January 25, 2015

To: Graduate Council Committee on Admissions and Recruitment

From: Prof. Robin Behn, Director, MFA Program in Creative Writing, English Department

Subject: Request for Renewal of Admissions Test Score Waiver

I am writing to request a renewal of the modified policy wherein the GRE or other admission test is not required for applicants to the MFA in Creative Writing Program. This “no GRE” policy has been a success, and we wish to continue the policy.

1. Alternative Criteria.

Like all graduate programs in creative writing nationwide, we consider the applicant’s submission of a manuscript of creative writing (poetry, fiction, and/or creative non-fiction) to be the most important criterion. When we review files, we read the creative writing first. If the creative writing submitted by the applicant does not indicate outstanding promise, then no amount of good grades, good recommendations, or high test scores is going to convince us to admit that applicant. This is a degree in creative writing, and the applicant’s creative writing is what counts. We find that for creative people, the ability to take standardized tests does not necessarily correlate at all with the ability to be creative with the art of language. As indicated on our original application for this waiver, of the top twenty ranked schools in creative writing, all of them—now, happily including UAI—either do not require the GRE or have no minimum score required. Among those that do not require the GRE are top ranked University of Iowa, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, and Brown University.

2. Data

Applications received have held basically steady, with peak years in 2012 and 2015:
2011: 296
2012: 348
2013: 295
2014: 278
2015: 447 so far (including 93 incomplete applications, though this often means that just one transcript including one transfer course is missing)
We interpret the dip in 2014 and the rise in 2015 to be a result of our being “down” two faculty members in 2014 while we conducted searches, and now “up” two faculty—our new hires are helping us recruit.

Applicants admitted have held steady.
2011: 24
2012: 21
2013: 23
2014: 28
We give a fellowship or GTA to every admitted graduate student. Since our program can be completed in either three or four years (the student’s choice), we have a slightly fluctuating number of graduates from year to year, and, hence a slightly fluctuating number of open GTA lines available to give new admits. Hence, we always have a slightly fluctuating number of admits.
New enrollment has grown somewhat, due to the creation of several new fellowships, our Prison Arts Fellowships chief among them.

2011: 16
2012: 15
2013: 17
2014: 22

Degrees awarded:
2011: 6
2012: 12
2013: 13
2014: 19

3. Outcome data of the numeric sort is difficult to come by in the field of creative writing. Our measure of success would be to ask our graduates, about fifty years hence, whether they are still writing. Our degree is not and never has been a passport to an occupation, even though it does play a part in opening doors in fields such as teaching, editing, publishing, and the like for those graduate students who choose to prepare themselves for such roles. But there is no simple way to quantify it.

Here is a list of some of the places where MFA students who have been admitted during the last four years and are still in our program are publishing their creative writing.

