

BFA Information Session 2024

My name is Bronwen Tate and I'm the Undergraduate Chair of Creative Writing and I'm coming to you from my office with many, many piles of books and papers but still a little bit of that space on the traditional ancestral and unceded land of the Musqueam people, UBC's Vancouver Point Grey campus.

And I'm joined today by Alexandra Tsarditis who is the Undergraduate Advisor. If you email crwr.undergrad@ubc.ca that's who you're going to get and will be the person who is answering all the questions you might have about, you know, does this credit count for this thing or how do I apply for this thing.

I'm also joined by several of our wonderful faculty and students in both the Creative Writing major and the Creative Writing minor. So I'm going to introduce them one by one and if they want to just say really briefly the main genre they work in, anything like that, and then we'll move into an overview of the program.

So we're joined by Mallory Tater. Hi everyone, good afternoon. Yeah, my name is Mallory. I use she/her pronouns and I am a lecturer at the UBC School of Creative Writing. I teach mainly poetry and fiction. Thanks so much Mallory.

We're also joined by Mandy Catron. Hi everybody, I'm Mandy. I am also a lecturer here at UBC. I use she/her pronouns and I teach creative non-fiction at every level from intro to graduate. Thanks so much Mandy.

And finally, we're joined by Cecily Nicholson. Hi everyone, my name is Cecily and I'm an assistant professor in poetry mainly, but I'm also teaching right now in collaboration around sound and other kinds of media. Amazing.

We're also joined by several students in both the Creative Writing major and the Creative Writing minor, so we have Angus Nordlund with us today. Hello everyone, my name is Angus. I am majoring in anthropology in the Bachelor of Arts program in my third year, but I'm also minoring in creative writing. My main genre that I work in – Bronwen knows this all too well – I mainly dabble in poetry, but I actually have been getting back into short story writing, short story fiction writing, which was actually where I started during quarantine when I did writing on the side. Amazing. Thanks, Angus.

We also have Yasna Rahimi with us today. I am in fourth year history. My major is history, but my minor is in creative writing and I mostly write fiction, so short stories. Amazing. Thank you.

We're also joined by Kayla Smith. Hi there, my name is Kayla. I'm currently doing a double major in English literature and creative writing, and my main genres are primarily fiction and creative nonfiction. Terrific. Thank you.

And finally, Samantha Chen is with us today. Hi, I'm Sam. I'm in my fifth year in the

creative writing program and my main genre is poetry fiction. Amazing, so thanks so much everybody. I'll turn back to you at various points either to offer a few thoughts on your experiences or to answer some questions from folks who are joining us eager to get information.

So first, I'm going to share my screen and go through a few slides to just offer kind of an overview of the programs and how they work. So here we go.

So we have lots of genres in the School of Creative Writing. When I studied creative writing in my undergraduate, it was basically poetry or fiction, maybe some playwriting, maybe some hybrid stuff, but we have writing for children and young adults. We have screenwriting, we have writing for stage fiction including speculative fiction, lyric forms, songwriting, comics, climate writing, creative writing with an indigenous focus, literary translation, hybrid forms. Basically, if it's any flavor or kind of creative writing or could conceivably be called one, we probably have people who are working on it, doing it.

We have some growth right now, especially in new media. So we're expanding our offerings in writing for video games, offering more courses in podcasting and other new media forms. And we're always curious to hear what our students are interested in, and a lot of the new courses we develop come out of student interests.

All right. We have two options for studying creative writing in depth at the undergraduate level. One is the creative writing major, sometimes called the BFA because that's our default designation if you do the creative writing major, although some people who double major end up getting a BA in creative writing because their other major is a BA. So for that program, there's a portfolio-based application. So it's a closed program, and only people who successfully apply to that program are creative writing majors.

The classes at the 400 level are reserved for students in that studio-based program. Students in the major take 36 credits of 400-level courses. All of these courses are capped at 12. But many students also take courses at the 200 and 300 level either before applying or even while doing the creative writing major. We found we didn't know that that was the case until we asked and people were like, "Oh yeah, I did interactive storytelling last term."

The creative writing minor, on the other hand, is a self-declared minor, so there's no application needed. It's basically students are able to look at their interests and see if they have sufficient credits or if they can get sufficient credits in the right areas in time. So it's 30 credits of 200, 300, and 3.5 level courses. And in general, our minor program courses start quite large and then get smaller as you go.

For example, I recognize a few people who are in creative writing 201 with me this term. I think there's about 229 students in that class. 209, the fiction class, is similarly large. After that is 301, which is three sections of 30 students, with sections led by TAs and an instructor guiding. And then after that would be 351, a kind of workshop-based course that's capped at 30 but is often closer to 20 or 25 students.

