



MFA Graduate Student Handbook

2026-2027

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The Department of Writing's Graduate Student Handbook is subject to the policies of the Faculty of Graduate Studies Graduate Supervision Policy. **Last Revised April 2026.**

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1.0 MFA Program Contacts

Graduate Advisor	Shane Book writinggradadvisor@uvic.ca	
Graduate Secretary	Elena Stalwick writing@uvic.ca	250-721-7306
Department Chair	Lee Henderson writingchair@uvic.ca	

Generally, the first point of communication is the Graduate Secretary via email or phone. Your thesis Supervisor will mainly provide guidance regarding your program of study, research, and thesis writing and defense. For more administrative matters, contact the Graduate Advisor, followed by the Department Chair.

Please note: If you have special concerns, you should first discuss them with your Supervisor and/or (if TA-related) the Instructor of the course, as they are your employer in this case. If the matter is not resolved, contact the Grad Advisor, followed by the Department Chair.

2.0 Admission to Graduate Studies in Writing

International Students will need to provide the graduate secretary with their Canadian Residential address once it is obtained to ensure receipt of funding.

3.0 The MFA Program

The Department of Writing offers a two-year, project-based MFA program in Writing. The MFA program accepts students who work in the genres of fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, theatre, screen, or interactive narratives. Students' courses include writing workshops and advanced lecture courses with a variety of themes and approaches. The MFA program emphasizes instructional skills and will prepare students to teach creative writing courses at the post-secondary level and for community groups. The degree culminates in an original creative work in the student's primary genre.

3.1 Degree Requirements

Students are required to complete six courses (9.0 units) and the Major Writing Portfolio (9.0 units). Coursework includes two writing workshops, two lecture courses, an instructional skills preparation course, and one elective. Writing workshops are often a combination of graduate students and senior undergraduate students with the relevant experience in that genre. The Major Writing Portfolio is an independent research project that culminates in an original creative writing manuscript.

3.1.a Required Courses

Graduate students must complete 2 graduate level workshops, 2 graduate level seminars, and 1 instructional skills preparation course.

2 of WRIT 511, 512, 513, 515, 516, or 518: Graduate Writing Workshop
(3.0 units)

Creative writing workshops (poetry, fiction, playwriting, multi-genre, creative non-fiction, and screenwriting) in which students focus on writing and critiquing creative work.

2 of WRIT 501: Special Topics in Advanced Studies in Writing (3.0 units)

A seminar that focuses on literary models, specific elements of craft, and topics of interest to writers in more than one genre.

1 of WRIT 509: Instructional Skills Preparation (1.5 units)

A seminar which focuses on pedagogy and workshop methodology for post-secondary creative writing instruction.

3.1.b. Elective Courses

Graduate students must complete 1 elective.

To fulfil the elective course requirement, graduate students may request permission to enroll in 300- or 400- level courses offered by the Writing Department or graduate courses offered by other graduate programs at the University of Victoria or 300- or 400-level undergraduate courses with an added element of complexity, with permission of the instructors.

The Writing Department also offers two Directed Studies courses as potential electives: WRIT 590 and WRIT 591.

WRIT 590: Directed Studies in Instructional Skills Preparation (1.5 units)

A course which focuses on teacher training in creative writing.

WRIT 591: Directed Studies in Writing (1.5 units)

An independent course supervised by a faculty member with subject expertise in the student's area of research or creative production.

Directed Studies are entirely at the discretion and availability of the Instructor. Students are encouraged to pursue standard electives first, and to discuss their choices with their Supervisor to ensure it best serves their course of study.

3.1.c Major Writing Portfolio

Graduate students must complete the major writing portfolio and a defense of their project.

WRIT 598: Major Writing Portfolio (9.0 units)

A supervised, independent research project that focuses on the creation of an original creative writing portfolio in one of the following genres: poetry (30-50 pages), creative nonfiction (60-120 pages), fiction (60-120 pages), a stage play (60-100 pages), a film script (60-90 pages) or a production project with script/manuscript in one of the above genres.

3.1.d. Timeline for Completion

The MFA program in Writing is normally a two-year program. To ensure timely completion of the degree program, students will develop a project timeline in consultation with their supervisor.

