

FACULTY HANDBOOK



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VERMONT COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

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MFA IN WRITING/MFA IN WRITING FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG ADULTS FACULTY HANDBOOK

Note: In addition, all faculty must be familiar with and abide by all policies outlined in the Vermont College of Fine Arts Student Handbook, provided to faculty as a separate document and posted on the VCFA website, in addition to any VCFA policies housed on the VCFA website that are applicable to faculty. The College Policy Library is located at www.vermontcollege.edu/about/administration.

The following information applies to both the MFA in Writing Program and the MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults Program, unless noted otherwise.

FACULTY DEFINITION

1. Core Faculty: Faculty are eligible to join the Core Faculty of the MFA in Writing Program after teaching as Visiting Faculty for three semesters within a four-year period. Faculty are eligible to join the Core Faculty of the MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults Program after teaching as Visiting Faculty for three consecutive semesters; faculty may petition to waive the requirement that these semesters be consecutive. The approval process for Core Faculty is outlined in the Faculty Review and Retention section. Core Faculty members have the expectation but not a guarantee of ongoing employment.
2. Visiting Faculty: Visiting Faculty are those writers hired to teach for one-semester only. There is no explicit or implied expectation of ongoing employment beyond the term of hire.
3. Distinguished Core Faculty (MFA in Writing Program only): Distinguished Core Faculty members are writers of significant achievement and substantial national reputation who teach a reduced load and/or receive a higher salary. Although they are hired as Core Faculty members, with an expectation but not a guarantee of ongoing employment, they do not receive voting and other rights until they have taught three semesters within a four-year period.
4. Distinguished Visiting Faculty members (MFA in Writing Program only) are writers of significant achievement and substantial national reputation who teach a specially designed curriculum at residency and receive a higher residency stipend for such work. They do not teach individual students during the semester. Although they are hired as Faculty Members, there is no explicit or implied expectation of ongoing employment beyond the term of hire. The term of hire is variable, but is generally offered for at least two residencies within a two year period, renewable after the first residency has been taught.

FACULTY HIRING PROCESS

It is the responsibility of the Faculty Chair, in consultation with the Program Director and the Faculty Advisory Committee to interview and recommend the hiring of faculty whose qualifications in terms of degrees held, teaching experience and expertise, and demonstration of creative and professional activity and excellence are in keeping with the high level of accomplishment of current faculty. Program recommendations for hiring are made to the Academic Dean for review and final approval and the Program Director is responsible for all final contractual arrangements for new hires.

The Program will advertise nationally on at least an annual basis for applications for potential positions. Also, faculty members may nominate individuals for consideration for future openings.

When a faculty opening occurs, the Faculty Chair and the Faculty Advisory Committee or a designated hiring subcommittee in consultation with the Program Director, will review the nominations and applications and assess the potential faculty using the following criteria holistically, in no particular order:

1. Genre(s) in which a faculty member is needed (the ability to teach more than one genre—i.e., teaching experience and book publications in at least two genres—is desirable);
2. Teaching experience and effectiveness;
3. Publications and other professional activities (at least one book in each genre the applicant would teach) are required for MFA in Writing faculty; MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults faculty are required to have expertise in the teaching of a genre, as evidenced in their commentary on a sample packet provided as part of the interview process as well as a substantive body of work in the field of children's literature.
4. Gender, ethnic and aesthetic diversity;
5. National reputation;
6. Collegiality;
7. Likelihood of succeeding in a low-residency model.

Upon narrowing the field to a limited number of possible candidates, a committee composed of the Program Director, the Faculty Chair, and member(s) of the Faculty Advisory Committee or Core Faculty hiring subcommittee appointed by the Faculty Chair will conduct interviews with each candidate. For positions in the MFWC&YA program, candidates are asked as part of the interview process to read and comment on sample packets to ensure their compatibility with program standards. Following interviews, the Faculty Chair, the Faculty Advisory Committee or hiring subcommittee, and the Program Director will discuss the candidates, then the Chair and the Faculty Advisory Committee will come to a consensus or vote on a recommendation. The recommendation for hiring will be forwarded through the Program Director to the Academic Dean for approval, prior to the offer of a position.

