

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
PROGRAM CONCEPT PAPER**

**Submitted by  
The Department of English  
College of Liberal Arts**

**I. Proposed MFA Degree in Digital Writing**

Department of English, College of Liberal Arts, RIT

**II. Describe goals and justification for proposed program**

The MFA in Digital Writing is a two-year, 36 credit program. Coursework leads to a substantial MFA thesis project in the second year. The program is cohort-based and features close faculty mentorship throughout. It employs a project-based creative writing pedagogy to foster innovation in digital media. The program will seek to offer teaching assistantships to students as a way to assist in the cost of graduate school. Students will gain sophistication in the practice of teaching undergraduate writing, a marketable skill for academic jobs. Furthermore, this cohort of teachers will enrich all aspects of writing at RIT, leading to new opportunities for research, curriculum building, and outreach. In addition, the program will develop an online certificate in Digital Writing, based on the MFA curriculum. Students in the program may work in a variety of forms and media, including analog, with a focus on transformative practices and potentials for writers brought through the impact of the digital. The resulting cross-disciplinary literacies are necessary for teaching creative writing in universities today, and will further prepare students for moving beyond academia into careers in video game design, interactive media, transmedia storytelling, and other areas. When texts are machine-authored or distributed on the internet, creative writers need new ways of understanding creativity: no longer the clichéd solitary writer in touch with the muse, but a digital writer in the network, collaborating with a team of writers, designers, programmers, and so on. We are all digital writers today, but no MFA program exists to address this fact. The MFA is typically the terminal degree for creative writers. A survey of recent job offerings for MFAs shows the desirability of digital writing for university positions. Over 20% of the 145 tenure-track positions in creative writing advertised in the 2014 academic year (including Fiction, Poetry, and Open specializations) sought specialization in digital writing or new media practices. Non-tenure track, clinical, and visiting positions showed a similar percentage. No other specialization was as highly sought. Moreover, this percentage has risen every year. The need and demand for an MFA in digital writing is clear, yet the response by universities and institutions is uneven. The Associated Writing Programs, the largest professional organization for creative writers, is largely resistant to digital writing and the practices it brings. While interactive narratives dominate the app and gaming world, MFA programs continue to direct students towards traditional print-based practices. While a number of MFA programs at other universities now declare strengths in digital media or electronic writing – including everything from course offerings, to online journals, to digital theses --- no MFA program focuses entirely in this area. Rather than compete with hundreds of existing MFA programs (Poets and Writers database lists 262 MFA programs in the US), which are patently not addressing the realities of writing today, RIT can create a program directed at the real needs of creative writers. The team proposing the MFA conducted a survey of members of the Electronic Literature Organization, the leading professional organization for scholars and practitioners of digital writing, asking about the interest and need for the proposed program. The response was overwhelming and universal support for an MFA in digital writing, with responses from potential MFA students as well as from experienced teachers and administrators (many of the latter wished they could have had such a degree when they were in school). Scott Rettberg, Professor of Digital Culture at the University of Bergen, Norway, and one of the world's leading experts in digital writing stated: "I think a Digital Writing MFA should be an easy sell – I have thought this for some years. There are so many essentially similar MFA Creative Writing programs that a program in creative writing for digital media -- which would

presumably also give students the opportunity to develop programming, design, and other skills applicable in other sectors than creative writing – should have a lot of appeal. I think the first few schools to the market with Digital Writing MFAs will do very well in terms of recruitment and success.” A second survey of scholars of Creative Writing Pedagogy produced similar results. The MFA in Digital Writing will distinguish RIT as a leader.

### **III. Description of the new program: Summarize program curriculum and other program aspects**

The MFA in Digital Writing will consist of 36 credits. This is typical for terminal MFAs in creative writing (e.g., NYU requires 32 credits and the Pratt Institute 39 credits). Typically, credits will be 12 courses taken over a two year period. Students enroll in three courses per semester (nine credits) and teach two courses per semester in the First Year Writing Program. During the second year, students will enroll in a one semester internship; and complete an MFA thesis, with credit hours going towards thesis research and writing. Summer courses may be applied to reduce the time to degree. Our program will replace the traditional MFA “workshop” – which too easily leads to a narrow groupthink – with project-oriented collaboratories. This move suits RIT’s tradition of combining sophisticated methods with practical “maker culture.” The program will include required courses in tools and project management, reflecting the reality of practice and careers for digital writers. The unique combination of pragmatic technical training and rigorous methodological approaches prepares students for leadership roles in global creative industries where digital writing is the common medium of communication and invention. Core faculty in digital writing already exist in the English Department and will attract premier students to this program from all over the world; these faculty members can offer students coverage in the major practices, theories, and histories in this field. All faculty in the program are PhDs with teaching experience and scholarly production in digital writing. Future targeted hires will solidify this core. By offering Teaching Assistantships through the First Year Writing Program, we will make the MFA financially viable for students. Of course, students can draw from other faculty in COLA and elsewhere (e.g. IGM, Print Media, Imaging, etc.) In short, the MFA program will train the writers of tomorrow by making full use of RIT’s unique strengths and resources. The following briefly describes the proposed new courses for the MFA.