Sample two-year course plan		
YEAR 1	Fall	WRIT 515: Multi-genre Graduate Writing Workshop WRIT 501: Special Topics in Advanced Studies in Writing + one elective
	Spring	WRIT 511, 512, 513, 516, or 518: Graduate Writing Workshop WRIT 509: Instructional Skills Preparation + one elective (if not completed in Fall)
	Summer	WRIT 598: Major Writing Portfolio (Project)
YEAR 2	Fall	WRIT 598: Major Writing Portfolio (Project)
	Spring	WRIT 501: Special Topics in Advanced Studies in Writing WRIT 598: Major Writing Portfolio (Project)

4.0 Student Responsibilities

The [Graduate Supervision Policy](#) outlines the responsibilities of all Members of the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS): students, academic Supervisors, the Supervisory Committee, and the larger Academic Unit. The joint responsibilities of all members include academic integrity, professionalism, cultural awareness, and familiarity with departmental, FGS, and University policies.

In addition, students are responsible for meeting degree requirements for academic progress, complying with University academic standards, and maintaining full-time registration. International students are also responsible for ensuring that student visas and employment authorization documents are kept up to date.

4.1 Maintaining Registration

Students are responsible for maintaining full-time registration, either through coursework or a co-op work term, for the entire duration of their degree. If a student is unable to continue coursework, they should consult with their supervisor for guidance.

If you encounter any difficulties with registration, contact the Graduate Secretary for assistance.

4.1.a Registering for Directed Studies

To register for a directed study in Instructional Skills Preparation (WRIT 590) or in Writing (591), students must complete the following steps:

1. Find a faculty member able to supervise your project
2. Create a course outline for the proposed course
3. Complete a [Proposal for Pro Forma Course registration form](#)
4. Sign and submit these documents to the graduate secretary

4.1.b Registering for Courses Offered Outside Writing

To register for a course offered by another department, students must first contact that department directly to ensure they have the necessary prerequisites and permissions. To enroll, students require the following documentation:

5. Email confirmation of permission to enroll from the course instructor
6. A statement of support from their graduate supervisor
7. Completion of the [Graduate Registration Form](#)

4.1.c Academic Accommodations

The Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) arranges for academic accommodations to help reduce barriers. Accommodations may include notetaking, classroom accessibility, adaptive technology, and more. To register with CAL, visit the University's Accessible Learning [site](#).

4.1.d Academic Concessions

If you are unable to maintain full-time registration, students are able to request a leave of absence. To request a leave of absence, students must submit an [Academic Concession form](#) by the drop deadline posted on the academic calendar.

These leaves include personal, medical, parental, and compassionate leave. Students should discuss their options with the Graduate Advisor before submitting their request.

4.1.f Withdrawal

If the drop deadline has passed, students may request a course withdrawal under extenuating circumstances (WE).

4.2 Academic Standing

To meet the University's academic standards, graduate students must earn a B or higher in all academic coursework. Failure to meet academic standards or demonstrate academic progress could result in withdrawal from the program.

4.3 Academic Integrity

Students should familiarize themselves with the [University of Victoria's Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Students are responsible for the entire form and content of their work, which includes research materials, creative works, and material in any medium submitted to an instructor for assessment.

4.3.a Academic Integrity Violations

Academic integrity violations covered by the Academic Integrity Policy include but are not limited to:

- plagiarism;
- unauthorized use of an editor;
- unattributed research materials, including the use of AI;
- multiple submission;
- falsifying materials; and
- cheating on work, tests, and/or examinations.

4.3.b. Procedures for Dealing with Alleged Violations

Alleged violations must be documented by the instructor or direct supervisor, who must inform the Chair. The Chair shall then inform the student in writing of the nature of the allegation and give the student a reasonable opportunity to respond in a meeting between the instructor, the Chair, and the student. With advance notice, the student may request another party to act as their adviser. If the student does not provide a response or participate in the process, the Chair may make a determination on the nature of the violation in their absence.

