



MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN WRITING

SPALDING UNIVERSITY

Frequently Asked Questions

How much study time is involved?

The fall and spring semesters are about 6 months long. During the at-home part of the semester, packets are exchanged about every 3½ weeks. Students should expect to spend about 25 hours each week on their writing and reading for the program. The summer semester is about 9 months long, and packets are exchanged about every 6-7 weeks. Students should expect to spend about 12-15 hours each week on their writing and reading.

What is the spring-stretch semester?

Students who prefer the longer packet mailing schedule but do not wish to travel abroad may combine the spring Louisville residency with the 9-month summer at-home semester schedule. Students enroll in the summer semester but attend the spring residency. Such students should check to be sure they understand how their financial aid is affected by taking the spring-stretch semester.

May I study in more than one concentration area?

For fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, playwriting, and screenwriting: You may study in two areas—one for at least three semesters. To study in a second area, you must apply for admission and be accepted in that area. You may submit writing samples in more than one area with your application. Indicate on the application checklist the areas in which you are applying and include a writing sample for each area. Or you may apply in a second area by midsemester of your first semester.

If accepted for a second area, you study that area during your first or second semester. Faculty availability may determine the order of study. By midsemester of the second semester, students determine which area they wish to continue studying with the help of their mentor and approval of the Program Director. Students may take ENG650 as an opportunity to study a second or even third area. Again, students must apply and be accepted in any area to be studied.

For writing for children and young adults: Spalding offers a unique opportunity for students who write for children and young adults. Students choose focal areas during their second and third semester and may choose fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, screenwriting, or playwriting without additional admissions requirements. See our writing for children brochure for a full explanation.

All students have the opportunity to study different areas while in the program, through a variety of Workshop and cross-genre experiences that are offered at the residency.

How difficult is it for someone out of school for “decades” to adjust to the rigors of the MFA Program?

Students' ages have ranged from 22 to 82, and we highly value having a diverse community of writers in the program. How easy it is to adjust to the rigors of graduate study is an individual matter. If you have been out of school for some time, you might first consider attending a summer writing conference in your area. Consider whether it is difficult to hear your work discussed objectively. Do you enjoy group discussions? Are you open to new ideas? We intend for the workshop experience and all of the experiences of the program to be supportive. Workshop sessions are intended to be intellectually stimulating and emotionally supportive, not sessions where your work is “ripped apart.”

How flexible is attendance at scheduled events?

Attendance at residency events is required; however, there is some flexibility in the attendance expectations. Students are asked to use discretion in pacing themselves to take full advantage of the offerings of the residency. Workshop sessions may not be missed. Please keep in mind that you may have a couple of brief writing assignments during the residency, so you need to find some writing time during the week, too.

Do I have to “live” at the residency?

The accommodation package offered by Spalding University is not required. You may make your own room arrangements. Our days begin early and end late, so commuting would be very difficult.

How much does the program cost?

Tuition for each semester*	\$7,500* (for fall 2011, spring and summer 2012)
Application fee	\$30 (due with application)
Books/postage (estimate per semester)	\$400-500
Optional housing package for Louisville	\$250-850
Summer residency expenses (estimate)	\$3,000-4,500 (housing, travel, and meals)

Other university fees, such as a graduation fee and creative thesis fee, are included in the tuition. A \$500 deposit is required within thirty days of the date of your official acceptance letter to hold your place in the program. This deposit is nonrefundable and is applied to your tuition.

For residencies, students pay for their round-trip transportation and housing. For Louisville residencies, many meals are included in the tuition; however, for summer residencies abroad, students are on their own for most meals.

Tuition, fees, and housing fees, if applicable, are due before the beginning of the semester. However, for Louisville residencies, student charges may also be paid at the Enrollment Services Center on the first Friday of the residency.

*Tuition and other costs may change. A tuition increase of about 3-5 percent is expected each fall.

Do you admit unpublished writers?

Publication is not a prerequisite to admission in our program. Our main consideration for acceptance is the writing sample. The sample needs to demonstrate that the applicant is ready to write at a graduate level. Other factors considered include the essay and letters of recommendation, which demonstrate the applicant's level of interest in literature, motivation to work independently, ability to receive criticism, and willingness to learn how to critique others' work. We do ask that applicants list any prizes and publications with the application, but having none does not reduce your chances of acceptance to the program.