It should be noted that all faculty except for Distinguished Core Faculty are initially hired as Visiting Faculty.

FACULTY TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS

(MFA in Writing) A faculty member is eligible to teach a genre other than the genre he/she was hired to teach only if he/she has published at least one book in the genre.

An exception to the above policy will be made only if a third- or fourth-semester student petitions the Program Director and Faculty Advisory Committee to work with a faculty advisor outside of his/her

genre and the Program Director, Faculty Advisory Committee and the faculty advisor approve the petition.

(MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults) In the MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults Program, all faculty are expected to have familiarity with and to be willing to teach in all genres both during residency workshops and during the semester with individual students. Genres include picture books, early readers and chapter books, middle grade and young adult novels, non-fiction and poetry. It is not necessary that faculty be published in every genre.

FACULTY SEMESTER RESPONSIBILITIES

Faculty are expected to participate fully and actively in the entire ten-day residency period at the beginning of each contracted semester, unless otherwise contracted by the program. Such participation includes:

- reading student workshop manuscripts as submitted to the faculty member by the MFA office prior to, or at the beginning of, the residency period;
- arrival on campus one day before the residency begins for faculty meetings and orientation;
- conducting workshops during the residency;
- conducting end-of-semester reviews with individual students, unless conducted via phone at the end of the semester, but before the residency begins;
- meeting individually with students for conferences about their semester study plans and program progress;
- giving a public reading at every residency and a lecture at every residency unless exempt;
- remaining accessible to students, other faculty and visiting writers for informal exchange;
- offering an oral presentation via faculty interviews of preferred methods of working during the succeeding semester;
- evaluating lectures presented by graduating students;
- introducing graduating students at public readings;
- delivery to the MFA office of all evaluation materials before the end of the residency unless otherwise specified.

During the succeeding nonresident semester, each faculty member is normally responsible for supervision of five student projects. Supervision includes willingness to help students plan their projects during the residency, as well as frequent and thorough exchange through correspondence and dialogue. Such correspondence will include:

- an exchange with each student at least once every three to four weeks;
- thorough and detailed response to student letters and submitted creative and critical work within a week of receipt of packets; if, because of mitigating circumstances, that is not possible,

faculty must alert students as to when they will be receiving the response;

- dialogue with the student about his/her reading, work habits, questions of form and aesthetics, etc.
- a phone conversation at mid-term with advisees upon request;
- suggestions for reading, revision and any other appropriate directions for the study project;

Faculty are required to participate in various evaluative activities with their students. Such evaluation will include:

- a brief written report of the student's performance, due in the Program office at mid-semester;
- a written evaluation of the student's performance, including a description of the student's semester project and an assessment of the quality of the student's work and progress, due in the Program office at the end-of-semester date; this evaluation will substantiate a recommendation for or against degree candidacy, the award of a semester's credit, and/or the award of the degree;
- a written evaluation of a student's graduating lecture, either his/her own student or otherwise as assigned;

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

In addition, Faculty will automatically become members of the Faculty Committee once they become Core Faculty. Responsibilities of the Faculty Committee include the following:

- recommending the acceptance of new students into the Program through evaluation of application manuscripts and essays, with additional appropriate and acceptable compensation for each application manuscript reviewed;
- participating in end-of-first-year and dual-genre student reviews;
- come to a consensus or vote on major academic & policy issues presented by the Faculty Advisory Committee;
- electing representatives to serve on the Faculty Advisory Committee and the College's Academic Council;
- informing the Faculty Advisory Committee of issues, concerns, and proposals to bring to the Faculty Chair and Program Director for discussion;
- (MFA in Writing): nominating student work to the Faculty Advisory Committee and Program Director for annual awards and anthologies of student writing;
- (MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults): serve on committees to select winners for various scholarships and awards given to students.

