



photo by Rik Panganiban

**THE MFA  
IN CREATIVE WRITING  
& LITERARY TRANSLATION  
STUDENT HANDBOOK  
2011-12**

**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT  
QUEENS COLLEGE, THE CITY  
UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to the Queens College MFA Program! You are here because the creative writing faculty was impressed by the strength of your writing and your potential to grow and thrive as a writer in our new program. All of us on the faculty are excited to work with you.

What follows is a tool for planning your course of study and a summary of useful information about our program, but not a substitute for regular conversations with the MFA Director, Nicole Cooley, and the rest of the creative writing faculty. We are all available to talk with you about your course selection and your progress through our program.

The Queens College MFA has two tracks, one in creative writing (poetry, prose, playwriting) and one in literary translation.

### **For both tracks you will:**

- \*Complete a total of 36 credits, which include workshops, craft classes and literature electives
- \*Take the following courses: 4 workshops, 2 craft classes, 3 literature electives, 1 literary criticism course, and 1 year of thesis work
- \*Produce a thesis in your genre of focus
- \*Present your thesis and process paper and take an oral exam

### **A. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND COURSE LOAD**

The MFA requires 36 credits. Each of our courses is three credits. Our program emphasizes classes on literary craft and requires you to take at least one workshop outside your genre of focus. You are also required to take English 636, a course on the history of literary criticism.

**The chart below explains the basic requirements for each track:**

<b>Creative Writing Track</b>	<b>Translation Track</b>
<b>4 Creative Writing Workshops:</b> English 751, 753, 755, or 757—i.e., three in your genre of focus, one in another genre	<b>4 Creative Writing Workshops:</b> 2 Translation Workshops, English 757; and 2 CW Workshops: English 751, 753 or 755
<b>1 Literary Theory class,</b> English 636	<b>1 Literary Theory class,</b> English 636
<b>2 Craft/Form Classes:</b> English 760, 761, 762 and 781 (when it is offered as Theory of Translation)	<b>2 Craft/Form Classes:</b> English 760, 761, 762 and 781 (when it is offered as Theory of Translation)
<b>Thesis Sequence:</b> English 795 - Thesis Workshop, and English 759 - Advanced Writing Project	<b>Thesis Sequence:</b> English 795 - Thesis Workshop, and English 759 - Advanced Writing Project
<b>3 Electives:</b> 600 or 700 level courses, either from the English Literature M.A. program, or from participating departments with departmental approval.  NOTE: for those not on the translation track, one elective may be replaced with a translation workshop.	<b>3 Electives:</b> 600 or 700 level courses, either from the English Literature M.A. program, or from participating departments with departmental approval.

Ideally, the program will take two years to complete, with students taking three courses per semester. Taking less than three courses requires permission from the MFA Director. Also, note that summer MFA courses are not always offered, so you should plan to complete your course work, especially your workshops and craft classes, during the academic year.

Our department offers a wide array of wonderful literature electives, from classes in British, American and Global Literatures to a variety of special topics courses (English 781) such as, most recently a class in “Feminist Fairy Tales” and a course titled “History, Memory and the Caribbean Literary Imagination.”

You may also take graduate literature classes in other departments, and students in the playwriting track may take courses in the Theater Department. With an e-permit and permission of the instructor, you may also take elective classes at other CUNY campuses.

Our courses are offered in the late afternoons and evenings (primarily at 6:30 pm with occasional electives at 4:30), and it is possible to work in the daytime and take classes at night.

Only students in the MFA program take our MFA classes. Non-matriculated students may not take these classes. Literature classes are comprised of MFA and MA in English students.

### **Pre-registration**

Each semester, the MFA Director will announce pre-registration and help you to register for courses. While we do hold spaces in our MFA classes so that all students can register for the courses they want, literature electives—especially English 636—are also taken by MA students and may fill up quickly.

### **Transfer Credits**

The MFA program allows you to transfer credits for literature electives only, not for workshops or craft classes, provided you have taken graduate level courses at another university within the past 8 years. You may transfer up to 12 credits.

