



### **Summary of 2006/2007 and Changes to the Master Plan:**

2006/2007 was an exceptional year for the MFA program. Five current students (over a quarter of the program) had their work accepted for publication (Charles Heiner, Joshua Canipe, Steven Brown, John Anderson, Sarah Smith.) One recent graduate, Michelle Reed, published her first two stories and another, Jessica Pitchford, was named editor of the prestigious Southeastern Review. The program again hosted a series of diverse readers, from Pulitzer prize-winners like WD Snodgrass and Robert Olen Butler to South African novelist George Makana Clark. A half dozen of our current students attended the AWP Conference. A revamped website, which allows online informal application to the program, helped result in a record number of submissions, and next year's incoming class will be the largest in memory.

Although the program is in good health, a number of new procedures have been established to help quantify our work and to comply with SACS. These measures are referred to in the charts which follow, but a brief overview highlighting these steps seems appropriate. The tools themselves are included in an appendix.

#### *Creative Writing Assessment Tool*

This rubric was created by the creative writing faculty with input from current and previous students. It will be used internally in English 671 and 672, our workshop classes. These courses are the clearest indication of our program's commitment to the ongoing process of assessment. The students' creative work is the only text, and essential faculties like written expression and critical thinking are essential. However, other than grades, we have not quantified their work in any way. In addition to changes being made in the workshop syllabi to make them more uniform and to reflect the significance of critical thinking, written and oral expression, we will be utilizing the CWAT in fall 2007. Each students' work will be scored and tabulated. This should help us note trends through the three years of study typical for the program. Also, while the professors of English 671 and English 672 will be acting as Internal Assessors, we will be expanding the role of visiting writers, some of whom will now be Outside Assessors. These contracted visitors, themselves published poets and fiction writers, have always provided in depth criticism of student manuscripts in face-to-face conferences. Now, some will be completing the CWAT as well. This will allow us to compare internal/external judgments of the students' work and is viewed as a very productive allocation of resources. It should also be noted that the ongoing offering of English 671/672 is deemed an excellent allocation of resources, specifically those graduate professors. Many programs do not offer workshop on such a regular basis.

#### *Graduate Activity Report*

Because of the lack of uniformity in student responses, a matrix has been created. Beginning in spring 2008, students will submit their GARs earlier in the semester (the penultimate meeting of English 671/672). The graduate faculty will then evaluate them and hold conferences to discuss any concerns with the students. This conference will include a wide spectrum of graduate activities, from the submission of their creative work to the books and professional journals being read by the student. The graduate faculty will also consider appropriate benchmarks for the GAR Matrix after this first year. The teaching component of the GAR has been replaced by the GTA Assessment Tool, developed by the Director of Freshman Composition.

#### *Professional Endeavors*

This new course created in response to student feedback from the Exit Surveys of the last two years expressing a lack of preparation for the job market. This capstone experience will be offered each spring and taken by students in their final semester. Its student learner outcomes will focus on several independent projects consistent with the career plans of the students. While this class is currently under development, it seems clear that among these will be topics such as: searching for a job, applying, and a thorough discussion of the interview process; preparation of creative material for submission to appropriate publication venues; community service. The course will be submitted for inclusion in the catalog in fall of 2007. The graduate school will be petitioned to make it a required course for all MFA students. If necessary, the course content will be piloted in spring 2008 in English 676: Form and Theory of Fiction.

#### *The Graduate Thesis*

While no changes have been made to this process, it stands as one of the clearest indications of the students' success. The thesis must be a book length manuscript of imminently publishable work. It is submitted to a committee of three professors, who read and evaluate the work prior to a rigorous oral defense. As a final step, the student must read from his or her work at a public event.

*The Exit Survey*

We have determined that the survey being used, based on a model provided by AWP, does not address all of McNeese's needs. Subsequently, several additional questions have been added for spring 2008.

*The Alumni Survey*

To help track the success of our students in the fields of publishing and teaching, this survey will be sent out each spring to those alumni who graduated three years previously. We will also be seeking direct feedback for ways to improve our program.