MFA FACULTY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Faculty Committee will elect representatives to serve on the Faculty Advisory Committee for three semester terms.

1. Purpose: To represent the interests of the MFA Faculty to the Faculty Chair, the Program Director, and the College; to facilitate communication between the MFA Faculty and the College; to formulate, in conjunction with the Faculty Chair and Program Director, academic and policy proposals for discussion and come to a consensus or vote on a recommendation by the MFA Faculty; to participate, in conjunction with the Faculty Chair and Program Director, in any decision or recommendation, as appropriate, involving curriculum, Program policy, hiring, firing, censure, admission, denial of academic credit, suspension, probation, expulsion, petition, appeal or any other matter with which the committee might be charged.

2. Areas of Responsibility: The Faculty Advisory Committee is empowered to come to a consensus or vote on a recommendation on matters relating to the following subjects, as well as on other matters relating to academic and policy decisions that may come under its scrutiny:

- admissions
- academic standards and requirements
- the future of the program
- the hiring, firing, and censuring of faculty
- student affairs
- selection of visiting writers and recommendation of graduate assistants for each residency
- selection of the MFA in Writing Program's nominees for various annual awards and anthologies for MFA students
- reviewing and recommending on petitions for acceleration and transfer credit
- any other academic affairs that affect the curriculum and residency programs for the degree

3. Membership: Faculty must be Core Faculty to be eligible to serve on the Faculty Advisory Committee. Members may not immediately succeed themselves. Elections will take place as needed to replace members who rotate off the committee, go on leave, or leave the program. Faculty Advisory Committee members taking a leave of absence may choose to remain on the Committee.

a. The MFA in Writing Faculty Advisory Committee will consist of two poets, two fiction writers, and two creative nonfiction writers, to be elected from the Core Faculty at large. Each Core Faculty member may vote for any or all candidates for open positions regardless of whether he or she teaches in the particular genre for which a representative is being chosen. In order that there is continuity from one committee to the next, for the initial election one writer from each of the three genres will be elected for two years and one writer from each of the three genres will be elected for one year. In subsequent elections, each member will be elected to serve a three-semester term. If the Program's elected representative to the College's Academic Council is not currently a member of the Faculty Advisory Committee, he/she will serve on the Committee with voice but not vote.

b. The MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults Faculty Advisory Committee will consist of three people, to be elected from the faculty at large. In order that there be continuity from one committee to the next, for the initial election one person will be elected for three years; another for two years, and a final person for one year. In

subsequent elections, each member will be elected to serve a three-semester term.

4. Procedures: The Faculty Advisory Committee will meet each residency before the first general faculty meeting to discuss with the Faculty Chair and Program Director those concerns that have been determined to be the immediate priorities of the Faculty. These will then form part of the agenda for the succeeding faculty meeting(s) and Faculty Advisory Committee meetings.

To further efforts of the Faculty Advisory Committee to communicate and cooperate with the administration of the College, as well as to become better informed about the larger context in which the Program operates, a meeting of the Faculty Advisory Committee with the Academic Dean will be scheduled during each residency.

FACULTY CHAIR

The Faculty will elect a Faculty Chair for a three-year term. Faculty Chairs may not immediately succeed themselves. As head of the Faculty Advisory Committee, the Faculty Chair works in collaboration with the Program Director on the following areas of academic responsibility and supports the Program Director, as needed, in other areas of program oversight as required by the College:

- serve as one of the Program's representatives on the College's Academic Council;
- oversee the work of the Faculty Advisory Committee;
- oversee the Faculty Advisory Committee's discussion and vote on any proposal, petition, appeal or probation process with which it may be charged;
- oversee the Faculty Advisory Committee's or hiring subcommittee's discussion and consensus or vote on the election of new faculty for hiring recommendations to the Academic Dean;
- oversee the Faculty Advisory Committee's discussion on the selection of visiting writers and recommendation of graduate assistants;
- oversee the Faculty Advisory Committee's discussion and consensus or vote on a recommendation of faculty dismissal and censure;
- act as final arbiter in any recommendation with which the Faculty Advisory Committee is charged;
- oversee and coordinate the work of faculty, including the apportionment of teaching assignments and advising responsibilities;
- maintain oversight of the academic components of Program residencies, including workshops, lectures, and panel discussions;
- chair, or co-chair with the Program Director, the Faculty and Faculty Advisory Committee meetings at each residency;

