

# THE RAINIER WRITING WORKSHOP

## MFA @ PLU

### Three-Year Overview

**ENGL 504: Residency 1.** Participants and faculty gather on the PLU campus for the intensive 10-day residency. The residency schedule consists of workshops, lectures, classes, and other immersive activities. During the residency, each participant will be paired with a mentor for the following mentorship year. The participant and mentor will begin an initial discussion about the coming year: goals for the participant's work, expectations on both sides, possible course of study and readings, and logistical details for the exchanges, including methods and deadlines.

**ENGL 511: First Year Mentorship.** The participant is expected to submit 8 mailings to the mentor during the year. The emphasis—whether on ongoing projects or new and exploratory work—will be determined by the participant and mentor. There will be a strong emphasis on critical reading and writing, with the texts to be determined by the mentor and participant. Participants are expected to read at least 3 books or substantial texts per mailing. During the year, the participant is expected to produce approximately 40 pages total of critical writing, usually in the form of critical response papers.

The three-year span of the RWW is meant to encourage both deepening and broadening for the participant over the course of the three years. With the guidance of each mentor, the participant in his or her first year can try out new genres, or new possibilities and techniques within the participant's main genre. The basic goals for the year include the production of new work, renewed energy, and a growing sense of direction. Near the end of the year, the participant should take stock of what has happened during the year, and articulate some interests or directions that he or she would like to focus on for the next year's mentorship and for the eventual thesis year.

Another important goal for the year is to gain facility in the tasks associated with the critical component of the program. The critical response papers should be discussed in detail with the mentor, especially in regards to each mentor's expectations and each participant's understanding of the objectives that the critical response papers are meant to address. Initially, some participants will be more comfortable with this analytical component than others. The vital point is that all participants should find the critical work instrumental to the progress of his or her own creative work. The response papers may range from the formal and scholarly to the personal and idiosyncratic, but they should always be aware of how the critical work is in dialogue with the creative work.

**ENGL 505: Residency 2.** In addition to the regular offerings of the residency, an info session detailing the Outside Experience component of the program will be held. This session is intended for participants entering their second year.

**ENGL 512: Second Year Mentorship.** The participant is expected to submit 5 mailings to the mentor during the year. The emphasis will be on furthering the creative work begun in the first year, with an eye towards the eventual Creative Thesis of the thesis year; implementing the Outside Experience; and doing substantial preparation for the Critical Paper, which is due in the fall of the thesis year. A total of 25 pages of critical writing is expected for the year, some of which can be initial drafts for the Critical Paper.

This is the year in which most second-year participants have their Outside Experience. (The Outside Experience may also be fulfilled in the first or third year, but these rare exceptions must be approved by the Program Director and the Outside Experience Coordinator.) The goal for the Outside Experience is to invite other voices and other energies from beyond the confines of the program. Even though the participant will consult with the Program Director and Outside Experience Coordinator at important points during the process, the outside experience is meant to be an independent project generated by the participant to benefit his or her writing life.

An important part of the dialogue between mentor and mentee will involve the possible topics for the participant's thesis-year Critical Paper. Looking back at the critical work produced by the participant so far will help the participant identify the best topic for exploration in the Critical Paper. When the topic is directly aligned with an issue that has a bearing on the participant's creative work, the paper will often prove especially valuable for the participant. At the least, there should be a well-defined topic at the end of the second year. In some cases, it's advisable to have portions of the eventual Critical Paper already drafted by the end of the second year.

**ENGL 506: Residency 3.** Participants entering their thesis year may choose to take the sequence of four Pedagogy Sessions during the residency, in lieu of participating in the mixed-genre workshops. An info session detailing the tasks and goals for the thesis year will also be held for participants entering their thesis year. Prior to the residency, each participant will have been paired with his or her thesis-year mentor.

**ENGL 513; ENGL 599 (Thesis): Third Year Mentorship.** The main tasks of this year include: the completion of the Critical Paper (20-40 pages); the completion of the Creative Thesis (30-60 single-spaced pages of poetry, 60-120 double-spaced pages of prose); submitting a final Program Bibliography; preparing for a class presentation to be delivered at the residency, if the participant opts to do a presentation; planning for a reading at the residency. The participant is expected to submit 6 mailings to the mentor.

There are no critical response papers required in the thesis year. The Critical Paper is considered the culmination of the participant's critical reading and writing in the program. In the Critical Paper, the participant is not expected to produce new knowledge about the topic, but rather to present a reasoned analysis or a refined

argument. The finished product should be articulate and persuasive. The input of the thesis-year mentor will be vital during this process. Additionally, the participant should consult the archive of critical papers found on the “Soundings” website.

The Creative Thesis should be a sampling of the participant’s best work from his/her time in the program. Keep in mind that the Thesis is intended to be an academic artifact that fulfills the participant’s degree requirements towards the MFA — it is not the book manuscript that the participant is also working on. That said, the thesis manuscript should be of very high quality, and it should cohere. The program does not promise book publication for any participant, but ideally the participant should be aiming towards an eventual manuscript that will be of publishable caliber. The thesis manuscript should be seen as a substantial and promising iteration of that potential book manuscript. Here again, the mentor will be an important source of counsel as the participant works towards completing the thesis manuscript.

If the participant is writing a prose thesis (a novel, collection of short stories, a collection of essays, a memoir, or other nonfiction work) the thesis should be 60-120 double-spaced pages. For a poetry thesis, a manuscript of 30-60 single-spaced pages is ideal. For those completing a mixed-genre thesis, the individual pieces should feel as if they belong together. All the pieces in the mixed-genre manuscript, regardless of genre, should be of high quality. After the thesis has been submitted to the program, a faculty reader will assess the thesis. The participant will receive the reader’s report.

Some participants may finish a thesis-length work in the first two years. If so, the third year can be used to revise and polish the completed project. The participant might also choose to branch out into new territory — perhaps even a wholly new genre — and embark on new work. As always, the guidance of the thesis-year mentor will be vital.

Self-reflection will be a crucial part of the year’s process. Each participant should leave the program with confidence that he or she can rely on his or her own instincts, and with the skills to be able to surmount the inevitable problems that arise in one’s life as a writer. His or her years in the program will have helped each participant complete some projects and set into motion the momentum for new ones. The thesis year is meant to highlight what has already been accomplished, and to set the terms for what’s ahead.

**ENGL 507: Residency 4.** During the residency, a sequence of Grad Sessions will be offered, geared towards graduating participants. Participants may choose to take all the sessions, or mix-and-match these sessions with regular classes. Graduating participants will also participate in thesis-manuscript critique sessions with their peers in the genre. Those who have chosen to do a class presentation will present. All participants are required to do a brief reading of his or her creative work. The graduation ceremony will take place on the second Sunday, on the final full day of the residency.