So I would say these are both great options. I think sometimes students don't realize just how in-depth you can go through the minor, and a secret is sometimes those 3.5 level courses are just as in-depth, if not more, compared to the 400-level courses because it has a group of students who have been doing all of those latter courses leading into them.

So that's just a little overview of what the two programs are like and how they work. Let's see, so the creative writing minor program we'll get into in a little more depth, but first I want to invite the faculty and the students who are here with us to maybe just share a little bit about some of their favorite experiences with teaching and learning or co-curricular activities in either of those programs.

I'm going to stop the screen share for a moment so that you can see their faces on your screens and maybe see me. We'll go in reverse order. So Cecily, could you tell us a little bit about what you've enjoyed recently?

Sure, well, if I want to say I enjoy pretty much most of it, of course except for marking, but it's such a treat. And so I work a lot, and so far I've been doing seminar senior seminar courses, so 400-level, and also working at the graduate level. My courses have... I enjoy being able to weave in a conceptual framework. So for example, working on ideas of sound and transcription or other examples like place and language use and engaging and meeting students where they're at.

Recently, I currently am in a course that I'm cross-listed with the music department, and we're working on the idea of sound, so the idea of transcription and translation as it pertains to how we actually note things on paper. So deep, deep work around listening and sound with a decolonial or anti-colonial perspective working with a solo scholar, Dylan Robinson. So it's been just really wonderful to be on the adventure with students. I think with the learning, and then just seeing at the end, you know, those portfolios and the final projects, just seeing the arc of people's learning and capacity in a group environment, in the workshop environment, which has been really generative. So maybe I'll leave it at that, but there's lots to share. It's wonderful, thanks.

Thanks so much. Maybe Sam, we'll turn to you next. What have been some highlights for you so far in your creative writing studies?

Yeah, so I think what I've really liked about the program is just getting to experiment in a lot of different genres that I hadn't previously done before. So I think two of my favorite courses have not necessarily been genres that I've had a lot of experience with in the past. So one class that I really liked was Creative Writing 408, which is the graphic forms class. In that class, I felt really inspired by getting to learn how to make art at the same time and like pair it with writing, so I found that process really interesting. It also really helped me in other types of writing as well, just finding inspiration from a different place. And then one other class that I found super interesting that I hadn't really dealt with before was the songwriting class. So I think it was 411, and I didn't really have any musical talent or anything, but I found it super interesting to kind of learn how sound makes such an impact on writing and how it like, it kind of, it was like the same thing. It

just kind of helped me improve in all the other genres I was trying to work with at the time. And then in terms of co-curricular activities, I really liked going to the various author visits. Recently, I've been going to like the whole clock reading series, and I think that's really, it's been a really cool experience to get to hear like a poet read a whole book in the evening, and then so they read like their whole poetry book, and then they get to hear about their process and what went into making like their whole book. So I think, yeah, that's the thing that I've enjoyed the most recently.

Thanks so much Sam. Let's maybe hear from Kayla. What have been some highlights for you?

I think a lot of the highlights for me not only happen in the different classes but I think specifically like the workshop aspect of them. In the minor program, I was mostly doing those online and through COVID, so now being able to do them in person has been such an amazing experience. I think being able to connect with these people and learn about them through their writing first and then get to know them as people has been such an interesting experience.

So I think for ones that really I guess like challenged my own writing would be right now I'm doing writing for children, specifically picture books, which is something I'd never done before. And so I think experimenting in these different genres has been really exciting. And then I'd say another one would be right now I'm doing Mandy's class, which is creative nonfiction, and so we're really looking at all these different aspects of inquiry and exploring different methods of research and how to implement that into our own writing.

Beautiful. Thank you. So as folks are maybe hearing, the creative writing major really encourages cross-training, so there's a big expectation that people are going to try new things, which is kind of a spirit of how we approach our classes here. Let's maybe hear from Mandy.

I'll just keep this really brief. I feel like everyone else has said such lovely things, but one thing I just wanted to emphasize that I love about my job and being part of the school of creative writing is the relationships that I've been able to form. It really is a lovely community, and you know, before doing this for many years, I taught academic writing and I would get to know my students for a semester and then I would never see them again. So something I really love is because I am teaching these nonfiction classes at every level, I have students that I have in 205 and then again in 305 and then again in 405, and so I feel like I get to follow students' careers. I get to see them sort of developing their voices. I get to see them in the hallway, pass them as they're entering other classes, and so in a really anonymous, sometimes-feeling institution like UBC, which is just so big, it's really wonderful, I think, to have these connections where you see the same faces, you start to know people's names, you end up in classes with the same people, and over time, it really feels like a really wonderful community. And so I just wanted to highlight that because I think that can be rare.

Thanks so much.