- act as final arbiter for admission applications requiring an additional opinion;
- represent, in conjunction with the Program Director, the Program to prospective students when needed;
- address any issues that arise out of the Program Director's review of students' academic progress;
- mediate and resolve major student/faculty issues throughout the semester and during the residency;
- chair, or co-chair with the Program Director, student orientation sessions as needed;
- conduct the Graduation Ceremony at the end of each residency;
- communicate and meet with College administration as needed in regards to relevant Program issues;
- travel to major College functions that require the presence of a Faculty Chair;
- serve, when required, as Program representative at appropriate internal and external functions;
- maintain a highly visible national and international profile in literary/writing program venues.

FACULTY REVIEW AND RETENTION

Faculty retention decisions will be made by the Faculty Chair and the Faculty Advisory Committee in consultation with the Program Director. Traditionally, seniority has been a factor in decisions to retain faculty. This will continue to be the case, but a balanced, holistic approach to retention decisions will always be taken and decisions will ultimately be based upon what is best for the Program and the College. The three primary factors we will consider are teaching effectiveness, publications and other professional activities, and seniority, but we will also take into account our needs in terms of genre, gender balance, and cultural and curricular diversity as well as service to the Program and/or College, national reputation, and collegiality. See the sections "Determination of Seniority," "Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness," and "Evaluation of Publications and Professional Activities" below for criteria on which those factors will be evaluated.

1. VISITING FACULTY REVIEW PROCESS –

At the end of the first semester taught by a Visiting Faculty member, the Faculty Chair and Program Director will examine the student evaluations of his/her semester work, workshop, lecture, and reading and determine whether he/she should be invited back to teach a second semester as a Visiting Faculty member. If the Faculty Chair and the Program Director do not agree, the Faculty Advisory Committee will examine the faculty member's evaluations. A recommendation to retain or not will be sent to the Dean for the final decision. If retained, the same procedure will follow his/her second semester as a Visiting Faculty.

A Visiting Faculty may petition the Faculty Advisory Committee to be considered for Core Faculty status by advising the Faculty Chair and Program Director at any time after having taught three semesters. If a Visiting Faculty has not petitioned after having taught five

semesters, the Faculty Advisory Committee will review the individual for Core Faculty status at that time.

The Faculty Advisory Committee review will consist of an evaluation of the Visiting Faculty's teaching to date, including workshops, lectures, general interaction with students and faculty at residency, as well as semester exchanges with advisees. In addition, they will request evaluations from the Program Director, the faculty member's previous workshop co-leaders, and from the faculty as a whole. The faculty member being evaluated may also submit a letter and any other supporting materials he/she desires the Faculty Chair and the Faculty Advisory Committee to take into consideration. Upon completing the review, the Faculty Advisory Committee will come to a consensus or vote on the individual's entry to the Core Faculty, and the Visiting Faculty will be invited to return only if he or she is approved for Core Faculty. This recommendation will be forwarded to the Academic Dean for final approval. In some cases, however, the Faculty Chair and Faculty Advisory Committee may require the faculty member to continue for an additional semester as Visiting Faculty to address whatever concerns they may have with his/her progress toward the criteria for acceptance into the Core Faculty. It should be noted that even when a faculty member is accepted into the Core Faculty, a semester contract is dependent on enrollment and/or program needs.