- **Write Lab (3).** Replacing the “workshop” as the constituent course of MFA programs, the Write Lab will be a collaborative project-oriented course. The focus is not on critique and achieving a common vocabulary, as in the workshop, but on developing projects that push students’ research and craft in the direction of the thesis. This course is the backbone of the program and is taken every semester.
- **Pedagogy and Project Management Seminar (3).** Taken in the first year. A guiding assumption of the MFA is that digital writers engage in projects employing teams beyond the single writer/creator. Teaching digital writing similarly engages multiple voices and modes of authorship. This seminar focuses on methods and tools for teaching and managing digital writing projects and courses, including marketing and archiving/lifecycle development.
- **Tools (3).** Taken in the first year. This course introduces crucial tools and theories for the digital writer. The focus is a survey of typical tools, from composition to project management, including emerging tools.
- **Practice+Theory Seminar (3).** This seminar is taken in the second year and builds on the first year course. Topics will vary but the focus is a theoretically informed introduction to a specific area of digital writing practice, such as Curating, Interactive Fiction, Free/Open Software, Uncreative Writing, or Video Games.
- **New Modes (3).** Examines evolving forms and genres of writing, with a focus on authorial practice.
- **Thesis (3).** Taken in the second year. Directed work on the MFA thesis.
- **Internship (3).** Taken in the second year. A semester in an internship setting pertinent to the student’s work. The goal is an expanded writing, research, and teaching experience. The internship may be focus on industry, non-profit work, research within RIT, or others settings.
- **Electives (3).** Up to two courses in other programs that inform and expand the student’s work. Electives may be at the undergraduate level, if the Professor agrees to adjust the student’s participation in the course for graduate course expectations.

The program will also develop an online certificate based on 12 credits taken from the MFA core courses. This alternative delivery method will allow a broader range of students to participate in the program. Students attaining the certificate who later enroll in the MFA may use the credits towards the degree.

### **III. Describe new program's fit with RIT Academic Portfolio Blueprint Characteristics and criteria**

The MFA in Digital Writing addresses all six of RIT's Academic Portfolio Blueprint Characteristics. As a program in digital creative writing, the new MFA will foster **Scholarship, Research, and Creativity**. The innovative pedagogy will enable student and faculty collaboration on major, potentially externally-funded projects. All courses in the MFA will feature **Innovative Teaching and Learning**. The four semester Writing Lab will encourage **Experiential Learning**, moving past the outdated academic workshop to engage students with diverse communities and careers. The required internship and thesis will build on this pedagogy. The program builds in **International and Global Education** through partnerships with digital writing programs in other countries – collaborations are already underway with universities in Ghana and Portugal – and through visiting writers and critics. By bringing together creative writing and digital media, the program intrinsically addresses **Synergy and Interdisciplinarity**. The program will be an attractor for students precisely because of this combination, and students will graduate from RIT as leaders of this new disciplinary convergence. Finally, the pedagogical orientation towards internships and community will lead to **Inclusive Excellence**. This is a program that does not replicate existing MFAs but opens to diverse approaches and students. The MFA in Digital Writing also fits RIT's Academic Portfolio Blueprint criteria. The very nature of the program fits RIT's historic commitment to the meeting of technology and humanities (**Centrality**). There is a demonstrated demand for the program and for its graduates (**Marketability**). In fact, this is an opportunity for RIT to lead the field. The Department of English already has world-class faculty in the area of digital writing and can offer the necessary courses for the MFA (**Quality**). Finally, it is financially viable (**Financial Viability**). Of special note is the offer of Teaching Assistantships to students enrolling in the program – a possibility already discussed with RIT's First Year Writing Program. This will make the MFA financially possible for students and attractive as a choice when compared to other MFA programs.