Yasna, could you talk to us a little bit about choosing to do the minor and some highlights from classes for you?

Yeah, so I, it was pretty much an easy choice to do a minor. I really like writing and I find that I get really inspired by... I was one history major, so I get really inspired by stories that I learned in history courses, but I think there are so many classes and topics in the creative writing program, minor and major, that I wouldn't have anticipated. I've done like, for example, I did screenwriting, which I had never done before, and writing for children, and even video game writing, which I don't play many video games, but when I do, I think after taking that course, I've learned to appreciate the writing and the effort that developers and writers put into video games. And I've also learned that I really like writing textbooks for children, which is not something that I would have ever thought about, like history textbooks. So I get to incorporate one of my other passions, which is teaching children. I think that's such a, it's so fun and amazing.

So yeah, besides the fiction that I normally do, I think that taking other courses in the creative writing program will encourage you to take courses out of your comfort zone, and you will learn that you will actually like more things than you think. Amazing. Thanks, Yasna! I actually know someone who works on history textbooks, so if you want me to put you in touch with him, let me know! He's in DC in the US.

What about Angus? Can you talk to us a little bit about your creative writing minor experiences?

Yeah, so I think what's been really fun about doing the minor is that in doing such a smaller collection of courses as opposed to doing a major, you find a lot of opportunities to sort of see where the skills that you pick up cross different genres. Like I was talking to Professor John Vinya, who's teaching my Creative Writing 309 class, and I was wondering, "Hey, I'm really, I focus more on poetry than I do on fiction writing, are there any ways in which I can kind of transfer those skills?" Because a lot of the time you think maybe, "Well, I dabble more in this, but maybe don't have as much experience in this," but a lot of those skills that you pick up in one genre can transfer to the next, and it's interesting to see how that can really help you create your own unique voice and what you bring to the table.

I think also, just in terms of, I mean, Yasna mentioned stepping outside your comfort zone as well. It's really important not being afraid to take on different challenges. Another thing that I've really loved so far in the program is the process that we go through with revision, because as someone who previously struggled so heavily with going through the revision process, scared to look at my own work, scared to critique it in many ways, going through the minor has allowed me to become more comfortable with that process and formulate my own system. Going through that process.

Amazing, thank you.

How about you Mallory, you want to wrap us up with any thoughts?

Yeah, no Angus, I agree with you. I love helping guide us through revision. I always say to students that it's just a seeing again, right? It doesn't have to be super intimidating, and it's very generative and great for our process.

In general, I echo what my colleagues said in that I love supporting students' interests and instincts. I like guiding you with exercises that kind of tug or pull on those instincts and interests and help you kind of ground them. In 359 this term, we've explored sound, visual art, we went to the Belkin Gallery to write. We've talked a bit about developing our own unique research process, and I just love helping folks find a library of authors, artists, thinkers, activists that you can turn to even when you're done with the program and graduated. So I think of it as like, if I can help you make three libraries during our time together, one is a library of your own work that you're proud of, two is a library of activists, thinkers, writers, artists that move you that you'll turn to, and then three is a library of your own great friends and community that you meet in the program. I was roommates with all my BFA friends. It was a really lovely time writing together and editing and spending time with each other's work, so I think that's something really, really special you can foster in our program.

Thank you so much. Yeah, I actually, I'm still in touch with a friend who I took writing classes with as an undergraduate, and she's a scientist who then became a policy worker in government, but her first book was just published and it's been kind of great to have been part of her journey from the earliest steps. Yeah, so you never know who you might be in a class with. Now that, in what, more than 20 years, you're still in touch with talking about writing, sharing those experiences.

All right, I'm going to move back to sharing the screen and talk through some details of some of these programs. So all right, so the creative writing minor... there are, again, 30 credits of 200 and 300 level courses and students can follow this three-course path actually in more than four genres now. So it was initially poetry, fiction, screenwriting, and children's writing/YA, but I think this year we've added that fourth class in comics, and we're hoping to add it in creative nonfiction in the next year or two.

So that means that in these genres, kind of core genres, students can really develop their craft and that three-five level class is one that can be repeated for credit. So Mallory, you've taught the three-five-nine and seen some students who are coming back for more fiction and kind of continuing to push their work further through that small class. So in this path, you build a solid base in technique and craft and then gradually move to more self-directed practice and more of that workshop experience in those three-five level courses.

So for most of these courses, there is some kind of prerequisite. There are a couple exceptions. Writing for lyric forms, the songwriting course is a 300 level that doesn't have a 200 level prerequisite, but in general, these are quite ladder courses that move kind of from the biggest kind of craft-based introductory to a smaller kind of moving towards a more self-directed practice, more workshop, to the smaller kind of sustained projects or workshop-based course.

