Statement of Philosophy

One of the requirements for obtaining a Master of Fine Arts in Writing degree is a thesis project. The thesis is the culmination of a student’s work towards the MFA. Thus, it should represent the best work a student is capable of and, when complete, be a manuscript of publishable quality.

The thesis project is to be completed by taking ENG 698 (3 credits) twice. Students may not register for six thesis credits in one semester.

Checklist for the MFA Thesis and Graduation

1. Complete at least 30 hours of credits in the MFA.

2. At the end of your first year, identify a director (an MFA faculty member working in your primary genre) and two readers (any other MFA or English faculty). The thesis advisor will work closely with you throughout the project. The other two individuals will act in a consulting role and as readers of the initial proposal and of the final project. Please note that the MFA thesis is an independent project. It is an opportunity to show that you can craft a significant body of work on your own with important, but minimal input from others.

3. After the director and readers agree to serve on your thesis committee, have them sign the Thesis Committee form.

4. Turn in the Thesis Committee Form to the director of the program, and have the program director sign an Add/Drop form you have filled out (available at the HUB or on the Intranet) to register for thesis credits. You will not be able to register for thesis credits until you have your committee together and have turned in this form. Be sure to put the correct section number of your thesis director in the appropriate place on the Add/Drop form (each faculty member has a number assigned to them as a section number).

5. Write a 5-10 page proposal. Include in your proposal a description of the manuscript that you will complete; a discussion of the major influences (writers and/or works) on your thesis; a discussion of your aesthetic vision; and a discussion of the literary context of your work. You should also mention any challenges you expect to face in writing the thesis, and include a bibliography of 20-40 books of contemporary literature that you consider influential. You will eventually revise and expand this section of the proposal into a preface introducing your creative work and will include it with your final thesis draft.
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7. Attach to the proposal a sample of work that you will include in your thesis (5 pages of poems or 10 pages of prose). Also attach a one-page schedule of dates by which you will write and complete drafts and revisions of the thesis (or parts of the thesis).

8. Edit and proofread the proposal scrupulously. Careless errors suggest that you are not prepared to write the proposed creative work. Committee members will be instructed not to accept any proposals that contain significant technical errors, typos, or awkward sentence construction. You are a creative writer: this is your chance to show us you know how to write well.

9. Submit the proposal to your thesis director. The director may ask you to revise, or they may, after reading your proposal, give you permission to forward it to the other committee members.

10. Give a copy of your proposal and sample writing to the other committee members. Schedule a meeting to discuss your proposal. You need to give members at least a week to read the proposal. If one of your readers is unable to be physically present, you are responsible for setting up a conference call.

11. Prepare ten minutes of introductory comments, which you will give at the beginning of the meeting. You may have notes on note cards. Do not read from your proposal. This is your opportunity to set the context for the discussion that will follow, to indicate what you hope to accomplish with the thesis, what challenges in craft and subject matter you may face (and how you intend to address those challenges), to indicate what your own strengths and weaknesses might be and to show the committee that you are able to articulate, clearly, your own creative vision.

12. Meet with the committee, deliver your address, listen carefully to the comments and concerns of the committee members, and take notes so that you will remember what was said as you begin to work on your thesis.
13. Write your thesis and a ten-page introduction. The page length of the thesis requirement is somewhat flexible, but a guideline is 50-60 pages of poetry and 115-125 pages of prose. For those who have produced longer projects, the entire manuscript can be included in the thesis, but the committee is only responsible for detailed response to the revised work of up to 125 pages that satisfies the thesis requirement.

The completed thesis will include an introduction of at least 10 pages in which you provide a literary context for your work. The introduction should talk about the work and its various literary influences, how it relates to or builds on those influences, what you were trying to accomplish and what you think you have accomplished. It may incorporate personal meditation as well as analytic language, as long as it places the thesis within a literary tradition. The introduction may be based on the proposal you wrote or not, depending on how closely you have adhered to the proposal in the actual writing of the thesis.

You will work out the schedule for writing with your thesis director, but generally you will want to be giving your director significant chunks of work on a regular basis that have gone through revision already, then you will meet with your director for comments and suggestions. It is your responsibility to keep your director and committee informed of your progress.

14. Turn in your application for graduation early in semester you intend to graduate.

15. With your thesis director’s permission, submit a hard copy of your revised thesis to the other readers and your thesis director. You need to give them two weeks to read and respond to your thesis.

16. Set up a time, date and room for your thesis defense (at least two weeks from the date you handed the revised thesis out). Your thesis defense needs to take place BEFORE the last day of class of the semester. It is recommended that you schedule it a few weeks before the last day of class in case there are revisions suggested by the committee that need to be submitted before the end of the term.

17. Prepare a ten-minute introduction for your thesis defense. You may use note cards, but do not read from your thesis. In your oral remarks you should be able to clearly articulate your creative vision, what you think you have accomplished with the thesis, what challenges you encountered, and what you learned in the process. You should also be able to talk about what kind of reader you envision for the thesis, what you hope a reader will take from your thesis, and should be able to discuss literary influences in a sophisticated manner.

