credits do not count toward the minor.** No course with a final grade below C- counts toward the minor.
The Major

This major may be declared upon the completion of three courses in directed writing and a course focused on close reading. Ten semester courses are required, including the following:

A. One close reading course: ENG 10b (Poetry: A Basic Course), ENG 11a (Close Reading: Theory and Practice), or ENG 11b (Fiction: A Basic Course), which should be taken as early as possible.

B. Four semester courses in directed writing. See course category breakdown for list of directed writing courses. At least two of the required workshops must be from the 19/39a/79b/109/119 categories. At least one course in directed writing must be completed before the end of the sophomore year. A student may take as many workshops as she or he might like, but three should be concluded before the beginning of the senior year. No more than one course in directed writing can be taken in any semester in the same genre. Two such courses may be taken in different genres. Such courses facilitate writing under direction in a creative and critical community and are offered exclusively on a credit/no credit basis. All directed writing courses are by instructor's signature and require a manuscript submission.

C. One course dealing primary with literature in English written before 1800. For specific information about whether a particular course fulfills the pre-1800 requirement, please see listing of courses below.

D. One course in multicultural or world Anglophone literature. Multicultural literature courses are those that focus on texts written by ethnic or racial minorities within the United States or Great Britain; world Anglophone courses focus on texts written in English outside the United States and England (e.g., Indian, African, or Caribbean literature). Other courses may also be suitable; students with questions should consult the Director of Creative Writing. See the listing of courses below. By definition, film courses cannot fulfill the literature distribution requirements.

E. Two semester elective courses, at least one of which must be offered by faculty in the English department. Cross-listed courses are considered to be outside the department and are subject to the restriction in special notes below.

F. An elective course in a studio or performing art.
Poetry or Fiction Honors Options

1. Senior Creative Writing Honors Project

The Creative Writing Honors Project is a one-semester project, similar in scale to the Honors Essay in the English Department. It is available to qualified Creative Writing majors. The project culminates in the completion of a 25-page chapbook of poetry, or 50 pages of fiction.

**Eleven semester courses are required.** All four workshop requirements *(including two from the 19/39a/79b/109/119 categories)* should be completed prior to the project. One literature and the studio art requirements may be taken concurrently with the honors project, ENG 96a or 96b.

Students interested in this option should consult with the UAH in their respective genre (poetry or fiction) within the first month of the semester prior to the proposed study to discuss application, guidelines, and an advisor for the project, normally a senior faculty member the student has worked with before.

2. Literary Poetry or Fiction Thesis Option

Eleven semester courses are required. The directed writing requirement is reduced to a minimum of three semester courses in directed writing (poetry, prose, or both). Two of the required workshops must be from the 109/119 categories. Also required is the satisfactory completion of two semesters of the Senior Creative Writing Thesis (ENG 96d).

ENG 96d (Senior Creative Writing Thesis). The student will produce, under the direction of his or her adviser, a distinguished body of writing (usually a book of poems 50-70 pages, or a collection of stories or a novel of 125-200 pages) of appropriate scope (two semesters). The poetry or fiction thesis option major also requires an essay on a tutorial bibliography: a list of eight to twelve books, chosen by the candidate in collaboration with the thesis adviser and/or the director of creative writing in the candidate’s genre. The essay will be due at the end of the senior year, along with the thesis.

Admission to the poetry or fiction thesis option in creative writing is by application only during the first semester of the junior year. Admission will be decided by the creative writing faculty on completion by the student of at least one course from the 19/39a/79b/109/119 directed writing courses and either ENG 10b, ENG 11a or ENG 11b. The deadline for admission is usually in November. The deadline for midyear students will be in April.

Exact application dates, as well as instructions, may be found at our honors site: [http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/english/creativewriting/honorstrack.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/english/creativewriting/honorstrack.html).

A manuscript sample (20 pages of poetry or 35-50 pages of fiction, plus an informal transcript) should be emailed as a single .doc/.docx attachment to the English department (chaucer@brandeis.edu) by each year’s deadline. Students are notified of the results by the end of the semester’s examination period.

Recommendations for honors in the creative writing major will be made to the English department by the creative writing faculty, based on the student's work as exemplified by the senior thesis.
The Faculty

**Stephen McCauley**  
*Professor of the Practice, Co-Director of Creative Writing*
*M.F.A. Columbia University*

*Novels:*
*Insignificant Others* (2010)  
*Alternatives to Sex* (2006)  
*The Man of the House* (1997)  
*The Easy Way Out* (1992)  

**Elizabeth Bradfield**  
*Co-Director of Creative Writing*

*Poems:*
*Approaching Ice* (2010)  
*Interpretive Work* (2008)  
*Editor: Broadsided Press*

**Professor John Burt**  
*Ph.D. Yale*

*Lincoln's Tragic Pragmatism* (2013)  
*Victory* (poems, 2007)  
*Work Without Hope* (poems, 1996)  
*The Way Down* (poems, 1988)  
*After the Southern Renaissance* (1999)  

**Professor Mary Baine Campbell**  
*Ph.D. Boston University*

*Trouble* (poetry, 2002)  
*Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (1999)  
*Are Sin, Disease and Death Real?* (chapbook featured in Black Warrior Review, spring 1993)  
*The World the Flesh and Angels* (poetry, 1989)  
Michelle Hoover  
*Fannie Hurst Writer in residence*

*The Quickening* (Other Press, 2010)  
*Bottomland* (Grove Press, 2016)

Rebecca Morgan Frank  
*Jacob Ziskind Poet in residence*

*The Spokes of Venus* (Carnegie Mellon, 2016)  
*Little Murders Everywhere* (Salmon Poetry, 2012)

Marc Weinberg  
*Screenwriter*

*Projects for:*  
Discovery Channel  
A&E Network  
USA Network  
Dick Clark Productions  
Script Analyst for 20th Century Fox Studios

Olga Broumas  
*Professor Emerita of the Practice*  
*M.F.A. University of Oregon*

*Poems:*  
*Rave: Poems 1975-1999*  
*Eros, Eros, Eros, Poems, Selected and Last, translations of Greek Nobel Laureate, Odysseas Elytis* (1998)  
*Olga Broumas: a CD, featuring readings from the above works* (2000)  
*Sappho's Gymnasium, collaborative poetry with T Begley* (1994)  
*Perpetua* (1989)  
*Black Holes, Black Stockings* (prose poems, *with Jane Miller*, 1985)  
*Pastoral Jazz* (1983)  
*Soie Sauvage* (1980)  
*Beginning with O* (1977)  
*Restlessness,* 1967 (in Greek)
Student Publications and Venues

Laurel Moon — poetry and fiction.
Pseudonym — poetry, fiction, drawings, photographs.
Where The Children Play — poetry, stories, art, photography.
The Justice — weekly newspaper.
The Hoot — independent weekly newspaper.
Blowfish — satirical publication.
BOMS — Brandeis Open Mic Series.

For more information please visit our websites:
http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/english/news/events.html
http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/english/about/index.html
http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/english/courses/index.html
http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/english/creativewriting/major.html
http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/english/creativewriting/honorstrack.html
http://registrar-produ.unet.brandeis.edu/registrar/schedule/classes/2016/Fall/1800/UGRD
http://registrar-produ.unet.brandeis.edu/registrar/schedule/classes/2017/Spring/1800/UGRD

You may contact the English Department at 781.736.2130, or at chaucer@brandeis.edu.