

TOPIC: PROPOSAL TO OFFER MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN CREATIVE WRITING AT WESTERN STATE COLLEGE

PREPARED BY: HEATHER DELANGE

I. SUMMARY

This agenda item requests approval for Western State College to offer a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. The proposed program complements the undergraduate liberal arts offerings; is one of two graduate programs approved by the Trustees; and is a response to regional needs.

II. BACKGROUND

The following is summarized from Western State College's proposal for the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing.

The program will use a "low-residency" format – that is, students will engage in studies in two ways: (1) on-campus intensive seminars and workshops for two weeks during three consecutive summers, and (2) a plan of non-residency study requiring four academic semesters, during each of which the student works on-to-one with respective faculty mentors.

When fully phased in, the MFA will offer students three concentrations and a certificate:

- Commercial Writing,
- Poetry with an Emphasis in Formal Verse,
- Screenwriting, and
- Publishing Certificate (Phase II).

ROLE AND MISSION SUPPORT

The Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing supports the role and mission of Western State College. The statutory mission states:

There is hereby established a university at Gunnison, which shall be known as Western state college of Colorado. Western state college of Colorado shall be a general baccalaureate institution with moderately selective admission standards. Western state college of Colorado shall offer undergraduate liberal arts and sciences, teacher preparation, and business degree programs and a limited number of graduate programs. Western state college of Colorado shall also serve as a regional education provider. C.R.S. 23-56-10.

EVIDENCE OF NEED/DEMAND

Western State College plans to pilot 18 students across the three Phase I concentrations. In the second year, Western will admit a maximum of 27 students – nine in each of the three concentrations, which is the upper enrollment target for the ongoing program. Because the program is self-funding, Western's entry into the MFA arena is scalable and flexible.

The Commercial Fiction concentration is consistent with the values Western teaches about fiction in its undergraduate curriculum. The popularity of writing conferences and workshops across the country attests to the hunger authors have for this arena of writing. The nearby Colorado Springs' annual Pike's Peak Writers Conference, which has a focus on popular fiction, consistently draws over a thousand participants each spring.

The Poetry with an Emphasis in Formal Verse concentration addresses a trend over the past two decades of increasing interest in the study of poetic form. Western's undergraduate creative writing emphasis has embraced the study of form already and many other low-residency MFAs have begun to offer seminars of this kind of poetry, but none have focused on formal poetry as a concentration.

The Screenwriting concentration complements and continues the undergraduate offerings. Public demand is high for education in this field. Only five current low-residency MFAs in the country offer scriptwriting.

The Publishing Certificate addresses the nationwide recognition among MFA programs that writers receive little or nothing in the way of training for the realities of the publishing world. Only three MFA programs in the country offer such a component.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

The low-residency format allows the MFA to function as a self-funding program: The College will contract faculty to participate per each enrolled student, and these faculty will only be required to be on campus physically during the two-week summer intensive workshops. The need for 0.875 FTE is predicted for the administration of the program during the first year, and 1.25 FTE for the second and subsequent years of the program.

III. STAFF ANALYSIS

DHE staff has collaborated with the institution on building a framework to assist in determining the fit of the program with the statutory role and mission. Within the framework, variables have

been discussed to ensure the centrality of institutional role and mission statements. Western State College has provided DHE with the following data requested by staff in order to make such a determination.

- 1) Number of CCHE authorized degree programs by undergraduate/graduate: 23/1*
- 2) Number of two-digit Classification of Instruction Programs (CIP) categories of undergraduate/graduate programs: 15/1*
- 3) Total instructional costs for undergraduate/graduate: \$11.9 million/\$0*
- 4) Total tuition/fee revenue by undergraduate/graduate: \$14.6 million/\$0*
- 5) Fall and Spring FTE enrollment undergraduate/graduate: 2,062/0*
- 6) Fall and Spring Student Credit Hours by undergraduate/graduate: 61,860/0*
- 7) The number of degrees awarded by undergraduate/graduate 347/0*
- 8) The number of Masters degrees awarded by 2 number CIP code: 0*

*Western State College's MA in Education was approved by CCHE in July 2009 and will not begin instruction until Summer 2010.

Additionally, Western State College demonstrated that the MFA in Creative Writing will serve, directly or indirectly, an unmet need in the region that will advance the College's role and mission as a regional education provider. The format of the program was chosen to best accommodate individuals who do not live in Gunnison. Students will go to Gunnison for two weeks of conference sessions and coursework during the summer, then complete coursework during the fall and spring terms online.

The addition of the program will not have any effect, directly or indirectly, on the College's role and mission as a general baccalaureate institution. Rather, it is expected that increased involvement of faculty in creative writing will contribute to, not detract from, undergraduate teaching and learning.

Pursuant to Colorado Revised Statutes 23-5-129 (6)(b), department staff finds that the proposed program fits the centrality of the institution's statutory role and mission.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Department staff recommend that the Commission approve the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing degree submitted by Western State College.

VI. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Copies of all relevant statute and policy are on file in the Academic Affairs Office.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

C.R.S. §23-5-129(6)(b)