2. CORE FACULTY REVIEW PROCESS

Each year the Faculty Chair, Program Director, and the Faculty Advisory Committee will evaluate the performance of one-third of the Core Faculty (including Distinguished Core Faculty for MFA in Writing). The faculty will be evaluated in order of seniority, with the most senior faculty evaluated the first year and the least senior the third year. The Faculty Chair and the Faculty Advisory Committee will examine the student evaluations for each faculty member's semester work, workshops, lectures, and readings for the previous three years. In addition, they will request evaluations from the Program Director, the faculty member's previous workshop co-leaders, and from the faculty as a whole. They will also examine the faculty member's curriculum vitae in order to evaluate his/her publication and professional activity over the previous seven years. Each faculty member being evaluated may also submit a letter and any other supporting materials he/she desires the Faculty Chair and the Faculty Advisory Committee to take into consideration. After examining this information and completing the VCFA Core Faculty Review form, the Faculty Chair, Program Director, and the Faculty Advisory Committees will generally vote or reach a consensus to recommend retention or dismissal. In some cases, however, the Faculty Chair, Program Director, and Faculty Advisory Committee may elect to ask a faculty member to take a leave to address whatever concerns they may have with his/her progress toward the criteria for retention as a member of the Core Faculty. In all cases, the Faculty Chair and Program Director will discuss with each faculty member the various strengths and weaknesses revealed during the evaluation process, and the faculty member will have the opportunity to respond to this feedback.

a. Determination of Seniority:

When considering seniority, we will take into account both the number of semesters a faculty member has taught in the Program and how recently or consistently s/he has taught.

b. Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness:

Teaching effectiveness will be determined primarily by examining student evaluations

of semester work, residency workshops, and lectures. Copies of semester and workshop evaluations will be provided to every faculty member at the conclusion of a semester and a residency. Copies of lecture evaluations will also be provided to a faculty member when those evaluations raise concerns about a faculty member's performance. In addition, performance during residencies may be evaluated through observation of lectures, readings, and other presentations and interactions with students. In measuring a faculty member's teaching effectiveness, we will also take into consideration the relative ease or difficulty of finding a sufficient number of advisees who want to work with him/her, as evidenced by a continuing pattern of high or low numbers of students who list him/her on their Advisor Request Forms. Finally, we will also take into consideration evaluations by the faculty member's peers. At the end of each residency, each faculty member will complete an evaluation of his/her workshop co-leader. As with student evaluations of teachers' performance, these evaluations may be confidential or not. In the case of a confidential evaluation, the Program Director and the Faculty Chair will jointly provide a written synopsis of the evaluation and the faculty member has the option to respond in writing for any official record or file.

It is recommended that faculty retain correspondence with all students for a period of three semesters. The Program office will retain copies of student evaluations, for semester work as well as residency evaluation, for a period of five years.

In instances where a faculty member receives two or more student complaints in a given semester's end-of-semester evaluations, or at least one student complaint in end-of-semester evaluations for three semesters consecutively, or a negative evaluation from a workshop co-leader, or written complaints from two or more students, a review will be conducted by the Faculty Chair and Program Director to investigate the legitimacy of the complaints. The students' names will be blacked out before the review.

It is important to note that there will be no assumption that a complaint has merit. A review process is also a means of support for faculty in instances of an unwarranted complaint.

If there appears to be some legitimacy to the complaints, the Faculty Chair and Program Director will report to the Faculty Advisory Committee who will recommend the following procedure:

The Faculty Chair will draft a letter to the faculty member indicating in detail the complaints and suggest methods for improving teaching performance. During this process, the faculty member will be encouraged to present to the Faculty Chair, Program Director, and the Faculty Advisory Committee any evidence of his or her teaching effectiveness (including packet letters, tape recordings, student and/or faculty workshop evaluations, and the like). After the conclusion of the following semester, the Faculty Chair, Program Director, and the Faculty Advisory Committee will review the relevant student and/or faculty evaluations and make a recommendation on retention.

In instances where there is deemed insufficient merit to a student or faculty complaint, a letter of support, if necessary, will be written in response to the complaint and one copy will be given to the complainant and another will be placed in the faculty member's file.