Both the MFA Director and Graduate Admissions must approve transfer credits. If you wish to transfer credits, please consult with the MFA Director and bring a copy of your official transcript listing the course(s) you wish to transfer as well as a course description.

### **Filing for Graduation**

In your final semester of the MFA program, you must apply for graduation through CUNYfirst. Be sure to fill this out as soon as the semester starts if you plan on May/June graduation.

Everyone who graduates from the program must do so in the May/June graduation, not the fall or summer graduations.

## **B. MFA THESIS**

Your thesis represents the culmination of your graduate work and is completed over your last two semesters of the program.

In the fall of your final year in the program, you will take the thesis workshop (English 795), a multi-genre course in which everyone presents a portion of his or her thesis to the workshop. Students also meet in conference with the instructor of the thesis workshop. In the spring, you will sign up for English 759 and work directly with your thesis advisor.

### **Thesis Parameters and Advising**

For poetry, your thesis will be 25-30 pages. Prose should be 65-75 pages. For drama, you will write one full-length play or two one-act plays. For translation projects, students should work with their advisor to determine the appropriate length of the project.

The MFA Director can help you choose both the advisor and a second reader who will also comment and grade your final project. It is possible for a literature faculty member to be a second reader on your thesis, but if so, you should choose someone with whom you have taken a literature course.

### **The Process Paper**

The process paper is a critical exploration of your work that accompanies your thesis and your reading list when the project is due in April. It should be approximately ten pages long and can follow or precede your thesis project but is part of your completed thesis.

The process paper allows you to reflect on the decisions you make as you write your thesis and to situate your work in terms of literary traditions. In effect, you are positioning yourself as a writer in this essay. It is a chance for you to look closely at how you have developed as a writer in the process of writing your thesis

and working on your MFA. It should be written as an academic essay but should focus on your own artistic decisions.

### **The Oral Exam**

In your final semester of the program, you will also take your MFA oral exam. This combination presentation, question-and-answer, and thesis-defense (about an hour) is an opportunity to talk about your manuscript with your advisor and a second reader, situate your project in a literary tradition and discuss the texts that have been influential to you. Questions will be based on the MFA reading list and the categories you have chosen from that list. Both your advisor and your second reader will be in charge of the exam.

### **Submitting Your Thesis**

After your exam, you will have the chance to make any revisions to your thesis and then prepare it for submission to the college.

The title page of the thesis must bear your signature, your advisor's signature and the following statement:

“Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of English in the Graduate Division of Queens College of the City University of New York, (date).”

After your committee has approved your thesis, your thesis director will submit two copies of a Thesis Approval Form to the Office of Graduate Studies. Then the thesis must be bound. To arrange for binding, you must pay a \$25 binding fee at the Bursar's Office, for which a receipt will be issued. The receipt and two copies of the thesis manuscript must be taken to the Catalog Department of Rosenthal Library (Room 201). One bound copy is retained by the library and becomes part of its collection. A second bound copy is sent to the English department. If desired, a third copy may be submitted for binding, with no extra fee; the third copy will be given to you.

### **C. MFA READING LIST**

One of our commitments as an MFA program in Creative Writing and Translation is to immerse ourselves in various literary traditions and to encourage students to see themselves as members of a community of writers practicing a range of different styles, techniques, and writerly strategies. In the interest of placing student work in dialogue with the work of – in particular – 20<sup>th</sup> century writers, mostly working in English, mostly in the U.S., we have compiled a list of texts, which we expect our students to read in time for their oral exam at the end of their four semesters of course work.

The reading list is separated into Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Non-Fiction and Translation. You should make a list of thirty texts: fifteen from your genre of focus, five from another genre, five from the criticism list and five outside texts not on the list of your own choosing.

These reading lists are meant to be an integral part of your writing process, not simply an exam list of required texts. We hope you will find, among them, a handful of texts that speak directly to your creative project. Finally, we post these lists in the interest of developing an area of common knowledge that will help generate a shared sense of intellectual and creative community in discussion in and outside the classroom.