4.3.c. Determining the Nature of the Violation and Appropriate Penalties

The Chair will determine whether compelling information exists to support the allegation. If the allegation is supported, the Chair shall consult the Office of the Registrar on the student's academic record.

If there is no prior record of violations, the Chair will determine the appropriate penalty in accordance with the University's Policy on Academic Integrity.

If there have been one or more prior violations, the Chair will forward the case to the Dean of the appropriate Faculty.

5.0 Project Supervision

All successful MFA applicants to the Department of Writing are selected by supervisors based on the genre (or genres) identified in their application to the program and supervisor availability.

As outlined by the Graduate Supervision Policy, Academic Supervisors are responsible for overseeing the student's program, which includes:

- advising the student on course registration;
- assisting the student in establishing a timeline for their program of study;
- submitting written feedback on a schedule negotiated with the student; and
- consulting with the student on the composition of the Supervisory Committee.

5.1 Meetings and Communication

Students and their Academic Supervisors should establish a schedule of regular meetings, conversations, and/or correspondence to oversee the student's academic progress. Students and supervisors should normally meet at least twice per semester. The time between meetings should not exceed more than 40 working days (~6 weeks) unless required by remote study, personal leave, or academic concession.

Note that in-person meetings are typically put on hiatus over the summer research term, and the student and Supervisor should schedule a meeting in advance to establish self-directed deadlines and academic progress targets.

5.1.a. Supervisor's Responsibilities in Communication

Academic Supervisors are responsible for maintaining contact with the student in accordance with the Department of Writing's policies. Supervisors on vacation may have a reasonable expectation to be out of contact for a time communicated to the student in advance.

If a supervisor is to be out of effective communication for a period of more than forty days, an interim supervisor should be appointed in consultation with the Supervisor, Graduate Advisor, and Chair, if necessary.

5.1.b. Student Responsibilities in Communication

As outlined by the Graduate Supervision Policy, students are responsible for maintaining contact with their supervisor and the Department of Writing. Students are expected to respond to requests for information on their progress in a timely manner.

5.2 Supervisory Committee

The Supervisory Committee is composed of the Academic Supervisor, the Committee Chair, and one or two Committee Members from the Department's faculty. It is the Academic Supervisor's responsibility to form the committee.

The Supervisory Committee receives the second draft of the major creative project and is present for the Oral Examination.

5.3 Resolution of Conflict

Supervisors, supervisory committee members, and students share responsibility in recognizing and negotiating potential conflicts (GSP 10.1-10.4). All members should commit to a professional arm's length relationship.

If a substantial conflict of interest develops (e.g., emotional, romantic, financial, or business relationship), the individuals involved must notify the Graduate Advisor and Chair immediately. Substantial conflicts, past or present, will immediately terminate the supervisory relationship, and the Graduate Advisor will act as an interim supervisor until a new supervisor can be appointed.

5.3.a. Withdrawal of the Academic Supervisor

An Academic Supervisor may consult with the Graduate Advisor and Department Chair to withdraw from the Supervisory relationship if one of the following situations arises:

1. a significant interpersonal conflict impedes satisfactory academic progress; or
2. a student's project diverges from their original proposal and the Supervisor's expertise is no longer relevant or appropriate.

5.3.b. Replacement of the Academic Supervisor

If a Supervisor withdraws from the supervisory relationship, a replacement supervisor will be negotiated by the Graduate Advisor, student, and potential

replacement. If the replacement is initiated by the student, agreement of the current Supervisor is not required, but **it is the responsibility of the student to locate a new supervisor** (GSP 11.4).

6.0 Funding

Funding for graduate students in the MFA Program is subject to the budgets and policies of the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS). Students must meet all eligibility requirements set by FGS to receive their awards. If a student does not meet their criteria, the Department will advocate for exemptions where possible.

6.1 University of Victoria Fellowship

Subject to funding, incoming graduate students will be offered a Graduate Award of approximately \$12,500 for the first year of their academic program.

*available to international students

6.2 Graduate Entrance Awards

Each year, there is one \$5,000 Graduate Entrance Award which will be offered to a student entering the program with a first class grade point average.