All right, here's a little map so you can see what these look like, and it may be very small so don't worry about it, but basically gives you a sense of Creative Writing 200 where a lot of people begin, taught often by Mallory, by Taylor Brown Evans, by Tarek, our wonderful introductory course leaders. Then to the 200 level, then the 300 level, and then the three-five. So this map is also on our creative writing website, and you can look at it as you're kind of charting, "Oh, you know, maybe if I want to be doing work at this level or I want to focus in this, I want to see when these classes are offered to kind of chart that trajectory."

The creative writing major, again, it's a fine arts program in the Faculty of Arts, a closed studio program. Focus is on experiential learning and really working closely with peers through attention to craft and critical writing and critical reading. Again, it's a multi-genre program with a big emphasis on cross-training, so students are really encouraged to try genres that are new or challenging. In any given class, there's some people who have, you know, maybe done the minor program courses, bring some depth of experience, and students who are jumping into the thing new for the first time.

We've recently reintroduced four-five level classes in addition to the 400 level classes, and the four-five level classes offer some kind of deep dive or topics-focused class in a genre that is all students who have some foundation in that genre. So the requirements are 36 credits of 400 level creative writing workshop courses in at least four genres, and the program is designed to be completed over two years at three courses per term, but of course people who are maybe doing a double major or working during their studies can sometimes be approaching this in a different timeline or trajectory.

All right, let's see... Alexandra, I'm gonna turn to you now if you want to kind of talk us through some of the technical eligibility things here. Yeah, for sure. So I'm the undergraduate advisor in the program and I can help with any questions you have about our courses, the structure of our program, advising, program planning, anything like that. For the major eligibility, you must have active UBC status. This includes transfer students and secondary students that must apply to UBC Enrollment Services by their deadline of January 15th, and this is before our creative writing application deadline of February 28th. Most students apply during their second year of studies, which requires third year status as of September 2025.

If you won't have the 54 credits by the end of that year, you do have the opportunity to take the credits in the summer term, as long as they're completed before the September start date. There is no GPA requirement, so we don't look at your grades on your transcripts for admission. It's a portfolio-based, and based on your statement of intent. Another requirement is Creative Writing 200 or equivalent. So this can be any creative writing 200 level course. It doesn't have to be Creative Writing 200 specifically, and this will be noted on your application when you apply. So you can let us know that way.

Then in the next slide... so the application process, the window to apply is January 6th to February 28th for a September 2025 start date. There's only one application cycle per year, and we do not accept late applications. Students can apply in any of the 10 genres

listed in our application guidelines, and once admitted, like you've heard from students here, you can study in any genre offered.

There's four application components:

The online application form, which is found on our apply section of the website and it will be available on January 6th once it's open.

There is a personal statement or statement of intent that is required, and in our application guidelines, it explains in detail kind of exactly what we're looking for. It's a short statement.

Then the manuscript. So there's a primary genre and a secondary genre. The primary genre should be what you believe to be your strongest piece of work, not necessarily the genre that you're most interested in studying.

Then, the minimum pages. So we do have a 10-page minimum per genre. So if you submit a piece of work that's one or two pages, there's a chance that your application might not get looked at in the cycle.

We do ask that you try to adhere to that. There's a little page formatting guidelines for each genre, so in the guidelines document, it talks for each specific genre, how many pages and what to include for that specific genre. Pieces can be from previous assignments or published works, works that you've worked on in other classes. It doesn't have to be something new that you create just for the application.

And a question we get a lot is, "Can it be collaborative work?" And the answer is no. We want to evaluate each applicant's unique voice, style, and creativity. We don't want to be seeing collaborative works of any kind.

Another question we get is for genre quotas. So we do not have intake quotas for individual genres. There's no predetermined limits on how many applicants we accept based on a specific genre. We will not review manuscripts before the application is submitted, so please don't send them to the faculty. Don't send them to the staff. Just submit them with your application and they'll be reviewed at the same time.

I can be reached at any time at crwr.undergrad@ubc.ca if you have any questions about the application process or yeah, any questions at all. Reach out.

Thank you, and as you see, the acceptance rate is about 25%. We'll get somewhere between 90 and 100 applications most years, and we'll take somewhere between 25 and 30 students.

In any application process, there's partly us trying to do our best to select students we think will thrive in the program and partly just that there's some subjectivity to anything like that. We've certainly seen students who have been accepted to the program on their second or third application who have done wonderful work. What happens is always partly us doing our best, but partly also chance and subjectivity of any kind of admissions process.