- Finishing Line Press (February 2015), A Place Made Red (chapbook) by Theodora Ziolkowski Bishop (F’13)
- Theodora Ziolkowski Bishop (F’13) anthologized in: The Great Gatsby Anthology; Persephone Anthology; and Warning. Poems may be longer than they appear
- Short FICTION (Fall 2014): “Afterlife”: Theodora Ziolkowski (F’13)
- Reverential Magazine (Fall 2014): “Tracks”: Theodora Ziolkowski Bishop (F’13)
- New Voices (May 2014), “Goose”: Theodora Ziolkowski Bishop (F’13)
- "The Fevered Woman," short story, Quarterly West (Spring 2013): Ashley Chambers (F’11)
- "You Will Make Several Relaxing Cuts," short story, Bellevue Literary Review (Spring 2013): Ashley Chambers (F’11)
- Illuminations (forthcoming); “The Good of It” and “Bonsai”: Theodora Ziolkowski Bishop (F’13)
• The Poet's Billow (August 2014); “Song for Ariel”; “The Looking Glass”; Brontë for Beginners”: Theodora Ziolkowski Bishop (F’13)
• Clapboard House (2014); “Burial,” “A Place Made Red,” “Gretel Grows Up”: Theodora Ziolkowski Bishop (F’13)
• Powder Keg Magazine (forthcoming), “Equestria” and “Cutey*Eschatology”: Jordan Scott (F’14)
• The Atlas Review #5 (forthcoming), “Majokko” and “S★T★R” and “Phlegethon”: Jordan Scott (F’14)
• Apogee IV (December 2014), “Validator” and “Kisekae”: Jordan Scott (F’14)
• Wyvern Lit (October 2014), “Night Things”: Jordan Scott (F’14)
• Apogee (#StandWithFerguson, August 2014), “Magpie”: Jordan Scott (F’14)
• LEVELER (June 2014), “Days After”: Jordan Scott (F’14)
• No, Dear (May 2014), “Meme”: Jordan Scott (F’14)
• Flavorwire, National Poetry Month Daily Poem (April 2014), “Tribulation”: Jordan Scott (F’14)
• Real Pants (ed., January 2015), “Point/Counterpoint: Reading from Smartphones”: Jordan Scott (F’14)
• Blunderbuss Magazine (forthcoming), “The Cake”: Krystin Gollihue (F’12)
• Ampersand Review (August 2014), “She is Your Mother, She is a Reminder”: Krystin Gollihue (F’12)
• Quarterly West (Spring 2014), “The pain of other animals: macro”: Krystin Gollihue (F’12)
• Safety Pin Review (December 2013), “A Present from a Small Distant World”: Krystin Gollihue (F’12)
• decomP magazine (September 2013), “The Spine”: Krystin Gollihue (F’12)
• Carolina Quarterly (Spring 2013), "Brothers": Krystin Gollihue (F’12)
• Monkeybicycle (November 2014); “The White Girl Comes Back to Life,” by Reem Abu-Baker (F’14)
• Timber (August 2014); “Common Usage,” by Reem Abu-Baker (F’14)
• Driftwood Press (Fall 2014), “A Haibun Approval”: Kayla Candrilli (F’14)
• Gravel (Winter 2014), “A Quilt-like Maze”: Kayla Candrilli (F’14)
• Spork Press, “Milk-aling-ing,” 2014: Aleah Goldin (F’14)
• Gone Lawn, “Geopolitics,” 2014: Aleah Goldin (F’14)
• “He's Kissing Christian" / "Sonnet III", Smoking Glue Gun, Sep. 2014: Chris Emslie (F’13)
• "Sinew is a Thing We Have Uses For"; Upstart: a Journal of English Renaissance Studies, Aug. 2014: Chris Emslie (F’13)
• “In a Most Peculiar Way”. Phantom Limb, Apr. 2014: Chris Emslie (F’13)
“I We Registered as Captain & Mr America”. *The Pinch*, Sep. 2013: Chris Emslie (F’13)
"Will Work 4 Food," *Word Riot* 2015: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
“Love Like Cheeto Residue that Never Comes Off,”[PANK] 2014: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
“Things Inside of Us,” *The Collagist* 2013: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
“This Isn’t Really About Fishing” Excerpt, *Hobart* 2013: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
“This Isn’t Really About Fishing” Excerpt, *Cartridge Lit* 2014: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
"Marianne Claws Out A Man’s Eyes," *This* 2015: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
"Marianne Grows a Baby," *This* 2015: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
"Marianne Grows Claws," *This* 2015: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
"Marianne Collects Fish," *This* 2015: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
"Marianne Breaks All Her Babies," *Noble/Gas Quarterly* 2015: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
"Marianne’s Mother," *Noble/Gas Quarterly* 2015: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
"The Time Marianne Gave Birth To A Plastic Baby," *Noble/Gas Quarterly* 2015: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
“Your body is too____ for me baby: 2001,” *It Was Written: An Anthology of Poetry*:
Tasha Coryell (F’12)
*Inspired by Hip-Hop* (Forthcoming): Tasha Coryell (F’12)
“Crazy in Love, 2003,” *It Was Written: An Anthology of Poetry Inspired by Hip-Hop* 
(Forthcoming): Tasha Coryell (F’12)
“Countdown,” *It Was Written: An Anthology of Poetry Inspired by Hip-Hop* 
(Forthcoming): Tasha Coryell (F’12)
“Dear Michelle,” *Sunday Lit* 2014: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
“Norm Coleman,” *Liver of Dixie—Stories from Egan’s* 2013: Tasha Coryell (F’12)
“Cliff Clavin,” *Liver of Dixie—Stories from Egan’s* 2013: Tasha Coryell (F’12)