The reading list is available on the MFA website or you may obtain a copy from the MFA Director.

### **D. MFA TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES**

The MFA Program is pleased to announce that second and third year students will now have the opportunity to teach as adjuncts in the English Department.

Second year MFA students may compete for adjunct teaching slots. Courses available will vary, but may include "Introduction to Creative Writing" (English 210) and "Writing, Literature, and Culture" (English 120). Students will submit materials (CV, letter expressing interest, sample lesson plan/s) to a committee composed of faculty from the MFA program and the English Department. Decisions are NOT based on student writing but on the quality of the submitted teaching materials and the committee's view of success in the classroom.

Although availability of courses depends on the university budget, students who are awarded courses in the fall semester will have priority for teaching courses in the spring.

All students who teach in the English Department must take English 703, a class which serves as a teaching practicum and which counts as one of the three required electives.

Once students have received their MFAs, they will no longer receive priority for adjunct teaching in the English Department because space must be reserved for current students.

## **E. THE FLEA THEATER AND PLAY DEVELOPMENT LAB**

We are very happy to have a partnership with the highly regarded Flea Theater based in Manhattan. Each semester, several of our playwriting students will have their classroom work augmented by sessions with actors at The Flea who will conduct readings of MFA student plays.

In addition, playwriting students will have the chance to work with the Queens College Theater Department, in our new collaboration titled Play Development Lab, in which actors on campus perform MFA student plays.

## **F. THE ADVANCED CERTIFICATE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

Queens College is located in one of the most linguistically diverse places on the planet. Our MFA program is one of the rare programs to offer *both* a degree in Creative Writing and Literary Translation. Students now have the option of earning an Advanced Certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language.

In an increasingly competitive job market, where an MFA alone is often not sufficient to teach on the college-level, this Advanced Certificate in English Language Teaching will enhance the degree and give graduates other options. (Note: This minor does *not* fulfill the State Education requirements for certification in elementary or secondary schools.)

## **G. THE LOUIS ARMSTRONG HOUSE AND MUSEUM RESIDENCIES**

In collaboration with the Louis Armstrong House and Museum, each spring, we offer several residencies for MFA students to conduct research in the Armstrong archive. Students work in the archive to create original works based on Armstrong's life and work and then present them in the garden at the Armstrong house in Corona during a public reading. This is a wonderful opportunity to utilize the resources of Queens College and the borough of Queens.

## **H. MFA READINGS AND EVENTS**

### **On the Same Page Discussion Series**

We begin each academic year with an evening of lively discussion about the craft of writing. Based on a packet of texts sent to students during the summer, and led by MFA faculty members, the discussions are designed to engage everyone in the MFA program, and to explore matters of craft, form and language in the texts.

### **The New Salon in Queens**

We are thrilled to have an ongoing partnership with the Poetry Society of America, the nation's oldest poetry organization that is based in NYC: The New Salon in Queens. This series brings internationally renowned poets to campus for large public readings involving the entire campus community. Most recently, we brought poets Gerald Stern and Marilyn Hacker to campus to read in this series.

### **Trends in Translation Series**

Each year we invite several esteemed literary translators to campus to speak about the theory and practice of translation. Every other year we also offer a Trends in Translation Conference in the spring, with a daylong series of talks, readings and meetings.

### **Writers Read at Queens College**

Each semester, on a series of evenings, writers come to read and talk about their most recent book with our students. Books by readers will be assigned and/or made available to students as everyone is expected to read the books. Some of our most fascinating and still on-going discussions have been generated during these

conversations. We have had readings by poets and fiction writers and children's book authors as well.

### **Talks by Agents and Editors**

At least once a year, we invite an editor and/or an agent to come speak with students about the practical matters involved in writing. These talks are a great way to learn about the nuts and bolts of publishing .

### **Under One Roof**

For three years, we have collaborated with the MFA program in visual art at Queens College and presented a joint reading/exhibition in a gallery in NYC.