So just a few words of advice or tips on this. So part of this is a personal statement, and

this is a chance to kind of tell us about who you are and want to become as a writer. It's a chance also to share your voice in something separate from your writing itself, but we're interested in hearing, you know, what draws you to writing. What do you like to read? What is exciting to you? Who do you see yourself in conversation with? And maybe especially, why do you want to do writing within an academic program and within a program of small courses where you'll be working closely with other people? So what do you feel like you have to offer in supporting the work of others, and how do you feel like learning alongside other people might help you deepen your own writing practice?

We will be assessing those statements anonymously, so unlike a cover letter where you might be, you know, signing your name, you'll just be giving the statement with your name withheld, but trying to give us a sense of kind of who you are as a person, what it would be like to work with you in class or have you as part of a program.

In terms of the manuscript, you know, we're often asked, "What do I need to do in the manuscript or what are people looking for?" And that question is both easy and hard to answer. I'd also say you're welcome to turn to classmates for help in preparing your manuscript submission, so one thing we're trying to do in most of our classes, right, is kind of build community, get a sense of what you can learn from other people. So while faculty and staff can't review your materials, you're absolutely welcome to, you know, get a group together with some classmates and read one another's materials, respond to them, help each other polish those.

I'd say we're very open aesthetically. So we're not looking for only, you know, realist fiction. We're also interested in speculative fiction. We're not looking for, you know, only high literary, children's experimental work. We're also interested in highly accessible non-fiction work for children, so there's nothing where I would say like, "Oh, this is just like not our thing." It's a question of with each thing, what are the terms of the thing and how is it done?

I'd say work that stands out is work that can ground itself often within the first page or two, whether that's showing a kind of voice, a situation, a question, an engagement in craft. So if it's poems, we're maybe looking at, you know, what kind of detail is showing up in this work? How is this person working at the level of line? If it's non-fiction, we're maybe saying, "Oh, do we get a sense of who this narrator is and what they've come here to say and why we should keep reading?"

There's also the fact that this is, you know, these portfolios are passed out to the faculty, and we are a group with diverse styles ourselves and diverse interests, and so we're always, I would say, reading these optimistically and as openly as we can. We're interested not in saying, "Are you doing my thing?" but are you doing something that I can kind of see that you're doing something on purpose, if that makes sense?

So do pay attention to the manuscript guidelines and the page requirements. The cap is there partly to protect us because, you know, it takes time to read your work carefully and thoughtfully. So more does not just show that you're like enthusiastic and we see that. No, more becomes too much for people to be able to read, and we will again be

assessing these anonymously, so we ask people to hold off from including their names.

Let's see, so I'm going to stop sharing the screen for a moment and just invite faculty if they want to say a few words about experiences reading portfolios and what they're looking for or what has tended to stand out to them. Maybe we'll start with Mallory and I see there's some questions coming up in the chat and we'll turn to those really soon.

Okay, wonderful. Essentially, I just recommend for students to show us the world as you see it. You know, those uncanny details specifically in your own voice, so tailor your characters, setting, all the descriptions you can, regardless of what genre it is. Make it as you as you can to make it palpable and memorable for us as we're reading. You know, I think about a voice, a writing voice or a style as your own unique fingerprint, and I'm always looking for the manuscripts that kind of feel like they've pressed themselves against the window, right? And I'm looking at that window and I can't look away. So to really tailor those details and refine it to your own voice and just make it you and make it special.

Thank you.

Mandy or Cecily, anything you'd like to add?

I can jump in. Yeah, so I always, whenever people ask me for creative writing application advice, I think about how useful it is to be on this side of it, and I think like I wish I had had a similar experience when I was applying to programs earlier in my life or submitting things for contests or whatever. So something that I really recommend is like thinking about your own experiences in a writing workshop. If you've sat through a writing workshop before and think about, like, when you pick up a piece of writing, like what makes you want to keep reading? When we are reading these applications, we're reading a whole bunch of them, and so partly what we're looking for is something that like immediately sort of... I like how Bronwen said like grounded itself, but immediately there's like a sense of something at stake, there's a sense of a character.

It really is true that if you, like, if you've got a page range and let's say, I don't know what the exact page ranges are, but let's say it's like 10 to 30 pages, like don't submit 20. I think it's usually the 10 to 20. Don't feel like you need to fill up the page range to make a point. Like really submit your strongest work and only your strongest work because that's going to do so much more to help us see like what you can do.

I'm really interested in like people who are not necessarily like published already, who are not necessarily super experienced, but people who are motivated, who are excited, who are interested in contributing to the program as much as they are in learning from the program. So people who like thinking about the sort of nerdy technical details of craft or are very interested in trying something new and taking a risk. I think those are the kind of things that are really going to stand out because those are the students who are going to contribute and workshop and really form a community in the program, and that I think is as important and exciting as talent.