18. After your thesis defense, you may be asked to make more revisions, so you should not make any bound copies until your thesis director tells you to do so.
19. Make any revisions suggested by your committee and then make three bound copies of your thesis. Give one to your thesis director, one to the program director, and one to the library. Also give the library an electronic version of your thesis. Make sure you have followed the following formatting guidelines:

**Thesis Format**

The complete creative thesis must be printed clear and readable font, at least 12 point in size. Both bound copies must be on 8-1/2 x 11 bond paper of at least 20-pound weight containing 25% or more rag content. The left hand margin should be set at 1.5 to 2 inches and all other margins should be set at 1 inch. The thesis must be double-spaced throughout, with the exception of poetry, which may be single-spaced. The appropriate title page, thesis committee approval page, and table of contents should be included (refer to the end of this manual for examples). A student may also include an acknowledgements page if he/she wishes to do so. A bibliography must conclude the thesis. Students should follow Associated Press guidelines for documentation of source material.

**Elements of the Thesis**

1. **Title Page.** Include the full title of thesis, your full name, as you would like it to appear on the final manuscript, and the following language: "A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts Chatham College MFA in Creative Writing". Include the month and year the work is submitted.

2. **Signature Page.** This page should contain the date, followed by the statement, "We hereby recommend that the thesis of (insert your name) entitled (insert the title of your thesis) be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts." Following this statement, there should be a list of three blank lines for the signatures (Director, Reader, Reader)

3. **Acknowledgements.** (optional)

4. **Introduction.** The introduction is your opportunity to present your own view of the work included in the thesis. It should include information concerning the work's development, literary influences, and aesthetic aims.

5. **Table of Contents**, with page numbers.

6. **Text of Creative Thesis.** This book length collection represents your completed and revised work in your genre of study.
Pagination

1. A thesis contains two sets of numbers. The preliminary pages (items 1-6 of the thesis) should be numbered consecutively in small Roman numerals. The title page should be considered "i" but should not be numbered. Beginning with the text, all pages must be numbered consecutively in Arabic numerals (items 9-11 of the thesis).

Extensions

1. Extensions will be given as long as the student continues working in good faith towards the completion of the thesis. Students must register for ENG 800 (Graduate continuing credit) to continue working on their thesis in a semester where they are not registered for any other classes.

Grading

Grading will be based on the following criteria:

1. Originality: The thesis is an original piece of writing developed solely by the student
2. Quality: The thesis is the culmination of the student's program of study and will represent the best work of the graduate student. Therefore, it will be a final draft of the highest quality and will include no errors of fact, content, grammar, spelling, style or format.
3. Length: The core of the thesis is a book-length piece of fiction or non-fiction or a collection of linked, shorter pieces
4. Format: The thesis is to written according to the printed guidelines

Professional standards for approval of the thesis will be as rigorously applied as in any other area. The grade for the thesis will be determined by a consensus of the committee and will be awarded on a scale of High Pass, Low Pass, Fail. Key factors in grading include originality, clarity, voice, and style. Manuscripts that contain errors will be returned to the student for correction before a grade is determined.

Reading

As the culmination of their thesis project, students will be asked to give a public reading of their work. These will be arranged and publicized on campus and open to the public.
Children’s and Adolescent’s Writing

1. Format The writing for children thesis is to be written according to the printed guidelines of the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators.

2. Literature Review: The thesis will include a thorough and exhaustive literature search that explores books of similar topic, genre and/or style.

3. Critical Component: The thesis will include a critical component demonstrating a thorough grounding in children's literature and the place of this work in that context.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. When should I begin my thesis?
   You may begin your thesis during any semester, providing you have already completed at least 30 credit hours in the MFA program.

2. What is the length of the time span in which it is to be completed?
   The thesis may take from one semester to two years for completion.

3. Do I need to register for the thesis?
   To register for the thesis you must enroll in ENG 698 (3 credits) twice. Prior to enrolling, you will need to fill out a Thesis Form. You will need to register via an Add/Drop form, available at the HUB or on the Intranet.

4. When is the first meeting of the thesis board?
   The first meeting is scheduled by you, and is dependent on your individual schedule and plan for completion. However, it should occur no later than October 15 for Fall, February 15 for Spring, and June 15 for summer. If you do not have your board by these dates, you will be asked to withdraw from the 698 and will have to register again the following semester.

5. What should I distribute to the board during the first meeting?
   You should provide each member with a copy of your proposal, bibliography, and schedule for thesis completion.

6. What are the guidelines for submission of the thesis (how many copies, to whom, by what date)?
   Final submission will be determined in consultation with your thesis advisor. Copies of the thesis should be provided to all members of the board and a bound copy to the Program Director. An electronic copy and a bound copy should be sent to the library.

7. What about extensions?
   Extensions will be given as long as the student continues working in good faith towards completion of their thesis. Students who are not registered for any other courses will need to register for the one credit Graduate Continuing Credit (ENG 800) if they need an extension on completing the thesis.
SAMPLE TITLE PAGE

[3 Hard Returns/Enters]

THESIS TITLE

[7 Hard Returns/Enters]

A Thesis in [Nonfiction/Fiction/Poetry] Writing

By

Your Name

[7 Hard Returns/Enters]

Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Chatham College
August 2008

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MFA Thesis Committee Recommendation Form

This form must be completed, signed and attached to your thesis after the title page.
We hereby recommend that the thesis of

entitled

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Chair:

First Reader:

Second Reader:

Signature of Program Director:

Date: