

San José State University

Department of English and Comparative Literature

ENGLISH 291: Literary Practicum

Fall 2019

Practicum Supervisor:	Prof. Alan Soldofsky
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Office Hours:	Tues/Thurs 3:30pm - 5:00pm and by appointment.
Class Days/Time:	Online (via Canvas) with occasional Thursday evening symposia and CLA events (see schedule below)
Classroom:	Sweeney 229

Course Description

This 4-unit CR/NC practicum course prepares Creative Writing graduate students to take the MFA Comprehensive exam; also to develop and begin writing an MFA thesis. The practicum will provide a forum for peer review to assist MFA candidates as they customize the MFA exam reading list and prepare to take the MFA comprehensive exam. The practicum will also provide a forum for MFA candidates for drafting the thesis abstract and thesis preface. MFA candidates will consult with their individual thesis directors and thesis readers on their Thesis Committees at the start of the semester to create a thesis completion plan. The candidates will be guided by their MFA thesis directors during the semester, sharing thesis drafts with other students in the same primary genre via Canvas. Students will post texts of their thesis abstracts and introductions and portions of their thesis project. During the semester, students will receive comments on their drafts from other MFA candidates working in the same genre, and from the candidate's thesis director and thesis readers.

Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

Course Goals:

A degree candidate in the MFA program must complete a book-length work of publishable quality in the candidate’s primary genre (or a full length play or screenplay). Also, an MFA candidate must demonstrate a substantial ability to articulate and analyze the literary influences on his/her writing. To gain such an understanding, MFA candidates will accomplish the following objectives in this practicum course:

- Devise an MFA thesis completion plan, assisted by your thesis director.
- Customize the MFA exam reading list to prepare for taking the MFA comprehensive exam, consulting with your thesis director (if you haven’t taken the exam).
- Take the Fall MFA comprehensive exam, or sign up to take the Spring MFA exam.
- Write an MFA thesis abstract—may be revised if your thesis project changes substantially after you finish writing it.
- Draft the Preface to your thesis, reflecting on and analyzing important literary influences on your writing. Base your introduction on your MFA thesis proposal. Post your thesis introduction on Canvas for other candidates to read on comment on.
- Revise MFA abstract and thesis Preface in response to peers’ and thesis committee members’ comments.
- Post sections (chapters, scenes, poems, etc.) of your thesis on Canvas for other MFA candidates in the practicum to read and comment on.
- Consult during the semester with your MFA director and thesis readers on the progress you’re making to complete your thesis manuscript.
- Submit portions of your thesis manuscript to journals for publication. (Optional)

Learning Objectives:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

Student Learning Objectives:	Skills/Knowledge Acquired:	Activities:
SLO 1: Students will demonstrate a high-level of ability to write and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, or a scriptwriting).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognize what makes a successful MFA thesis abstract and introduction. 2. Recognize what material works for your MFA thesis; recognize what material needs to be revised. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write an MFA thesis abstract and thesis introduction. 2. Draft material (chapters, stories, scenes, essays, poems, etc.) for your MFA thesis. 3. Comment on peer’s MFA thesis sections posted to peer group forums on Canvas.
SLO 3: Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognize historically relevant trends in modern and contemporary works of creative writing (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and dramatic writing). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read works from the MFA exam reading lists (in candidate’s primary and secondary genre) to prepare for taking the MFA exam.

	2. Identify developments within creative writing genres, and the development of individual authors and schools/styles of writing.	2. Research works and authors which have significantly influenced the MFA candidate's thesis project. 3. Self-selected candidates take the Fall MFA exam.
SLO 4: Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.	1. Apply and improve close reading skills. 2. Recognize and apply formal terms to describe and analyze literary elements and qualities in the works read. 3. Apply close reading skills to evaluate the quality of peers' and published literary texts.	1. Read texts from the MFA exam reading list under the supervision of MFA thesis director. 2. Take the Fall MFA exam or prepare to take Spring MFA exam. 3. Write introduction to your MFA thesis. 4. Write MFA thesis introduction works cited list.
SLO 5: Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to: a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion; b) formulate and defend original arguments; c) employ effectively the language of their discipline; d) write under time constraints.	1. Recognize elements necessary to be present in a successful MFA thesis abstract and MFA thesis introduction. 2. Recognize rhetorical and literary elements, and literary styles used in successful literary essays commenting on works by modern and contemporary authors. 3. Understand criteria used for evaluation of MFA exam essays.	1. Write an MFA thesis abstract and MFA thesis introduction, and post on Canvas for peer comments and comments by MFA thesis director and thesis committee members. 2. Close read works on candidate's customized MFA exam reading list. 3. Self-selected students to take the Fall MFA exam; others prepare to take and sign up for the Spring MFA exam.

Course Methods and Activities:

At the start of the practicum course, the group of MFA candidates enrolled will meet face-to-face with the practicum supervisor for a group course orientation. Each candidate will subsequently meet with and coordinate their semester's activities with their individual MFA thesis directors and thesis committee members. Each candidate will work with their individual MFA thesis director to devise a thesis completion schedule. Each candidate will also work with their MFA thesis director to customize their MFA exam reading lists, and to determine when (Fall or Spring term) they will take the MFA comprehensive exam. Each candidate will prepare for their MFA

exam, making notes on the works they've chosen from the reading lists. During the semester, the MFA candidates in the course will write portions of their MFA theses, including their thesis abstract, thesis introduction, and portions of the creative work that shall comprise the primary substance of their thesis manuscript.

Practicum Symposiums: Visits from Writers, Editors, Agents, and Publishers:

The practicum will occasionally host symposiums by Bay Area and West Coast literary professionals who will make brief presentations and take part in Q & A about matters pertinent to the course material. Some presentations will be made in live face-to-face meetings; others will be conducting remotely via digital technology.

MFA Comprehensive Exam Reading Lists:

<http://www.sjsu.edu/english/graduate/mfa/mfareadinglist.html>

ON-LINE RESOURCES:

Course Homepage on Canvas	Up to date course information, syllabus, class activities and announcements, thesis drafts, and the MFA exam reading lists. https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1321412
Academy of American Poets URL	Large resource with thousands of poems, essays, biographies, weekly features, and poems for special occasions. www.poets.org
Associated Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) URL	AWP provides community, opportunities, ideas, news, and advocacy for writers and teachers of writing. http://www.awpwriter.org
Poets & Writers Online URL	Information, support, and guidance for creative <i>writers</i> . Find <i>writing</i> contests, grants for <i>writers</i> , news, small presses, and much more. http://pw.org
Los Angeles Review of Books URL	A West Coast literary <i>review</i> journal covering the American and international <i>book</i> scenes. http://lareviewofbooks.org/
New Pages URL	News, information and guides to independent bookstores, independent publishers, literary magazines, alternative periodicals, independent record labels, alternative newsweeklies and more. http://www.newpages.com

The New Yorker blog “Page-Turner” URL	Criticism, contention, and conversation about books that matter. http://www.newyorker.com/books/
The Rumpus URL	The eclectic online San Francisco literary magazine, blog, and book review. http://therumpus.net/
Litseen URL	Daily calendar of literary events in the Bay Area, with a hub of recurring events, pre- and reviews with video, book reviews, interviews, and more. http://litseen.com/

Practicum Due Dates

MFA Comprehensive Exam

- Sept. 11: Customize MFA exam reading list due to MFA thesis director.
- Sept. 29: Fall MFA exam distributed 9:00 a.m.
- Oct. 2: Fall MFA exam essays due by 5:00 p.m.
- Dec 4: By Dec 4, contact thesis director and/or committee members to discuss preparation for taking the Spring MFA exam.