And I think sometimes when you're writing, like a statement of intent, like something I see a lot is, "I wanted to be a writer since I was a small child," and like that's awesome, but that is not a thing that's going to set you apart from everybody else. What's going to set you apart is like really nerding out about the things that you're super excited about. So like I always encourage people to really sort of, like Mallory saying, like be yourself, like really get nerdy and like be the sort of most enthusiastic version of the writer that you are, and I think that really goes a long way for making the case for being not just like a person in a workshop but a member of a community.

Yeah, I love that, Mindy. And that note about, "I wanted to be a writer since I was a kid," it's such a thing. It's like the trope, right? Like, okay, that's wonderful, but like who are you now? And I'd say also, there's something about, like, you know, when we see that someone seems hungry for it, you know? Like you can feel it when there are people in your class who are hungry for what that class has to offer and hungry for learning from one another, and to me, getting a sense that someone has, like, an appetite for it that it won't be like, "You know, oh, I've got to make myself read this book," but like, "Oh, I read this book, what's the next book?" Right? That's really contagious.

Cecily, anything to add?

Sure. I mean, there's lots of great points already made, so what I might add, I think that note around creative influences on the application criteria, I would tunnel down a little bit and I think, as Bronwen framed it, who you find yourself in conversation with. But to my interest is also, who are you reading? Who else are you engaging? And so if you're advancing a practice but you've not really read in that field, I would be doing some reading in the field that you'd like to move forward in, whatever that sort of niche or genre is that's specific to you. And I think one of the main things that really stands out is, again, we're reading an anonymous application one after the other, right? So attention to detail is so key, and the moment there are typos or there's just the kind of mistakes that come because we don't have enough time or maybe we need a second reader, you want to remove those kinds of mistakes because they do kind of distract us maybe from the content.

And then, yeah, I think like some of those... try to demonstrate your engagement in more than one field. And so sometimes we see some really heavily weighted, you know, powerful interventions in the poetics, but maybe like next to nothing or struggling in sort of any of the other areas. So for example... sure, it's not anybody here, but so, like, just definitely to try to figure out how to have a balanced sort of portfolio that's going to speak to more than one area.

Thank you.

Maybe Kayla or Sam, do either of you want to just say anything about how you selected your materials or how you approached the application process?

I can go first if you want.

I think for my letter of intent, I actually had the opposite thing where I haven't always wanted to be a writer, so I think that was one of the things I like included in there and just like things that I was interested in working with, like certain aspects I kept returning to in my work was the main focus of mine in the intent letter. And also, yeah, influences, things that brought me here and also talking about that workshop experience that I had in the minor classes, which was really important. And then for selecting my works, yeah, as the professors were saying, ones that were strong and then also ones that really spoke to what I was trying to explain in my letter of intent, like these themes, these messages, and pieces that I felt demonstrated my voice as a writer.

Terrific, thank you.

Sam, anything to add?

Yeah, for like my statement of intent, I think I remember writing about like art and just different, like, other things that kind of like inspired me and like impacted my writing as well, so not just think, not just writers but like other types of art. And then for when I was picking my application materials in my portfolio, I think I just remember trying to find a balance between things that I was comfortable already with writing but also like including things that I didn't feel as comfortable or like I didn't feel was something that I was immediately comfortable with. So just taking some risks, just like I think that it's important to not be afraid to take risks when like putting things together.

Absolutely.

So we've had some questions in the chat and some of those have been answered, but I'm going to go ahead and read them and answer them verbally as well just so we have them later for the recording which I know people do watch later.

So one is, can a submission be made up of multiple short submissions? And the answer is absolutely yes. So, you know, for fiction, you might have two short stories. For, you know, non-fiction, you might have, you know, five flash pieces and one slightly longer personal essay. For poetry, you are probably going to have a bunch of different poems, so absolutely.

Question: when would people find out whether or not they've been offered a place in the BFA program? And the answer to that is May, so May 2025 for entry in September.

All right, question: can the work in my application include work from my intro to creative writing class? Yes, definitely.

Question: can we ask TAs for additional advice on portfolio submissions or just classmates? Cannot ask TAs because they're also considered teachers, but you know, if TAs have been giving you feedback on your work or if instructors have been giving you feedback on your work, you can absolutely use that feedback to improve, you know, and deepen your work. You just can't say, "Here's my portfolio. Can you give notes on that?" But you can take everything you've been learning in your classes, including

feedback on the work, and use it to strengthen your writing.

Will question: will we get feedback on the application after results are sent out? The answer to that is no. So, you know, we're assessing these by giving them scores, essentially, and then we have a meeting where we discuss the weight of the scores and we make our selections, but we're not able to dedicate time to giving feedback on why a certain portfolio did or didn't move forward.

Let's see, are any parts of the program offered online?

