English and Creative Writing, BA

The major enables students to experience the historical, traditional, and innovative aspects of literature in English and the relationship between critical reading and creative writing. The major provides the transferable skills important for a liberal arts major, including the ability to think deeply and creatively, read complex texts with comprehension, and master writing and speaking skills at an advanced level.

The English and creative writing major introduces students to the wealth of resources associated with the University of Iowa and the Iowa City writing communities. For over 75 years, the Department of English and the University of Iowa Writers’ Workshop have been leaders in the area of writing. The MFA offered by the Nonfiction Writing Program and administered by the Department of English has been voted the top MFA program in creative nonfiction in the United States. Likewise, the MFA program in the Writers’ Workshop is annually noted as the top graduate program in the country.

The international reputation of writing at Iowa is boosted by synergy across colleges, with the International Writing Program hosting published writers each fall from countries around the world and each spring traveling to other countries, taking Iowa writing on the road. This synergy helps the university and Iowa City draw writers of all ages and nationalities to its writing community. The community is bolstered by the strong readings series offered by the Nonfiction Writing Program, the Writers’ Workshop, and Prairie Lights Books, with hundreds of readings archived by the Iowa Digital Library, creating a resource for future writers and scholars.

The status of Iowa City as a UNESCO City of Literature also has enriched the writing community, with people from across the Midwest visiting the city during the annual Book Festival. The Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offered by the Department of English, “Every Atom: Walt Whitman’s Song of Myself” and “Walt Whitman and the Civil War,” as well as the International Writing Program’s online series called “How Writers Write,” have enrolled thousands of students and adult learners from around the world, enhancing the reputation of the University of Iowa as the “Writing University.” The Iowa Summer Writing Festival, Iowa Young Writers’ Studio, the Certificate in Writing, the Center for the Book, the Iowa Playwrights Workshop, and the Iowa Youth Writing Project all help to turn Iowa City into a destination for writers, who are drawn to the city for its heritage and for its current community of writers.

Learning Outcomes

The goal is for students who graduate from the Department of English to demonstrate the skills of reflective reading, critical thinking, effective speaking, compelling writing, and engaged citizenship.

Reflective Readers

• Analyze literary and cultural texts through close reading.
• Gain broad knowledge of several fields of literature.
• Grasp formal elements of key literary genres.
• Learn to read comparatively to illuminate aesthetic, social, and cultural contributions of texts.

Critical Thinkers

• Approach texts with a spirit of critical inquiry and flexibility.
• Formulate productive questions.
• Use textual evidence to support individual interpretations.