

FAQ's:

The Basics

Got any advice for improving my chances of getting in?

It all matters, but the most important part of your application is the writing sample. We're sorry to say that, due to the volume of applications, faculty cannot provide direct feedback on manuscripts.

- Poetry (approx. 10 pages)
- Fiction (approx. 25 pages)
- Creative Nonfiction (approx. 25 pages)
- An amalgam thereof (not to exceed 30 pages total)

In addition to the writing portfolio, you will also need to provide: transcripts of all undergraduate work, three letters of recommendation (we don't have a recommender's form), and a brief statement of purpose (500 words or less). All prose should be double-spaced.

GRE scores are not required. Of course, good ones don't hurt, so send 'em in. And make use of the personal statement in the application to let us know what your voice is, who you really are.

Do you look for a particular style of writing?

There is not a single aesthetic that we're looking for—you'll notice that the faculty at Hollins write in quite a range of styles, genres, modes, what have you.

We do look for writing samples that are strong, polished, and indicative of a writer committed to the craft, someone who's dedicated to reading and writing. Don't apply here because you want to be "an author" or because you think working as a college professor is an easy fallback plan for your life. Apply here if you burn to make art from language, if you have things to say and take delight in what words do.

While most applicants submit in one genre only, if you write both poetry and fiction, say, feel free to send samples of both: our best advice is simply to send your strongest work. Proofread it carefully.

And if you enter the program, be prepared to work with people dedicated to all different forms and flavors of writing. You yourself may want to focus on memoir, but you'll certainly spend time in class with novelists, short story writers, poets. We're interested in good writing across the board, rather than keeping you on a narrowly focused track. And don't expect your classmates' styles, tastes, interests, fave writers, to be clones of yours.

Can I attend the program part-time?

Sorry: no. We're structured in a way that makes that impossible.

How large is the program?

Hollins accepts approximately twelve new writers each year for our two-year program. So there are usually twenty-four Creative Writing grad students around, along with a considerable number of undergraduates who are serious writers themselves; many undergrads come to Hollins because of the Creative Writing program. And then there's the faculty...

May I transfer credits from another graduate writing program to Hollins?

All credits must be earned at Hollins.

Who are some writers who have graduated from Hollins?

Over the past ten years, Hollins graduates have published over 200 books. Among them are Pulitzer prize winners Annie Dillard, Henry Taylor, and Natasha Trethewey, novelists Madison Smartt Bell, Kiran Desai, Garrett Epps, Tama Janowitz, Jill McCorkle, Tony D'Souza, and Sylvia Wilkinson, poets Scott Cairns, Wyn Cooper, David Huddle, Edward Kleinschmidt Mayes, and Mary Ruefle, as well as photographer Sally Mann, and filmmaker George Butler.

But this list of names is just the beginning. The number of books by Hollins alums is quite remarkable, really. There's a reason we were called "pound for pound, the most productive writing program in America." You might want to check out the long (and incomplete) roster at: http://www.hollins.edu/grad/eng_writing/books/bookfrm.htm

We think this is in part because of our work-hard-have-fun ethic, the energy and commitment of the writing faculty, and the general atmosphere of challenging support. It's certainly because of who comes here to study. Or maybe it's just the feng-shui from the surrounding mountains. Or something in the water...

How closely will I be studying with the Creative Writing Faculty?

In the first-year, graduate students participate in two workshops per semester: the graduate tutorial, and the advanced workshop, working with a different teaching writer for each.

The graduate tutorial lasts the entire school-year, and is usually composed of four graduate students plus an M.F.A. faculty instructor. In the second year of the program, you take another two-semester tutorial.

The advanced workshops range between six and twelve students, mixed grad and undergrads: usually you'll switch to someone new for the second semester. For the

second-year, rather than more workshops, graduate students work closely with a teacher of their choice while completing their thesis.

Your elective courses (one per semester, unless you are itching to take on overload) are likely to be taught by writing faculty, too, although you'll find a wide range of options. In any case, you're likely to get to know a lot of the faculty outside of class—at readings, receptions, and just hanging around Swannanoa Hall.

What courses do Hollins Creative Writing grad students take for their M.F.A.s?

Forty-eight (48) credits are required for the master of fine arts degree in Creative Writing. That means, 12 4-credit classes, three per semester for two academic years.

A typical course of study will include:

Four semesters of ENG 501/502/511/512 (16 credits total)—this is our “grad tutorial”, described above.

Two semesters of ENG 507/508 *Advanced Creative Writing*, the workshop (8 credits) plus two of ENG 599: *The Thesis* (8 credits).

Two courses selected from: ENG 584, 585, 586, & 587: *Advanced Studies in Poetry, the Novel, Short Fiction, & Creative Nonfiction* (8 credits)—these courses are designed and taught especially for the MFA students in Creative Writing.