Yes, there are parts of both programs offered online. So, at the minor program level, we have some sections of creative writing 200 that are fully online. We sometimes have other courses, depending on the year and who's offering them, that are offered fully online. In the BFA program, the 400-level courses, most terms, there may be a couple of 400-level courses that are offered via Zoom, and those just depend on kind of instructor capacity, instructor need. So we don't guarantee that students would be able to complete their degree, say, remotely or by doing online courses, but some terms, there are online courses available for students who are interested in those.

Let's see, there's a question: how many pieces can we include?

Might need some clarification there, but I would say you can include work in two genres, and each genre might have a single longer piece or a gathering of short pieces, and what you put together would depend on satisfying the sort of genre-specific expectations which are often, you know, a page count within a certain range, say 10 to 20. For some of the genres like writing for lyric forms, there's also an option to include like audio files or links to audio files for that work, but all of that will be laid out in the application guidelines.

Okay, let's see... is there any submission material we should try to avoid? Violence, death, etc. I would say no content specifically, but it's always a question of how you're handling that content, right? So as we're reading, if somebody says, "Is including violence?" then we might be asking, you know, what is this person doing with violence? Is it being, you know, approached in a thoughtful and responsible and ethical way or does it seem gratuitous?

So in anything, I would say there's no content that's like, you know, off-limits or off the table, but it's always a question of how are you handling something, how are you going about it, what, you know, what moved you to do this particular writing, what moved you to include something in your writing, and how are you grounding it and thinking about it?

A question: how can you successfully complete the creative writing 200 course if your first degree was in a different field and didn't include any related courses?

So we actually have a kind of option for that and people can have that requirement waived. Do you want to say a little bit about that, Alexandra?

We don't necessarily waive that requirement, but you can take a creative writing 200 or an equivalent introductory writing-level course. So if your first degree has something like that, a creative writing intro course that might be equivalent, you can include that in your application and we will look at the course outline and determine the equivalency after the fact.

If not, we do offer creative writing 200 in the summer that students can take online, as long as you complete it before September. So it's usually offered May to June online every summer. So if you don't have it at the time you apply, there will be a note to include that in your application and you can take the course in the summertime to ensure your eligibility.

Thanks so much. So there's some options there if you don't have it coming, especially if you are looking at doing a second degree.

There's a question, what genres are we not allowed to submit?

So we're updating and actually, video game writing will be allowed this time. It wasn't previously because we didn't have faculty who were consistently there available to assess it, but now we've hired Ray Clark as a halftime lecturer, so Ray is able to read the video game submission, so we can offer that now.

And the guidelines will lay out anything along those lines about what the options are and exactly... all right, here we got a question that might be best directed to one of the students. So a question is, how would you describe the workshop environment in the major?

Anybody want to speak to that?

I'm just going to call on one of you. Kayla, you go and then Sam.

Sure. I would say the major is a lot more focused. Usually, the classes are at most 12 people. I've had somewhere it's only five people, so it's really a different level of, I guess, intensity in that way. You're very close to all the people you're working with, and you get to read more of their work in a more detailed way and just having those experiences.

I think one of the things I like most about the, I guess, BFA workshop style is that's most like a small, like, community. It's very knit together, and instead of doing a lot of revision, it's mostly working on new pieces constantly, just getting out as much work as you can, kind of thing.

I'd add, so depending on the course, you know, we... I mean, they're all called workshop-based courses, but like what people are actually doing in the course can vary quite a bit from class to class. So, I mean, they're all workshop in the sense that people are working on their creative work, but in the sense of workshop as in everyone's sitting around the table, say, critiquing one person's story or poem, that might happen a lot or it

might happen a little depending on the class. So, for example, Sarah Levitt, who teaches 408, the comics course, because comics is often so new to many people, she has a lot of generative exercises, a lot of reading, a lot of people making work alongside one another, but not a lot of kind of reading and group critique. Maybe only once or twice over the term would that happen.

In general, I would say there's been a big movement as a department towards workshop approaches that like are founded in anti-racist principles and that give a lot of agency to the writer. So there's sort of this nightmare version where, like, a writer's sitting there, they're not allowed to talk, everybody is misunderstanding their story and going on and on about it, and they're just sort of stuck there. We really try to not have that be what people are experiencing in their classes, so a lot of us use methods like critical response process or other kinds of alternative workshop approaches where the writer, you know, is invited to take agency, maybe make their own workshop agenda about how they want the workshop to run, maybe ask questions of the readers to direct the feedback or be able to say, "Hey, actually, this isn't useful to me. Can we turn our attention somewhere else?"

So I would say, like, as a department, we've thought a lot about, you know, what pedagogy is useful at what stage of development and how to give writers as much kind of power and agency and to be able to shape the kind of feedback they get and what their own goals are and how their readers can support their vision versus sort of an idea that there's a single good kind of poem or good kind of story that everybody is trying to get to.