Thesis Completion Plan

- Sept. 8: (For Dec. 2018 graduates) completed thesis manuscript to MFA thesis director.
- Sept. 18: Thesis completion plan due to MFA thesis director and practicum supervisor. (Thesis manuscript due to thesis director for December 2018 graduates.)
- Sept. 29: Thesis manuscript (revised as necessary) submitted to second and third readers (for December 2018 graduates).
- Nov. 3: Department approved thesis due to Office of Graduate Studies (for December 2018 graduates).
- Dec. 11: Mostly completed draft of thesis manuscript (for May 2019 graduates) to thesis committee members.

Grading

This course is graded on a CR/NC basis.

Completing the practicum projects according to candidates’ thesis completion plan will result in a CR grade. Not completing the projects will result in a NC grade.

Workload

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week) for reading works in preparation for the MFA comprehensive exams; meeting with thesis directors

and committee members; drafting and re-writing creative material and the introduction for the MFA thesis; and participating in other course related activities. Other graduate course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus (see SJSU Academic Senate Policy S12 - 3).

Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week preparing doing the reading, writing, and online Canvas participation expected for this class and completing required course activities. Careful time management will be required to maintain an intensive schedule of reading and writing appropriate for this course, to comment on work posted by other MFA students writing a thesis in the same genre as yours, and allowing sufficient to during the semester to complete an MFA thesis draft on schedule.

University Policies

The link below contains university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc.

<http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>

ENGL 291: Fall 2019 Schedule Activities

NOTE: The calendar lists work assigned by week. The practicum supervisor reserves the right to revise this schedule and to notify students of such revision in a timely manner, e.g., "subject to change, announced at least one class meeting in advance."

<p>Week 1 IN PERSON Aug. 22</p>	<p>Course Overview. All candidates enrolled will meet with practicum supervisor for an overview of the work required during the semester.</p> <p>Topics Covered This Session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forming a Thesis Committee • Drafting and submitting a Thesis Proposal • Preparing for the MFA Comprehensive Exam
<p>Week 2 ONLINE Aug 29</p>	<p>May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask faculty members to serve on thesis committee (Director and 2nd & 3rd readers) <p>Dec. 2018 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish up first draft of thesis.
<p>Week 3 ONLINE Sept 5</p>	<p>May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post names of your Thesis Committee members (Director, 2nd Reader, 3rd Reader) to Canvas assignment. • In “Thesis Proposals” Discussion, post the first draft of your MFA Thesis Proposal. <p>Dec. 2018 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept. 10 is the deadline to file or reactivate application for graduation with GAPE (do this through MySJSU). • Send draft of your thesis, including Preface, to your Thesis Director • Post same draft to “Thesis Drafts” Discussion. <p>MFA Comprehensive Exam planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confer with your MFA thesis director if you wish to add any works to the MFA Exam reading list. • Read works on MFA Exam reading list.
<p>Week 4 ONLINE Sept. 12</p>	<p>May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and comment on Thesis Proposals by other students in your concentration. <p>Candidates Taking Fall MFA Comprehensive Exam: Sept. 17: Sample MFA Exam questions emailed individually to candidates.</p>

	<p>Readings: Continue reading works on MFA Exam reading list.</p>
<p>Week 5 ONLINE Sept. 19</p>	<p>NO MEETING</p> <p>SEPT 20: 7 p.m. – Center for Literary Arts Event— Reed Magazine Launch Party and Reading featuring Jonathan Franzen, Hammer Theatre.</p> <p>ON CANVAS</p> <p>May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise Thesis Proposal based on peer critiques • Begin filling out Petition for Advancement to Graduate Candidacy form (http://www.sjsu.edu/gape/forms/candidacy.pdf) <p>Readings: Continue reading works on MFA Exam reading list.</p>
<p>Week 6 IN PERSON Sept 26</p>	<p>Visit from the 2019-20 Steinbeck Fellows. Get a glimpse of life post-MFA. Bring questions!</p> <p>For candidates taking Fall MFA Exam:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept. 27: Exam questions distributed by email (9:00 a.m) • Sept. 30: Exam essays due (5:00 p.m.) <p>May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oct 1 is deadline to file Petition for Advancement to Graduate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Candidacy form (http://www.sjsu.edu/gape/forms/candidacy.pdf) ○ Send Thesis Proposal draft to committee members for review. <p>Readings: (For candidates who will take the Spring MFA Exam.) Continue reading works from MFA Exam reading lists.</p>
<p>Week 7 ONLINE Oct. 3</p>	<p>Dec. 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oct 7 is deadline to deliver completed thesis manuscript (with necessary revision) to second and third thesis readers. <p>Readings: (For those candidates taking Spring MFA Exam.) Continue reading works from MFA Exam reading list.</p>