Do you accept students working at unrelated jobs?

Yes. It is typical in this type of program for students to have a variety of professions and careers. Many of our students have full- or part-time jobs. Although entering into this program is a commitment of about 25 hours a week (spring/fall semesters) or 15 hours a week (summer semester) and may require a juggling of schedules and other sacrifices, many are willing to take on the extra work to pursue their interest in writing.

Do I need to complete the degree in four consecutive semesters?

No. Once a student begins the program, he or she has ten years to complete the course of study. For example, a person may be able to come only to the fall residency and not the spring. Others may need to stay out a semester for personal or financial reasons.

How is my mentor chosen?

The mentor is chosen during the residency. During the first few days of the residency you have a chance to hear readings or lectures by the faculty members in your area of concentration. You receive a handout titled Faculty Teaching Philosophies and Practices. A preference form listing your top several mentor preferences is filled out and turned into the MFA Office. Every effort is made to give everyone one of his or her choices. Mentors are assigned to upper-level students first, then to students with less seniority. Students who have not worked with a particular mentor have priority over students who wish to repeat working with that mentor. (Students must work with at least three different mentors during the program.) However, in the end, the program directors look at the overall picture of the entire body of students and faculty and make the best possible assignments for everyone; therefore, changes cannot be made after the mentor-student assignments have been posted.

How do I know what I will be studying?

Every student develops a Student Independent Study Plan with his or her mentor at the residency. The study plan is tailored to each student's writing goals. The study plan includes a list of 8-10 books, which are books written in the student's area of concentration, books on the craft of writing, or books/films/scripts assigned by the MFA Program as preparation for the residency. The study plan includes a list of the writing projects the student intends to work on during the semester and/or a more general statement regarding a student's writing goals. The study plan also lists the dates the student submits the packet to the mentor. A mentor may suggest reading or writing assignments while developing the Student Independent Study Plan (or even during the semester) that are designed to further the student's writing goals.

MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN WRITING *(FAQ, continued)*

What about the semester reading list?

Included in the Student Independent Study Plan is a reading list of 8-10 books. The reading list is largely determined by the student with input from the faculty mentor; however, the Program suggests a few books that may be part of the reading list, such as the Program Book in Common. The book list may be modified during the semester after student-mentor discussions. The list consists of books about the craft of writing or books written in the area of concentration the student is studying. Some students may wish to fill in gaps in their education, some may wish to learn more about authors with whom they are already familiar, and some may wish to emphasize contemporary writers. First and second semester students write short critical essays about the books on their reading list. The essays are short 2-4 page analyses of a few aspects of the text; each essay focuses on an aspect of the subject, structure, style, or significance of the material read that is of technical interest to the student. "How does reading this material contribute to my education as a writer?" is the question the student should address in the essay.

What do the independent study packets sent during the semester contain?

Over the course of the semester, students send five packets to their mentors according to a schedule determined at the residency. Mentors return the packets within seven days of their arrival. The packets from the students consist of

- (1) a 2-3 page cover letter discussing the enclosed material and asking questions about specific parts of the material.
- (2) original creative writing consisting of some new material and some revisions: 35-45 pages of fiction, creative nonfiction, writing for children middle-grade or young adult, screenwriting, or playwriting; 5-7 poems; text for 3-4 picture books. ENG630, ENG640, and ENG650 students have somewhat different requirements. Once in the program, students get complete information on these upper-level semesters.
- (3) short essays in MLA format, each based on a book from the reading list: ENG610 and ENG620 students complete 8 to 10 short essays over the course of the semester; ENG630 and ENG640 students write only one short essay, which is on the Mentor Group Anthology.
- (4) the student's cumulative bibliography in standard MLA format.
- (5) a cumulative list of titles of original creative writing included in the current semester's packets.
- (6) a SASE (if a mail carrier is used) with sufficient postage to cover the weight of the packet material and mentor's response. Students who submit packets electronically but receive responses by postal mail may supply the mentor with five SASEs at the beginning of the semester.