### **Queens College Evening Reading Series**

Sponsored by Queens College and directed by English Department faculty member Joseph Cuomo, this renowned series brings many notable writers to campus, including, in the past, Arthur Miller, Jamaica Kincaid and Robert Pinsky. Readings are held at 7pm on Tuesday nights during the academic year. Leonard Lopate writer as well as host of *The Leonard Lopate Show*, conducts interviews with many of the writers. Further information is available at: [www.qc.edu/readings](http://www.qc.edu/readings)

### **Bulletin Blog**

One of the ways we keep in contact is through postings on this website. Check it out: <http://queenscollegemfa.blogspot.com/>

### **I. OZONE PARK: A JOURNAL OF NEW WRITING:**

[www.ozoneparkjournal.org](http://www.ozoneparkjournal.org)

In the first year of our program, the MFA students launched a national journal in which all MFA students are welcome to participate.

Ozone Park is a biannual online journal of new writing publishing Fiction, Poetry, Creative Nonfiction, Plays and Translation from emerging and established writers. Ozone Park is edited and designed by graduate students in the Queens College MFA program in Creative Writing and Translation.

The journal holds launch readings for each new issue, one each semester, in NYC.

## **J. OUR LITERARY PARTNERS ACROSS CUNY**

As part of a larger university system, The City University of New York, our students are part of a network of graduate programs: three other MFA programs and the Graduate Center. Although we are discrete academic programs, in the interest of community building *across* the system, we plan a number of joint events that engage the larger CUNY community.

All the MFA programs came together for a Marathon Reading in 2007; along with our own faculty members, other writers included Billy Collins, Michael Cunningham, Elizabeth Nunez, and Meena Alexander. Each year, our partnering continues at the Associated Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) 2008, 2009, and 2010 Conferences.

Each spring, the four CUNY MFA programs meet at the Graduate Center in NYC for the Turnstyle Reading Series where graduating MFA students read with MFA faculty. This wonderful public reading series allows MFA students from different programs to meet one another and present their work.

And finally the CUNY MFA programs co-sponsor A Celebration of the Chapbook at the Graduate Center each spring.

## **K. MFA FACULTY**

All of our MFA faculty are full-time members of the English Department. Each year, we also invite a visiting professor to teach in our MFA program. All our faculty members are all working writers and committed teachers.

Professor Nicole Cooley, MFA Director (Poetry)  
Klapper 702, 718-997-4671  
[Nicole.Cooley@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:Nicole.Cooley@qc.cuny.edu)

Professor Jeffrey Renard Allen (Fiction)  
Klapper 534 , 718-997-4704  
[jeffallen1826@aol.com](mailto:jeffallen1826@aol.com)

Visiting Professor Susan Bernofsky (Translation)  
Klapper 703, 718-997-4603  
[Susan.Bernofsky@gmail.com](mailto:Susan.Bernofsky@gmail.com)

Professor Kimiko Hahn (Poetry)  
Klapper 701, 718-997-4712  
[Kimiko.Hahn@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:Kimiko.Hahn@qc.cuny.edu)

Professor Roger Sedarat (Poetry and Translation)  
Klapper 704, 718-997-4713  
[sedarat@yahoo.com](mailto:sedarat@yahoo.com)

Professor Richard Schotter (Playwriting)  
Klapper 705, 718-997-4715  
[shotbag@optonline.net](mailto:shotbag@optonline.net)

Professor John Weir (Fiction/Non-Fiction)  
Klapper 614, 718-997-4663  
[jweirdo@yahoo.com](mailto:jweirdo@yahoo.com)

## **L. OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION FOR MFA STUDENTS**

The English Department Office, 718-997-4600

Dean of Graduate Studies, Kiely Hall, Room 139A, (718) 997-519

The Registrar, Jefferson Hall, Room 100 (718) 997-4400

The Bursar, Jefferson Hall, Room 200 (718) 997-4500

Graduate Admissions, Jefferson Hall, Room 105 (718) 997-5200

Financial Aid Office, Jefferson Hall, Room 202 (718) 997-5100