*The Visiting Writers Series*

Our ongoing Visiting Writers Series brings students into direct contact with published authors, most of whom provide face-to-face manuscript conferences. While we have sporadically invited professionals from the publishing industry to campus in the past, this will now be done on a more rigid schedule so that each three year cycle includes at least one such visit. A prominent literary agent, Mr. Warren Frazier, has already been scheduled for a paid appearance in the fall. This is another positive allocation of resources.

*The Dore Grants/Textbook Funds*

These monies, totally over \$20,000, have gone to help defray costs of graduate student attendance at professional conferences and to provide funds crucial for research and living expenses between semesters.

**Student Learning Outcome 1:** Graduates apply critical thinking in academic and professional environments. In the MFA program, this manifests itself essentially in the ongoing development of a mature artistic aesthetic. This is fostered in a variety of ways: the careful analysis of literature in academic classes; the meticulous criticisms of manuscripts in workshops; face to face conferences with published writers for personal critiques; response to feedback in the form of revision; attendance and participation at conferences, writing festivals, and public readings. Essentially, every exposure to a work of art should prompt the MFA student to critically think about his/her own artistic aesthetic.

<u>Expected Level of Achievement</u>	<u>Actual Data From Assessment</u>	<u>Actions/Decisions</u>
<p>100% of students enrolled in workshop (English 671 and English 672) will receive an A or a B, indicating the ongoing application of critical thinking as manifested via a maturing artistic aesthetic.</p>	<p>100% received an A or a B.</p>	<p>English 671 and 672 syllabi will be made more uniform and specifically define the inclusion of critical thinking as part of the grading process. This critical thinking will be assessed through revision efforts and response to the writing of others' in workshop.</p>
<p>100% of students will receive a 3 or higher on the GAR Academic Component, indicating a sufficient amount of reading in the field.</p>	<p>13/14 received a 4 or 5; one student received a 2.</p>	<p>Overall, the GARs were of limited value this year because of sporadic student response. The GAR Matrix has been created to make the process more uniform and to allow a quantifiable overview of the entire program. Also, specific numeric benchmarks are being explored to help define subjective terms like "sufficient".</p>
<p>100% of students will receive a 3 or higher on the GAR Creative Component, indicating sufficient attendance at public readings, conferences, etc.</p>	<p>100% received a 3 or higher. With monies from the Dore Grants and the fund established by the Director of Freshman Composition, six students attended the AWP Conference in Atlanta.</p>	<p>See comments immediately above.</p> <p>Monies from the Dore Grants and the fund established by the Director of Freshman Composition will continue to be used to help defray costs of attendance at national conferences.</p>
<p>85% of students will have at least one face to face manuscript conference with a published writer each year.</p>	<p>100% of students had at least one face-to--face conference. (Data from GAR).</p>	<p>Visiting writers will continue to be recruited. Because of the longstanding tradition of having at least one poet and one fiction writer come to campus each semester, this benchmark should be easy to continue meeting. Select visiting writers in the future will be asked to complete the Creative Writing Assessment Tool, in effect acting as Outside Evaluators.</p>

**Student Learning Outcome 2:** Graduates formulate and express ideas effectively through oral, written, and/or technological communications in academic and professional environments. For the MFA student, this manifests itself in a number of ways: written critiques of each others' work in workshop; oral critiques of others' work in workshop; written responses to literature in academic classes; oral presentations in academic classes. By far though, the most significant expression, the core of the entire MFA program in fact, is the ongoing creation of works of art in the forms of poetry or fiction.