Anyone want to add anything about the workshop environment?

All right, okay. Question: can we take more than three classes per term, or is that not recommended?

So if you're taking other courses in other units or the two or three hundred level courses, you could be doing more than three, but there's a cap on the number of workshop courses, the 400-level courses, that students can take, and that's partly just because we have to plan, you know, and decide how many classes to offer, and so we want to make sure that there's enough space for everyone to be fully enrolled but not a bunch of like half-empty classes. And so to kind of be able to accommodate everybody's needs, we do have that cap of no more than three workshop-based courses per term.

I would also say trying to do more than three workshop-based courses per term would likely mean that you're stretching yourself in ways that you're not going to be able to go as deeply as we would want you to be able to go in those workshop-based courses.

Do you have to take summer term classes? No, you do not. Those are there as options for people, so we'll often have maybe one course offered in the kind of May term, and then often we'll have an intensive like nine-day course as part of our summer residency, which is mostly for our low-residency or optional-residency MFA students, but there's usually one creative writing major course that is this intensive nine-day course, and

creative writing majors are also really welcome to attend all the events that are associated with the residency. So we have like all these talks and panels and agents and editors and all these people are there sharing insights from their work and the industry, and students are welcome to attend those as well.

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Is it possible to graduate on time without taking summer classes?

Yes it is.

All right any other questions in the chat just go for it.

Thanks so much everybody who's been asking your questions it's really helpful.

All right will there be help in getting a writing agent?

Big question.

I think faculty some of whom have agents and some of whom don't not all fields are agent based fields are often happy to speak with students about their publication journeys about the kind of presses they work with and how they found them.

We also have classes like the one Mallory teaches which is called Building a Career as a Writer.

Do you want to say a few words about that Mallory?

Yes absolutely and so for the BFAs we offer creative writing for 30 preparation for a career in writing and it's a course where I don't necessarily think I can help directly connect you with an agent but we have agents come visit and you can ask them questions and learn more about the publishing industry.

We talk more about applying for grants helping support yourself with funding opportunities.

We talk about reading.

Yeah it's actually it's a really delightful course for just kind of I like to say like alleviating some of the dry ice around the industry so if that's something that you folks are interested in I would definitely recommend taking it.

I have a lot of students really thrilled that they took the course and learned a lot more about their future paths.

Yeah I'd say well we can't always connect people with opportunities what we really aim to do is demystify as much as possible because there can be yeah you have this dry ice right there can be a lot of sort of like how do people do this and you just cold query or how does it work and so you know that is something that we really do try to offer as much as possible and that's also something that our visiting writers help us do because there can be many different kind of pathways to publication ways of finding an audience ways of sharing work and people choose different presses different pathways based on their values their commitments their priorities and we want to kind of attend to those and think through those together and help people think about how they might want to bring their work to readers.

There's a question for Kayla specifically about the workload as a double major.

You want to say a few words about that Kayla?

Yeah I think it really depends on what your other major is.

Never mind with English literature it's a lot of reading and writing so I'm constantly doing my readings everywhere I am and I'm always writing essays and doing that research but I think I'm in my sixth year right now so I've definitely been here a while and I'm also working part-time so it definitely has had an influence on how long I've been here.

I would recommend taking the extra time if you want to do a double major that way you can really focus on each of your classes and everything you're learning rather than trying to get it all over with at once.

So I usually do like four to five classes and that's about my max.

Thanks so much.

All right I'm just going to share my screen again to give contact information there.

So for anybody who has follow-up questions you can reach out to Alexandra Tsardidis our undergraduate advisor crwr.undergrad@ubc.ca.

If anybody has questions more about kind of program structure academic things about our pedagogy you're welcome to email me bronwen.tate@ubc.ca or stop by either of our offices which are both on the fourth floor of Buchanan E.

I'm directly across from the elevator and the photocopier machine and I always get to tell people where the washrooms are so that's fun.

Alexandra is just down the hall.

You can also look at our website creativewriting.ubc.ca and you'll see all kinds of things there like past visiting writers events that we've hosted some details about courses and things like that.

And if you have other questions you can type them into the chat.

I'll stop the recording now but I'm happy to stick around for a few more minutes.

Although anybody who's on campus may want to be making their way now to the event with Nalo Hopkinson and Sylvia Moreno Garcia which is going to be happening in the Dodson room.

So anybody who's on campus go for it.

Enjoy that.

Alexandra and I can stick around for a few more minutes if anybody has lingering questions and very profound thanks to faculty for making time in your day to our

students for joining us to share your experiences.

We really appreciate it and we look forward to welcoming you to our creative writing courses and programs in one capacity or another.