In addition, a faculty member also may request a review of his or her teaching performance at any time.

c. Evaluation of Professional Activities and Publications:

Faculty review of professional activity and publications will use, as a rough guideline, the publication requirements provided by the National Endowment for the Arts. Since there is often a considerable period of time between acceptance and publication, we will also consider pending contracts for publication as evidence of ongoing professional activity.

Faculty members will submit an updated vita or list of recent publications and other professional activities prior to a review or as otherwise requested by the program or College. The Faculty Chair and Program Director will review these documents.

The NEA guidelines state that, in a seven-year period, it is expected that a writer will fulfill one of the following:

In fiction:

At least five different short stories, works of short fiction, or excerpts from novels in two or more nationally-recognized literary journals, anthologies, or publications which regularly include fiction as a portion of their format; or a volume of short fiction; or a novel or novella; or two picture books; or some combination of the above.

In creative nonfiction:

At least five different creative essays (such as personal essays, memoirs, etc.) in two or more nationally-recognized literary journals, anthologies, or publications; or a volume of creative nonfiction.

In poetry:

A volume of 48 or more pages of poetry; or twenty or more different poems or pages of poetry in five or more nationally-recognized literary journals, anthologies, or publications which regularly include poetry as a portion of their format. Up to 16 poems may be in a single volume of poetry of fewer than 48 pages. This volume, however, may count as only one of the required five places of publication.

In some instances, comparable work in editing, reviewing, writing about literary craft, papers presented at conferences, and performance will be considered the equivalent of meeting some or all of the applicable guidelines above.

In the case of a faculty member falling below the standards of publication and/or professional activity, the Faculty Chair and Program Director will report to the Faculty Advisory Committee who will recommend the following procedure:

That the Faculty Chair and Program Director will first inform the faculty member that it appears s/he is falling below the standards set by the faculty for itself and encourage the faculty member to seek more professional exposure. The Faculty Chair and Program Director should, in this conversation, discuss with the faculty member his or her publishing plans, ongoing projects and plans for other kinds of professional activities.

At the end of the second semester following this initial conversation, the Faculty Chair, Program Director, and the Faculty Advisory Committee will review the faculty member's progress and make a recommendation on retention to the Academic Dean.

The publication criteria should not be construed as a strict guideline. However, if faculty members are not publishing, the program's reputation diminishes. Furthermore, it is the reasonable expectation of students in the program that the faculty is actively engaged in publication and/or professional activities.

It is important to note that a faculty member's reputation as a writer is a major reason students are drawn to the program, the faculty member's reputation as a teacher is of even greater importance. While a wait-and-see attitude might be employed in cases of publication and other professional activities, the same will not be the case with teaching deficiencies.

3. DISTINGUISHED VISITING FACULTY REVIEW PROCESS (MFA in Writing only)

At the end of the first residency taught by a Distinguished Visiting Faculty, the Faculty Chair and Program Director will examine the student evaluations of his/her residency work, including workshop, lecture, reading, classes and the general interaction with students and faculty to determine whether he/she should be invited back to teach a second residency as a Distinguished Visiting Faculty member.

4. DISTINGUISHED CORE FACULTY REVIEW PROCESS (MFA in Writing only)

Distinguished Core Faculty will be reviewed and evaluated on the same basis as regular Core Faculty.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

VCFA protects the right of faculty members to freedom of inquiry, thought, expression, publication and peaceable assembly. Faculty may not be penalized by VCFA for expressions of opinion or associations in their private or civic capacity. They should, however, remember that the public may judge VCFA by their words and make a reasonable effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.

Furthermore, VCFA ensures that individual faculty members retain ownership rights to the creative and scholarly material they present at residencies. VCFA is entitled, with permission of the faculty member, to reproduce and distribute or sell such material only to its faculty, alumni, current students, and potential students.

Vermont College of Fine Arts reserves the right to change any provision, requirement, statement of policy or procedure, service or facility detailed in this handbook