

# West Virginia Wesleyan Low-Residency MFA in Creative Writing Program FACULTY HANDBOOK

Revised October 2016

## GENERAL EXPECTATIONS OF MFA FACULTY

**Basic Overview of the MFA Faculty Role:** Each faculty member participates actively in the full residency period—teaching a seminar, co-facilitating genre workshops, giving a reading, participating in Thesis Interviews and evaluating a graduate's seminar (as appropriate), meeting individually with students to plan semester projects, and remaining accessible to the MFA community. During the semester that immediately follows the residency, s/he is contracted to advise 1-4 semester projects, possibly serve as a secondary reader for a thesis manuscript, and evaluate each advisee's progress twice during the term.

### **Expectations during the residency period:**

WV Wesleyan's program seeks to create and sustain a culture of participation and stimulation at our ten-day residencies. At the residency, guest faculty are housed together and are provided meals in the dining hall to encourage informal connections with students. Modest breakfast offerings are usually provided in guest housing, and spontaneous dining at local eateries is of course acceptable but not paid for by the program. (Core faculty stay in their homes during residency; those who live locally are provided only lunch in the dining hall; those who commute longer distances are provided lunch and dinner.) Each core and guest faculty member is expected to participate actively in the residency period, teaching a morning seminar, facilitating afternoon genre workshops, meeting individually with advisees, and remaining accessible to other students and faculty for informal exchange.

Faculty are asked to submit their craft seminar descriptions and any pre-assigned readings for the seminar (books of reasonable length, or shorter assignments in PDF form) to the director three months before the residency (in April for summer residency, in October for winter residency). One month prior to residency, faculty receive the workshop samples for their genre workshops: 5000-6000 words of prose or up to 6 poems per student. Workshops average 5-8 students. Two or three faculty members split each genre's workshop days during residency and are expected to consult one another as they prepare for the workshop sessions, divvying up workshop pieces for which each will be responsible for leading discussion. Regardless of which faculty member spearheads workshop discussion on a particular work, faculty are expected to respond in writing to all students in their workshop so that students have the benefit of at least two faculty perspectives on their writing.

Prior to residency, faculty serving as semester advisors are expected to review portfolio materials for each advisee—core faculty can locate portfolios and evaluations on the campus network (MARS); guest faculty will receive these background materials electronically from the director. No exchanges or consultations with the advisee are required before residency; advising pairings are usually announced first night of the residency. Having familiarized themselves with the student's writing samples and prior evaluations, faculty arrive at the residency prepared to meet with advisees for at least two individual conferences, and to make suggestions for each student's project focus, reading list, writing goals, Critical Essay topic and thesis preparation, as appropriate—the student's formalized Semester Project Proposal should reflect these conversations. Project planning is a collaborative process for advisor and advisee. Together, the student and faculty advisor also set a specific schedule for the semester's packet deadlines; if an advisor is working with more than one student, it can be helpful to stagger advisees' packet deadlines.

All faculty are expected to attend the residency's opening and closing faculty meetings, the evening readings, and other faculty members' seminars when possible (though not other faculty members' afternoon workshop sessions). Depending on the nature of one's contract, other faculty responsibilities during the residency may include guiding the Genre Fundamentals discussion during first-day orientation, sitting on the closing panel, guiding one of the critical sessions (on annotations, Critical Essay, or teaching the graduate seminar), giving a reading, participating in Thesis Interviews (in person or via Skype, if on a thesis committee), and evaluating a graduate's seminar (if serving as thesis advisor or secondary reader).

### ***Expectations during the 17-week semester:***

During the semester, a faculty advisor is contracted to supervise 1-4 semester projects; each project involves five packet-exchanges, via mail or email, approximately every three weeks, with variation expected for the thesis semester (see the section below on advising theses). Each student packet contains a letter on progress, new and revised creative work (**up to a maximum of 35 double-spaced pages** unless exceptions are agreed upon by advisor and student), and an average of three annotations or a draft of the Critical Essay (annotations are optional for thesis students). The student also submits a final portfolio at the semester's end. The portfolio serves as a basis for the advisor's final evaluation of the student; additional commentary on the portfolio contents is not expected. No further exchanges or consultations are required after the final evaluation is shared with the advisee at the end of the semester (with the exception of Final Deposit review by thesis advisors, as noted below).

Supervision of projects includes frequent and thorough exchange through correspondence and requires prompt, attentive response to submitted material; advisors are expected to respond to packets **within one week** (sometimes longer, as agreed upon, for thesis students with packets of higher page count). Ideally, this one-week turnaround time is counted from advisor's receipt of packet submission to student's receipt of feedback. The manner of packet submission—via the post or email—must be agreed upon by student and advisor, but electronic submission and response are recommended. Advisors who prefer to comment on manuscripts by hand instead of with inserted comments in MS Word might consider scanning marked-up pages to a PDF and emailing them as an attachment. So that the student does not feel adrift during the semester, advisors are encouraged to be reasonably available by phone, email, and/or Skype in between packets, and should discuss, at the residency, the expectations for and means of communication that will best serve both advisor and student throughout the semester. Setting reasonable limits for between-packet communication is acceptable.