The remaining two courses(8 credits) will be taken in appropriate 300/500 level courses. Many students decide to take more than two of the four courses from the Advanced Studies series listed above. Others choose from the English Department's various literature courses (ranging from Origins of Poetry to Film as a Narrative Art, Screenwriting, Poetry as Performance, the Modern Novel, Arab-American Literature, and a wide range of other courses. You may also pick classes in other departments (Art or Philosophy, for example), if they suit the needs of your writing.

What is the literary life like at Hollins?

We have a regular series of evening readings—about six a semester—by such writers as James Tate, Charles Wright, Lee Smith (B.A. '67), Natasha Trethewey (M.A. '91), Claudia Emerson, Matthew Klam (M.A. '92), Madison Smartt Bell (M.A. '81), and Fred Chappell, among others. Receptions after these readings give students a chance to meet visiting writers and hang out together, talking trash.

We also have readings by students, run by students. Rah.

During the spring semester, there is a distinguished poet or writer of fiction in residence. Past writers in residence include: Kathy Acker, Richard Bausch, Kelly Cherry, Ellen Douglas, Mary Gaitskill, LeAnne Howe, Alice McDermott, David Adams Richards,

Derek Walcott, Dara Wier , and Paul Zimmer. He or she teaches a special course which is open to graduate students.

My primary interest is writing for children—should I apply?

Actually, in that case, we recommend our sister summer-term program, which has a separate section in the Hollins website. However, if you want to focus on writing for adults, but would like to do some children's/YA writing on the side, or if you want to take good courses in which you read and discuss children's lit, this program would work well for you. (Translation: don't send writing for children as your application sample for the two-year Sept-May program)

What is the level of student interaction outside of class?

With only twelve students in each year, the M.F.A. students generally are a pretty close-knit group, whether they are clustered in the graduate lounge on the third-floor of the English building, catching a movie at the Grandin Theater in downtown Roanoke, or arguing about prose poems while sitting in rocking chairs on the front porch of Main. On Thursday nights, it's not uncommon to find the whole bunch just down the street singing karaoke (competitively).

Of course, you can go off on your own to write—you will, you will—but our sense of community is a key part of the Hollins experience.

What's can I expect from campus and the Roanoke area?

Roanoke is a small city of about 250,000 surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains. It's got good coffee shops and a farmer's market that just won't quit. The picturesque (yes, it really looks like that) Hollins campus is about fifteen minutes from the downtown area, and just miles from the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail.

Do you have graduate student housing?

Hollins University has a limited amount of apartment-style housing on campus for graduate students. This has all the pros and cons of dorm-like life, with kitchens.

In addition, the English department maintains a list from former graduate students of housing in and around Roanoke, and we share these leads with admitted students. Roanoke city and the valley offer a variety of options, from funky apartments in early 20th-century showplaces-on-the-skid to standard apartment complexes to the occasional cabin in the country.

Are there job opportunities on the Hollins campus?

Not many. But most M.F.A. students do find work in town—bookstore gigs, substitute teaching, a little journalism, and yes, frothing those lattes. And, while the program will keep you busy writing, it *is* possible to work a part-time job while attending.

Does Hollins have its own literary journal?

A leading American literary journal, *The Hollins Critic* enters its 45rd year in 2008 with essays on writers like Larissa Szporluk by Lisa Williams; David Markson by Peter Dempsey; Jane Hirshfield by Jeanne Larsen, and more.

The *Hollins Critic*, published five times a year, presents the first serious surveys of the whole bodies of contemporary writers' work, with complete checklists. You'll find essays on such writers as Irving Feldman (by David Slavitt), Rebecca Goldstein (by Emily Budick), Carolyn Kizer (by Henry Taylor), Antler (by Howard Nelson), Russell Hoban (by Earl Rovit) and Ted Hughes (by Harriet Zinnes).

But we don't have a magazine focused on short fiction, personal essays, and poems that's staffed by M.F.A. students. While graduate students often write book reviews that appear in the *Critic*, they are never charged with slogging through a slush pile, or stuffing envelopes with rejection slips. In the past, students interested in publishing have started their own 'zine. But you can, and will, take part in judging one of the country's top prizes for high school poets, and you can concentrate on your own work.

Advice from M.F.A. Program Director

We look for playful workaholics: writers, first, who really write. They most likely work every day, almost, and likely at something like a regular time. Or they may be binge writers, disappearing for several days, staying up till dawn to hit the keyboard—as long as the binges happen often, these people will be fine, too.

The playful part is important. This doesn't mean excessive fondness for bohemian bacchanals. It might be a love of karaoke. Equally, it might be a zest for dodgeball. Almost certainly it means a love of jokes and verbal goofiness and a little tomfoolery every now and then.

We look for people who read like crazy. Did, do it, cannot stop. Maybe mess around with other art-forms, too.

Finally, we are pleased to see someone's got obsessions. Fly-fishing, quilting, medieval Japan, the Fibonacci series, Indian motorcycles, goats, progressive jazz, the Appalachian trail, whatever—if there's something out there in the world a student finds compelling, we feel hopeful. If it's several somethings, even better.