<u>Expected Level of Achievement</u>	<u>Actual Data From Assessment</u>	<u>Actions/Decisions</u>
<p>100% of students enrolled in workshop (English 671 and 672) will receive an A or a B, indicating all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Sophisticated written criticism</li> <li>*Sophisticated oral discussion</li> <li>*Appropriate quality of submitted creative work</li> </ul> <p>100% of students will receive a 3 or higher on the internal Creative Writing Assessment Tool, averaged out over the entire academic year.</p>	<p>100% of students enrolled in English 671 or 672 received an A or a B.</p> <p>The Creative Writing Assessment Tool had been created and will be implemented beginning fall of 2007.</p>	<p>English 671 and 672 syllabi will be made more uniform and specifically define the inclusion of these components as part of the grading process.</p> <p>Using the Creative Writing Assessment Tool, the professors of English 671 and 672 will score the fiction and poetry produced by the students on a scale from 1 (unacceptable) to 5 (ready for submission). Future benchmarks tied directly to level of the student are currently being considered. (It may be appropriate to hold more advanced students to higher standards. Conceivably, first year students should earn a 3.5; second year 4.0; third year 4.5).</p>
<p>100% of students who have face to face conferences will receive a 3 or higher on the external Creative Writing Assessment, scored by select visiting writers.</p>	<p>The Creative Writing Assessment Tool has been created and will be implemented beginning fall of 2007.</p>	<p>At least once each academic year, a visiting poet and a visiting fiction writer will be asked to apply the Creative Writing Assessment Tool. This will be in addition to the writer's usual critique of the manuscript, and extra payment may be appropriate. The actual scores will be kept confidential and will allow the Program Director an opportunity to compare internal/external evaluation. Specific feedback for the improvement of the program as a whole will also be solicited.</p>
<p>100% of submitted theses will pass and be successfully defended.</p>	<p>Of the three theses submitted this year, three passed and were successfully defended.</p>	<p>After several years of a new process being revamped, the theses defenses were exceptional this year. The fiction component has implemented a mandatory "thesis progress report" due by the end of the second year; this may benefit the poetry component as well.</p>

<p>100% of students will read their work publicly as part of the graduation process.</p> <p>100% of students will receive a 3 or higher on the GAR Academic component, indicating a sufficient number of written papers and oral presentations as determined by the major professor.</p> <p>75% of MFA graduates will have published their work within three years of graduation.</p> <p>100% of graduating students will reply “excellent” (the highest option) when asked for an overall assessment of the Creative Writing Department.</p> <p>100% of graduating students will reply “significant” or “tremendous” when asked to assess the degree to which their writing has improved.</p>	<p>100% of those earning the MFA took part in the Graduate Reading on Friday, May 11.</p> <p>13 of 14 received a 4 or a 5; one student received a 2.</p> <p>This data will be collected via an alumni survey.</p> <p>100% responded “excellent” on this, question 16 of the graduate survey.</p> <p>100% responded “tremendous” to this, question 27 of the graduate survey.</p>	<p>The Program Director wishes to investigate the possibility of holding more readings prior to the graduate reading. Given the specificity of the new GAR Matrix, the benefits of benchmarking all student readings is being considered.</p> <p>Overall, the GARs were of limited value this year because of sporadic student response. The GAR Matrix has been created to make the process more uniform and to allow a quantifiable overview of the entire program. Specific benchmarks are being explored to help define subjective terms like “sufficient.”</p> <p>Implementation of Alumni Survey will begin in spring 2008. Each spring, the Program Director will contact the graduating class from three years previous in order to ascertain levels of accomplishment and to seek constructive feedback for improvements to the program.</p> <p>No action taken.</p> <p>No action taken.</p>
--	--	---



**Student Learning Outcome 3:** Graduates analyze the global community to make sound judgments in academic and professional environments. For the MFA student, the global community encompasses several realms: world literature (creative works produced outside of the United States, but especially by non-English writers), the publishing industry, and the academic community.

<u>Expected Level of Achievement</u>	<u>Actual Data From Assessment</u>	<u>Actions/Decisions</u>
<p>100% of enrolled MFA students will be members of AWP, allowing them access to information dealing with global literary movements and trends in publishing.</p>	<p>Professional memberships to be included on GAR Matrix Will be reported spring 2008.</p>	<p>Include on GAR Matrix</p>
<p>75% of students will attend at least one regional or national conference.</p>	<p>NA. To be included on McNeese specific program exit survey.</p>	<p>Include on McNeese specific program exit survey.</p>
<p>100% of students will contribute to the local community through the acts of service component of Professional Endeavors.</p>	<p>NA. To be included on McNeese specific program exit survey.</p>	<p>Include in Student Learner Outcomes for Professional Endeavors.</p>
<p>Before graduating, 100% of MFA students will be enrolled in a class that includes world literature.</p>	<p>First year of implementation. Will be assessed in spring 2008.</p>	<p>Include on McNeese specific program survey. All graduate syllabi may need to note inclusion of world literature to help facilitate this SLO. In addition, since the MFA major professors will be reviewing the students' annual reading via the GAR, appropriate diversity and depth will be encouraged.</p>
<p>Before graduating, 100% of MFA students will take part in at least one seminar conducted by an expert from the publishing industry, such as an agent or editor.</p>	<p>First year of implementation. Will be assessed in spring 2008.</p>	<p>Program Director will be certain to invite publishing experts to campus at least one in each three year cycle. Literary agent Warren Frazier has been scheduled to give a publishing seminar in October, 2007.</p>