The nature and length of feedback offered by each advisor does vary, but here are some general standards upheld by Wesleyan's program, based on AWP recommendations:

### **A typical response packet from the advisor should include:**

- a letter that:
  - dialogs with the student about his/her reading, work habits, questions of form and aesthetics, etc.
  - offers a holistic critique of the student's creative work and suggestions for new and revised work
  - comments on the student's critical analysis of reading assignments (annotations or sections/drafts of the Critical Essay) along with suggestions for annotation topics when needed (requiring revisions of subpar annotations is acceptable)
  - offers suggestions for related reading, especially books that provide models of craft pertinent to the student's particular ambitions and style of writing (these can be "next

up” suggestions pulled from the existing reading list on the student’s Semester Project Proposal, suggestions for substitutions in the reading list, or they can be reasonable suggestions beyond that list)

- a return of the student’s manuscripts with marginalia and line-specific suggestions, either in hard copy or digital copy; advisors who prefer to comment on manuscripts by hand instead of with inserted comments in MS Word might consider scanning marked-up pages to a PDF and emailing them as an attachment (return of the manuscripts and detailed commentary are *not* expected for the final portfolio)

Twice during the term, advisors submit written evaluations of each advisee’s project and a log of the correspondence to the director. At midterm, the report is informal: it does not become part of the student’s record but is used by the director as an early-warning system if the student seems to be in danger of not completing the semester or if there are difficulties in the student-advisor relationship. At the semester’s end, a faculty member’s detailed narrative assessment of the student’s progress and written products forms the basis of award of credit and recommendations for further study. (Final evaluation for thesis students differs; see below.) The final evaluation enters the student’s record, along with materials supplied by the student, and is made available to subsequent advisors; the advisor also sends a copy of this report to the student, and a portion of it is quoted in the student’s transcript. Deadlines for informal midterm reports and formal end-of-semester evaluations are included on the academic calendar and must be submitted on time.

### ***Expectations of members of a thesis committee:***

Faculty can serve as either Thesis Advisor or Secondary Reader for a student in his/her thesis semester. Faculty members in either committee role receive additional compensation (see “Compensation Policy”). The director and an Outside Reader, external to the program, also make up the four-person thesis committee.

The **Thesis Advisor** reads half of the thesis at the eighth week of the semester and gives appropriate written and/or oral feedback and consults with the director on the student’s progress. The advisor also arranges for other exchanges of manuscript pages and, if preferred by student and advisor, annotations with his/her advisee as necessary during the semester. (For suggestions on structuring thesis semester exchanges, see the Resources section of this handbook.) The advisor looks at drafts of the student’s Graduate Seminar description, reviews the final description submitted at the eighth week, and helps the student prepare to teach the seminar, reviewing the student’s primary supportive materials (outline, handouts, etc) submitted prior to the final residency. The advisor reads the student’s First Deposit of Thesis submitted at the End of Semester Portfolio Due Date (early November in fall, early May in spring) and has one month to submit an Evaluation Narrative to the director. The advisor receives collated thesis feedback from the full committee of readers three weeks before the student’s Fifth Residency and prepares for and conducts, along with the secondary reader and the director, the student’s Thesis Interview during the student’s Fifth Residency (advisors not attending the residency will be Skyped in). At this residency, the advisor also meets with the student to review preparations for the Graduate Seminar (or discusses preparations over the phone), and, *if in attendance*, observes and evaluates the Graduate Seminar taught, submitting the evaluation to the director promptly after the Fifth Residency (when an advisor cannot attend the Graduate Seminar, the secondary reader will complete the evaluation). Finally, the advisor reviews the Final Deposit of Thesis four weeks after the Fifth Residency (usually early August or early February) and confirms degree conferral with the director.

The **Secondary Reader** reads the student's First Deposit of Thesis submitted at the End of Semester Portfolio Due Date (early November in fall, early May in spring) and has one month to submit an Evaluation Narrative to the director. The secondary reader receives collated thesis feedback three weeks before the student's Fifth Residency and prepares for and conducts, along with the advisor and the director, the student's Thesis Interview during the student's Fifth Residency (secondary readers not attending the residency will be Skyped in). At this residency, *if the thesis advisor cannot be in attendance*, the secondary reader observes and evaluates the Graduate Seminar taught and submits the evaluation to the director promptly after the Fifth Residency.