**Here is a list of some awards won by current MFA students who have been admitted under the no-GRE policy:**

- 2011–2012 Graduate Council Fellowship, Emma Furman (F’11)
- 2011–2013, Coal Royalty Scholarship Recipient: Emma Furman (F’11)
- Graduate Student Administrator of First-Year Writing Program, Chris Emslie (F’13)
- Finalist, *Sonora Review* 2014 Essay Prize: Chris Emslie (F’13)
- Truman Capote APAEP Fellowship (2014), Tasha Coryell (F’12)
- Pushcart Prize nominee, Theodora Ziolkowski Bishop (F’13)
- Finalist, *Glimmer Train* Family Matters Contest, Theodora Ziolkowski Bishop (F’13)
- Recipient of Vermont Studio Center Scholarship, Theodora Ziolkowski Bishop (F’13)
- Graduate Council Fellowships: 2011-2012: Laurel Billings (F’11); 2014-2015: Reem Abu-Baker (F’14)
- Stephen Karatheodoris Award for Research in Feminist Theory, UA Department of Race and Gender Studies (2013), Laurel Billings (F’11)
• Finalist for first annual Fairy Tale Review Award in Poetry: Jordan Scott (F’14)
• “I Want To Listen: An Interview with JD Scott on ‘Validator’” (January 2014): Jordan Scott (F’14)
• *Funerals & Thrones* (by Jordan Scott, F’14) reviewed by Erik Kennedy for Sabotage Reviews (June 2013)
• The Two Keys Press feature on JD Scott, F’14, + micro-reviews of Night Errands and *Funerals & Thrones* (April 2014)
• Best of the Net 2014 Nominee, Krystin Gollihue (F’12)
• Finalist for the Sawtooth Prize, Ahsahta Press (2014), Ashley Chambers (F’11)
• Semi-finalist for the Poetry Award, 42 Miles Press (2014), Ashley Chambers (F’11)
• Finalist for the Chapbook Prize, Ahsahta Press (2014), Ashley Chambers (F’11)
• Semi-finalist for the Chapbook Prize, Cutbank Literary Journal (2014), Ashley Chambers (F’11), Ashley Chambers (F’11)
• Honorable Mention for the Annual Fiction Prize, Gulf Coast Journal (2013), Ashley Chambers (F’11)
• Honorable Mention for the Annual Fiction Prize, Bellevue Literary Review (2013), Ashley Chambers (F’11)
• Truman Capote Fellowship, Krystin Gollihue (F’12)
• Graduate Poetry Teaching Fellowship, Krystin Gollihue (F’12)
• UA Office of Student Media Editor of the Year Award 2014, Krystin Gollihue (F’12), as Design Editor of *Black Warrior Review*
• AWP Intro Journals Award Nominee 2014, Kayla Candrill (F’14)
• Glamour Magazine essay award, first place, Megan Tear Plummer.

We queried our current MFA students and asked them what they thought about the no-GRE required policy. Here is what they told us in response to the question, “How did optional score submission affect your decision to apply to The University of Alabama’s MFA program?”

• “Very important. I did not apply to any programs that required the GRE.”
• “I would have still applied, but it communicated to me that the department was not concerned with the kind of intelligence a GRE score indicates. It indicated a quality-based application process rather than quantity-based. That being said, I probably would have tried harder on my GRE if I had known that certain funding is dependent on it.”
• “Never having performed well on standardized tests, I was terrified that my low GRE scores would keep me from an MFA. Of the 8 schools I applied to, 4 did not require the GRE scores. I was accepted to 3 of those schools and wait-listed at the 4th. The 4 that required the GREs did not grant me admission. Not only did I search UA out for it's optional GRE, I was excited to know a program that cared only about the quality of writers applying.”
• “The GRE-score submission greatly affected my decision to apply to UA; I only applied to schools, in fact, that didn't have a minimum GRE-score requirement, because I think one’s writing/commitment to the program is the most important part of his or her candidacy for a creative writing program.”
• “The GRE didn't affect my decision to apply or attend, but I think it's really great that it's optional!”
• “The optional GRE was a big factor in deciding to apply to UA. I’m a terrible test-taker.”
• “While I did submit GRE scores during my MFA application process, I only did so to four schools (the maximum allowed by ETS without incurring further charges). My decision to apply to UA, as well as other MFA programs that don’t require GRE scores, was heavily influenced by my desire not to incur those charges. The lack of a GRE requirement, along with the prestige and popularity of UA’s MFA program, were a huge incentive to apply.”
• “I actually took the GRE as a multitude of schools I applied to required it. Studying was an incredibly stressful experience and took away from time I could’ve spent working on my portfolio or other writing projects. Because MFA programs are so competitive, I applied to 12 programs. Each program came with an application fee, I paid a fee to mail materials, a fee for each transcript, and a fee to send my GRE scores. Any place where fees could be trimmed (like GRE scores) would be beneficial. I also have friends who only applied to MFA programs where no GRE score was required.”

A list of books published by our alumni, including books published since 2010, is found on our website here:
http://english.ua.edu/grad/cw/alumnibooks

Every one of the faculty of Creative Writing is in favor of the score-optional policy. We are in line with our peer institutions. Our applicant pool has increased in size, and the quality of our students has remained incredibly high.

Thank you for your consideration. Please let me know if you require further information.

Robin Behn, M.F.A.
Director, M.F.A. Program in Creative Writing
# Graduate Applications

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<tr>
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*Average of only those who reported.

## Graduate Enrollment & Degrees Awarded

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