**Student Learning Outcome 4:** Graduates will receive training to assist in their career plans. Students earning their MFA go on to teach, work as editors, serve as literary agents, or continue their education at the PhD level. Given the many variables in the field of publishing and the job market for teachers, it must be conceded that not all will succeed, but we must strive to prepare them to maximize their chances. It should also be noted that unlike many other fields of study, the MFA degree is sought by some students solely for personal growth and satisfaction. This will be taken into account with the surveys.

<u>Expected Level of Achievement</u>	<u>Actual Data From Assessment</u>	<u>Actions/Decisions</u>
<p>100% of enrolled students will receive a B or better in English 677, Seminar in Freshman Teaching.</p>	<p>100% received a B or better in English 677.</p>	<p>No action taken.</p>
<p>100% of teaching assistants will respond “good” or “excellent” to question 30 on the Exit Survey (If you served as a teaching assistant, please rate your experience. How would you rank the training program provided?)</p>	<p>Of the three graduating MFA students, one responded “somewhat inadequate,” one “excellent”, and one “good.”</p>	<p>Because of the missed benchmark as well as feedback from the class of 2007, a more rigorous orientation program will be implemented in August. Expectations of the teaching assistants will be a focus of the new material.</p>
<p>100% of graduating students will respond “good” or “excellent” when asked about the preparation received to compete in the academic job market. (Question 33 on the Exit Survey)</p>	<p>Of the three graduating students, one responded “somewhat inadequate” and two responded “good,” though one student added the parenthetical “outside class.”</p>	<p>In response to this feedback, as well as feedback from the class of 2006, it seems clear that more must be done to ready our graduates for the job market. This effort will be led by a new course called Professional Endeavors. Please see the summary at the beginning of this report for a more thorough discussion.</p>
<p>75% of students will report success with their career plans on the Alumni Survey.</p>	<p>Not yet available</p>	<p>Include on Alumni Survey.</p>
<p>100% of students will receive a B or better in Professional Endeavors.</p>	<p>Not yet available.</p>	<p>See Summary for a discussion of the new class, Professional Endeavors.</p>
<p>100% will receive a 3 (indicating Proficient) on the Spring Graduate Teaching Assistant Assessment, as assigned by the Director of Freshman Composition. The Director regularly reviews’ graded assignments, conducts classroom observations, and holds exit interviews as part of this assessment.</p>	<p>Thirteen of sixteen received a 3, three received a 2 (indicating Needs Improvement) and one received a 1 for Unacceptable. This last student is leaving the program and 2 of the 3 in the second category were first year students.</p>	<p>The benchmark itself may be too ambitious, but one year’s data is insufficient for lowering expectations. In response though, a more rigorous orientation is planned for the fall, emphasizing the role of the teaching assistant. Also, at the recommendation of the Director of Freshman Composition, a teaching statement will be required as part of the application process for teaching assistants in the MFA program.</p>

## Creative Writing Assessment Tool

Note to Visiting Writers: The McNeese MFA Program in Creative Writing recognizes that, given the very nature of poetry and fiction, useful criticism for the apprentice writer must be precise and textually specific. Open discussion in the workshop environment and marginal comments on the actual text are helpful, augmented by written critiques and private consultation with thoughtful readers such as yourself. This rubric is designed to reflect this spectrum of subjective responses in a way that will be both accurate and quantitative. It is intended to facilitate tracking of one student's progress and the efforts of the program as a whole. *After you have conducted your critique in whatever manner you deem appropriate*, please take a moment to circle the level that most closely corresponds with your estimate of the work's overall artistic merit. This information will be kept confidential.

Any universal criticism of the work you've read or thoughts on improving our program at McNeese would be greatly appreciated.