<p>Weeks 8 IN PERSON Oct. 10</p>	<p>7 p.m. – Center for Literary Arts Event—Rita Bullwinkel reading, ON CANVAS May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise thesis proposal based on comments from committee members. <p>Readings: (For those who have signed up for Spring MFA Exam.) Continue reading works from MFA Exam reading list.</p>
<p>Week 9 IN PERSON Oct. 17</p>	<p>Literary Professionals Panel and Symposium</p> <p>Visit from Andy Ross (literary agent), Faith Adiele (2020 Lurie Distinguished Visiting Author), and Oscar Villalon (Managing Editor, <i>Zyzzyyva</i>). Bring all your publishing questions.</p>
<p>Week 10 IN PERSON Oct. 24</p>	<p>7 p.m. – Center for Literary Arts Event—Carmen Maria Machado reading, Dec. 2018 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize thesis manuscript for submission. Secure electronic signatures from committee members. <p>May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize Thesis Proposals. Secure electronic signatures from committee members.
<p>Week 11 ONLINE Oct 31</p>	<p>May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nov 1 is deadline for submitting signed Thesis Proposal to Department Graduate Coordinator, Dr. Krishnaswamy (revathi.krishnaswamy@sjsu.edu). Post Final Thesis Proposal to the Canvas assignment. <p>Dec. 2018 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nov. 5: Deadline for submitting thesis manuscript to Graduate Studies.
<p>Week 12 IN PERSON Nov. 7</p>	<p>7 p.m. – Center for Literary Arts Event – Poetry Reading with Tyehimba Jess and Harmony Holiday</p>
<p>Week 13 ONLINE Nov. 14</p>	<p>May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post Thesis Writing Plan to Canvas. Begin (or continue) drafting your thesis. Post chapters to Thesis Drafts discussion as appropriate.

<p>Weeks 14 IN PERSON Nov. 21</p>	<p>7 p.m. – Center for Literary Arts Event –Anniversary Reading and Panel Discussion of the <i>Big Aiieeeeeeeee!</i> anthology, featuring Lawson Inada, Sean Wong, and Marilyn Chin (respondent).</p> <p>ON CANVAS May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue drafting your thesis. Post chapters to Thesis Drafts discussion as appropriate. <p>Readings: (For those who have signed up for Spring MFA Exam.) Continue reading works from MFA Exam reading list.</p>
<p>Week 15 IN PERSON Nov 28</p>	<p>7pm – Fall Steinbeck Fellows Reading – Steinbeck Center (MLK 590) – Three of the six 2019 - 20 Steinbeck Fellows will read from new work and answer questions. Reception to follow.</p> <p>May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue drafting your thesis. Post chapters to Thesis Drafts discussion as appropriate. <p>For candidates taking Spring MFA Exam:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dec. 6 is deadline to notify MFA Director of your intention to take the Spring MFA Comprehensive Exam. As a courtesy, you should also notify your thesis committee members, as they will be grading your exam
<p>Week 16 ONLINE Dec. 5</p>	<p>May 2019 Graduates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue drafting your thesis. Post chapters to Thesis Drafts discussion as appropriate.