### **V. Synergy with other programs: Describe curricular linkages with other academic programs and associated interdisciplinary connection. Provide evidence of Dean support when program uses specific courses, resources, etc. from another college**

The MFA in Digital Writing will link directly to several other programs at RIT, notably: Game Design and Development (GCCIS) and Film and Animation (CIAS). These linkages are based on existing faculty affiliations. Students in the new MFA will build collaborative projects that draw from faculty and students in these and other programs. There is no evidence of redundancy or overlap between programs. The primary resources are within the Department of English.

### **VI. Administrative structure for the new program**

The program will be administered through the Department of English. This will include the creation of a Program Directorship and several faculty advising positions.

### **VII. Enrollment Management Expectations and Sustainment: Discuss projected enrollment, marketability and future sustainability of program based on requested input and guidance from Enrollment Management and Career Services**

The goal is for an initial cohort of 3-5 students, and to maintain this level for the first five years of the program. At that point, marketability and sustainability will be re-assessed, with the goal of expanding

enrollment over time. In general, there appears to be strong interest in the new program (as noted above). RIT Enrollment Management provided the following input:

We have reviewed the proposal for the MFA in Digital Writing through the College of Liberal Arts. While the focus of the proposed on digital writing is somewhat unique, the enrollment goals you have will require aggressive marketing and recruitment to break into a new market for RIT where there is significant competition. In addition the format of the program and the fact that all courses are offered on-campus will limit the market to full-time students and part-time students in the local area.

- We anticipate that the program will require aggressive marketing efforts in the department through the contacts and connections you describe, and identifying external resources for tuition and teaching assistantship will be required to achieve enrollment goals. It is anticipated that enrollment in this program could yield your enrollment target of 3 - 5 students (FTE) per year, based on the assumptions that follow.
- All courses will be offered on-campus and attract primarily full-time students, though the degree can be completed by part-time students who are able to take daytime courses.
- Students are able to enter the program only in the Fall semester.
- Most full-time students will enroll in 9 credits per semester, the program is 36 semester credits and will take two years to complete.
- Scholarship support is limited to RIT central funding of 25 - 30% of overall tuition revenue redirected to scholarship through Institute Graduate Scholarship allocation. Any additional funding for graduate students will come from research grants and outside resources.
- Targeted marketing, as well as the development of partnership agreements with appropriate professional partners and organizations, and external colleges and universities will be critical to marketing and enrolling students.
- The timing of the approval process will affect projections for the first year; to achieve the stated goal, program marketing should begin 9 – 12 months prior to the start date.

#### **VIII. Impact on Resources: Describe impact of proposed program on resources:**

- **Utilization of Existing Resources: Elaborate on how this program will use resources already assigned to the academic unit / college (space, faculty / staff) etc. and the plan for reorganization or re-allocation of resources.**

The MFA program will draw on existing Creative Writing faculty. The primary cost will be reassignment of faculty teaching to courses in the new program. This cost will be addressed through adjunct teachers. Space and other resources will not be a cost, at least in the near future as the program starts up.

- **Cost Model Analysis: summarize 5-year revenue and cost projections taken from Concept Paper Cost Model Template. See: Concept Paper Cost Model Template.**

**Overview:**

Each type of degree award requires a different number of general education credits as mandated by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). When providing guidance, NYSED uses the term "liberal arts and sciences" to refer to general education. In accordance with NYSED's guidelines, students in the following programs must complete, at a minimum, the number of credits indicated in each category, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The table shows the minimum number of semester credit hours (sch) required in each category. Details can be found in the sections below for each degree program.

	BS	BFA	AAS	AS
Foundation				
First-Year Semester*	6	6	6	6
Second-Year Semester (includes capstone)				
Perspectives Categories	20	12	15	15
Immersion				
Three additional related courses	9	9	0	0
General Education Electives	21	3	3	9
<b>MINIMUM TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>30</b>

\*First-Year Semester will not be offered in AY 2014/15, and may be replaced with a General Education Elective

Courses approved for use as electives, Foundation, and Perspectives are overseen by the General Education Committee, and designations for each type are marked in the Student Information System. The choices for Immersions are listed in the Course Bulletin.

**Use of program courses in General Education:** Programs may count no more than three courses (not including labs) from their home academic unit as General Education. These courses must be approved to carry general education designation by the General Education Committee. Programs may NOT require students to complete a specific immersion or restrict students to a group of immersions.