*available to international students

6.3 Donor Awards

Each year, there are a limited number of additional awards available by nomination through the Department of Writing and Faculty of Fine Arts. On July 15th, the Department will solicit applications from current and incoming graduate students. A Graduate Awards Committee consisting of three faculty members and chaired by the Graduate Advisor will nominate students who best meet the award criteria and FGS requirements.

The deadline to apply for donor awards is August 15.

*available to international students

6.4 President's Fellowship in Research-Enriched Teaching

Each year, the Department of Writing will nominate one graduate student to apply for the President's Fellowship in Research-Enriched Teaching Competition.

Applicants will be selected on the basis of their ability to provide 'research-enriched' teaching to an existing undergraduate course taught at the University of Victoria and

their commitment to developing their skills in research-enriched teaching. Research-enriched teaching is defined as the inclusion of research experiences where students actively engage in the research process within their discipline/field. This includes opportunities for students to gain experience in planning and undertaking research or creative activity, from question identification and proposal development, through engagement in the research process or creative activity, to knowledge translation activities. The intent is for students to see themselves as developing researchers furthering their opportunities and skill development in inquiry-based learning.

Successful applicants will receive a \$10,000 Fellowship from the Faculty of Graduate Studies (awarded in two installments).

*available to international students

6.5 External Awards and Scholarships

The Department encourages students to pursue funding opportunities through the BC Arts Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

6.5.a BC Arts Council

The BC Arts Council funds grants to support creative projects, professional development, and early career development (up to \$6,000 per year). Eligibility depends on students' experience and degree of training, and awards are available on rotating schedules. More information on criteria and procedures can be found [here](#).

6.5.b The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)

The Department encourages all students to apply for the Canada Graduate Scholarships: Master's (CGS-M). Students in the MFA program have seen a greater than 30% success rate for applications. The Faculty of Graduate Studies hosts grant workshops and application assistance beginning in October.

The application requires a significant time investment, and the portal can be difficult to navigate. Students have had their applications rejected in the past for small incorrect details (i.e. for including an administrative transcript rather than official transcript). For this reason, students should begin working on their applications as soon as possible, and should show their draft application to their Supervisor well in advance of the deadline for advice on crafting a strong application.

The deadline to apply for SSHRC is December 1.

*not available to international students

6.6 Travel Grants

Full-time graduate students may apply for one Travel Grant per year through the Faculty of Graduate Studies. This fund provides financial assistance to attend conferences, presentations, and to conduct research.

6.7 Teaching Assistantships

A call for TA applications will be sent out by June 15. Applications will close August 15. Employment decisions will be made by September 1.

Funding for graduate students in their second year of student is primarily offered through Teaching Assistant positions. TA Appointments are made by the Graduate Advisor in consultation with supervising faculty. The majority of available hours are in the Introduction to Writing (WRIT 100) courses offered in both fall and spring. TA positions in additional lectures is dependent on available departmental funds. Please note that TA appointments are made based on departmental needs.

6.7.a. Learning and Teaching Instructional Support (LTSI)

LTSI hosts a Conference the first week of the fall term. TAs are encouraged to attend relevant panels and workshops to aid in their professional development.

6.7.b. Union Membership and Collective Agreement

Appointment priorities and policies, including work schedules and pay rate, are subject to the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE Local 4162) [Collective Agreement](#). Teaching Assistants are required to attend a paid orientation by a CUPE representative at the beginning of the term.

Employees registered in an academic program are normally limited to an average of fourteen (14) hours of work per week, and the majority of assigned work should be self-scheduled to accommodate students' academic program of study.

The work assignments and schedule should be defined in writing no later than the fourth week of the term. It is the joint responsibility of the Teaching Assistant and Supervisor to monitor the work schedule and adjust when required. Failure to complete the initial work schedule checklist may prejudice any claim or denial that the schedule exceeded the total authorized hours to be worked during the term of appointment.

6.7.c Conflict Resolution

If problems arise, the employee and Supervisor should make their best effort to resolve the conflict between them. If that is not possible, the employee should first

reach out to the Graduate Advisor; if not, then the Chair; if not, then the Union. It is of utmost importance to follow that order of contact.