Name of Student:

Date:

Title of work/portfolio:

Level:                                    1            2            3            4            5

Evaluator:

### Level 5– Draft with Exceptional Promise

- \*Produces a unique and fully satisfying artistic experience
- \*Suggests a sophisticated aesthetic
- \*Demonstrates mastery of the elements of fiction or poetry
- \*Ready for inclusion in graduate thesis or for submission to appropriate publication outlets

### Level 4– Draft with Significant Promise

- \*Produces a strong artistic experience with only minor distractions
- \*Suggests a mature aesthetic
- \*Demonstrates skilled use of the elements of fiction or poetry
- \*With a focused revision, the work is likely to be ready for inclusion in graduate thesis or submission to appropriate publication outlets

### Level 3–Standard Workshop Draft

- \*Produces an artistic experience, albeit an uneven one, marked by underdeveloped aspects of the text or occasional distractions
- \*Demonstrates fundamentally sound understanding of the elements of fiction or poetry
- \*Possesses the potential to be included in thesis or for submission for publication, but only with substantial revision (one major aspect of the text or several minor ones)

### Level 2-Developing Workshop Draft

- \*Produces brief but isolated artistic experiences, but not a unified organic one, due to underdeveloped aspects of the text, significant distractions, or a flaw in conception
- \*Demonstrates an immature understanding of some elements of fiction or poetry
- \*Possesses questionable potential to be included in thesis or submitted for publication.

### Level 1- Failing Workshop Draft

- \*Does not produce an artistic experience due to undeveloped aspects of the text, widespread distractions or a fatal flaw in conception or execution
- \*Does not demonstrate an appropriate awareness of the elements of fiction or poetry
- \*Does not possess potential to be included in thesis or submitted for publication

## GAR MATRIX

Name:

Date of Submission:

Semesters covered:

The Graduate Activity Report is an assessment tool to help us quantify the work you do and to improve the quality of our program. Please fill out this matrix, then attach specific documentation substantiating these figures. It would be a great help if you could correspond this documentation with the number of the question. For example, on a subsequent page beneath 1., list the titles and dates of your submissions if possible; or for your face-to-face conferences, you might note the name of the writer and the date, etc.

This report is due each May at the penultimate meeting of workshop; include activity from the preceding summer, fall, and spring semester.

1. How many stories/poems did you submit to workshop?	
2. How many stories/poems did you critique as part of workshop?	
3. How many face-to-face conferences with visiting writers did you have?	
4. How many readings of creative work did you attend?	
5. How many regional or national conferences did you attend?	
6. How many regional or national conferences did you participate in as a presenter?	
7. In your academic classes, how many papers did you write?	
8. In your academic classes, how many oral presentations did you give?	
9. How many submissions of your poems/short stories have you made to contests or for publication?	
10. How many stories/poems have you published?	
11. How many seminars with industry professionals (agents or editors) did you attend?	
12. How many grants, awards, or honors did you receive?	
13. How many public readings of your work did you give?	
14. Including your academic course work, how many books in your field did you read?	
15. How many journals and or literary magazines do you read regularly?	
16. How many professional organizations do you hold membership in?	
17. How many academic papers did you submit for publication or acceptance at a conference?	
18. How many committees did you serve on?	
19. How many service projects did you participate in as a recognized member of the MFA program?	

McNeese MFA Alumni Survey (to be mailed or emailed to alumni in the spring three years after their graduation.)

When you graduated from McNeese, which of the following were among your goals?

To continue improving my art

To publish my creative work

To continue my studies in an academic setting

To work as a publishing professional (agent, editor, etc)

To work as an educator

Since graduation, have you continued to write?

Since graduation, have you published any creative work or had any accepted for publication?

Since graduation, have you continued your studies in an academic setting?

Since graduation, have you worked in the publishing industry?

Since graduation, have you worked as an educator?

Since graduation, have you participated in any community service related to creative writing or as a recognized alumnus of McNeese?

Please include any specific comments you feel might help up improve the program here at McNeese.

McNeese MFA Exit Survey Addendum (to be added to current Exit Survey)

Did you attend at least one regional or national conference while studying at McNeese?

If so, was it funded by the department or program in any way?

Did you take at least one class which included literature produced outside of America?

Did you attend at least one seminar with an industry professional?

Have you participated in any community service related to creative writing or as a recognized member of the MFA program?