The categories for Perspectives courses are as follows:

1. Ethical
2. Artistic
  3. Global
  4. Social
  5. Natural Science Inquiry
  6. Scientific Principles
  7. Mathematical

**Framework by Degree Type:**

**I. General Education Guidelines for Bachelor of Science (BS):** Students earning a BS degree must complete a minimum of 60 General Education credits. In addition to the two Foundation courses, these students must take one course from each of the first six perspective categories and two courses from the Mathematical category for a total of eight courses. A BS program may not require specific courses in more than three Perspective categories. The students must also complete an immersion. The remaining credits can be used as General Education electives.

**II. General Education Guidelines for the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA):** Students earning a BFA degree must complete a minimum of 30 General Education credits. In addition to the two Foundation courses, these students must take a total of four Perspective courses, one from each of the following four categories: Ethical, Artistic, Global, and Social. A BFA program may not require specific courses in more than two Perspective Categories. The students must also complete an immersion. The remaining three credits can be used as a General Education elective.

**III. General Education Guidelines for the Associate of Applied Science (AAS):** Students earning an AAS degree must complete a minimum of 24 General Education credits. In addition to the two Foundation courses, these students must take a total of five Perspective courses, one each from the following five categories: Ethical, Artistic, Global, Social, and Scientific Principles. The remaining course will be a General Education elective.

**IV. General Education Guidelines for Associate of Science (AS):** Students earning an AS degree must complete a minimum of 30 General Education credits. In addition to the two Foundation courses, these students must take a total of five Perspective courses, one from each of the following five categories: Ethical, Artistic, Global, Social, and Scientific Principles. The remaining three courses will be General Education electives.

**V. General Education Guidelines for Associate of Occupational Studies (AOS):** NYSED does not require that an AOS degree include general education courses. RIT Colleges offering AOS degrees should establish their own guidelines.



**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
PROGRAM EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Submitted by  
The Department of English  
College of Liberal Arts**

**Proposed MFA Degree in Digital Writing**

- Two-year, 36 credit, format typical of creative writing MFA programs.
- Rather than compete with hundreds of existing programs,<sup>1</sup> RIT's MFA in Digital Writing is directed at the real needs of writing today, characterized by online global networks, and by collaboration with teams including designers, programmers, and digital artists.
- No MFA in digital writing exists. The content and offering are unique and will distinguish RIT as an innovative leader in the field.
- The program is a clear fit with RIT's Academic Portfolio Blueprint, contributing to all six targeted characteristics.
- The program will teach cross-disciplinary literacies necessary for teaching creative writing in universities today.
- The program will prepare students for moving beyond academia into careers in video game design, interactive media, transmedia storytelling, and other areas.

**Demand, Costs, Revenue**

- Research by the proposing team shows clear demand for the program and potential jobs for graduates in and out of academia.
- Building on established and recognized strengths in creative writing in the RIT English Department, and synergies across the institute, the program will require no substantial initial costs.
- Target enrollment is an initial cohort of five students annually.
- Based on these assumptions, we estimate a revenue surplus of \$371,103.47 by the end of the fifth year of the program.

**Curriculum and Structure**

- Coursework leads to a substantial MFA thesis project in the second year.
- The program is cohort-based and features close faculty mentorship throughout.
- The program employs project-based pedagogy to foster innovation in digital media.
- The program will offer teaching assistantships through First Year Writing to select students to assist in the cost of graduate school.
- The program will develop an online certificate in Digital Writing, based on the MFA curriculum.

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<sup>1</sup> Poets and Writers database lists 262 MFA programs in the US.





**MFA in Digital Writing  
SUMMARY REPORT**

Fiscal Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Avg Enrollment: Students (FT + PT)	5	9	9	9	9	41
Part-time Faculty expense	\$ 25,920.00	\$ 26,438.40	\$ 26,967.17	\$ 27,506.51	\$ 28,056.64	\$ 134,888.72
Full-time faculty expense	\$ 114,304.65	\$ 116,590.75	\$ 118,922.56	\$ 121,301.01	\$ 123,727.03	\$ 594,846.01
Total Expenses	\$ 125,123.38	\$ 132,734.82	\$ 135,368.93	\$ 138,076.31	\$ 140,837.84	\$ 672,141.27
Revenue (Net of Aid)	\$ 120,639.59	\$ 224,751.56	\$ 232,617.86	\$ 232,617.86	\$ 232,617.86	\$ 1,043,244.75
CONTRIBUTION MARGIN Surplus/(Deficit)	\$ (4,483.79)	\$ 92,016.74	\$ 97,248.93	\$ 94,541.55	\$ 91,780.03	\$ 371,103.47

**Note : This sheet is password protected to maintain the formulas.**

