**Thesis Advice and Guidelines for the Butler MFA** (draft, 5.8, Levy)

**The thesis** in the Butler MFA in Creative Writing represents the keystone of your degree work and is a key graduation requirement.

In **prose**, the thesis should represent significant progress toward a full-length volume: a novel, short story collection, book-length work of nonfiction, essay collection, or equivalent experimental analogue. Title and table of contents are required. It is not necessary that the volume be complete (for instance , be a *complete* novel) to receive graduation credit. But both advisor and student should be able to agree that the student has achieved stylistic and structural maturity and will be able to complete a publishable project in subsequent draft cycles. In practice, prose theses have tended to be 120-180 pages in length, but neither upper nor lower limit is prescribed.

In **poetry,** the thesis should be a book-length manuscript of poems (at least 48 pages, single-spaced) that includes a title and table of contents and, in addition to the 48 pages of poetry, a short (4-8 double-spaced pages) prose introduction. Although the completed manuscript may not yet obviously be of publishable quality, it should at least show signs of being well on the way. It should contain the student’s best work and have unity and shape. The prose introduction is a statement of poetics: of what the MFA candidate most values in poetry and believes a powerful poem is or should be. The introduction should be approached creatively and should also have serious intellectual heft; it should show that the writer has significant comprehension of the methods and history of the art of poetry.

**Pre-thesis**: Before beginning the thesis, the student should fill out the thesis application, which is available on-line at the Butler website and is distributed via email every Spring semester for the following year. The student demonstrates intent to complete the program, describes course work, details (in rough form) the thesis project, provides a timetable, and requests both advisor and reader. The program director then approves the thesis request and assigns an advisor to the student.

Students have many different options for designing a **timetable** for thesis work that fits their needs. All students must take EN710 (Research Methods, 3 hrs.) and EN711 (Thesis, 3 hrs.) as their thesis courses. Most choose to take the two courses consecutively, allowing themselves one full academic year for thesis work. Some choose to take courses with a semester sabbatical in between, allowing themselves three full semesters. Some choose to work on the thesis in the summer (EN710 and EN711 are available in the summer sessions). Some choose to graduate in December, not May. Some choose to take both courses simultaneously. This last option, however, requires permission from the MFA Director and thesis advisor, and evidence of preparedness (usually, an already completed, assembled, or otherwise polished manuscript) to complete the thesis on an accelerated schedule.

We ask that students complete all of their course work prior to beginning their thesis course work, but variances have been available for students who present constructive curriculum alternatives. We also understand that a student may sometimes find him- or herself unable to complete thesis work on the predetermined schedule. If advisor and student agree, schedules can be amended appropriately. Please discuss those details with the MFA Director.

**Prior to beginning thesis work** (for instance, in summer 2013 if the student is taking EN710 in Fall 2013), the student should contact the advisor and agree upon a schedule and plan for the work entailed. Different advisors and students will make different schedules, especially since the length of time taken for thesis completion is customized for each student. In general, however, the following guidelines should be followed by each advisor-student team:

1. The thesis project should be defined prior to the start of the thesis timetable. Such definition will vary from project to project, genre to genre. For some students, this will constitute a thoughtful review, in coordination with the advisor, of one’s best extant manuscript and an evaluation of the next stages of work to be done. For others, this may constitute the construction of a thesis topic and idea that is clear and capable of abstract.
2. The advisor and student should meet regularly, and multiple drafts should be composed. All students should develop, in coordination with their advisors, a weekly and monthly work schedule that suits the overall timetable for thesis completion. This will vary from student to student, but we recommend twice monthly meetings, and 10 hours per week scheduled writing time, for those students taking a full academic year. Meeting and work schedules should be condensed or elongated for those taking fewer or more semesters.
3. The advisor and student should also attempt to design a mid-thesis goal, or transition point. An MFA candidate in poetry should, generally, consider the first semester of thesis work as the time to create new poems. As the thesis work continues, the student and advisor will consider how both old (composed in the MFA) and new work may or may not fit into the final thesis manuscript. In prose collections (essays or short stories), a similar process may be undertaken; for single works like novels or memoirs, this mid-thesis point might be represented by a movement from one draft to the next or a survey of the structure of the piece and appropriate shift in strategy.
4. **The** **reader** should be brought onto the project midway through the last semester of thesis work, as a fresh pair of eyes (if student and reader agree, the reader can be brought onto the project earlier or later). The reader is expected to read once, provide a marked manuscript and/or extended end comment, and meet with the student for one extended conference. As a general rule, the reader also attends the defense.

**Thesis Defense:** At the point where it becomes clear that the thesis will be completed in a timely manner (designed to coincide with the completion of EN711), student and advisor will schedule a **defense**. The defense consists of an hour-long discussion of the student’s thesis, scheduled prior to the end of the exam period for that semester: the turning-in of the student’s grade for EN711 represents the clerical point of completion. This deadline will be available from the program upon request.

1. The reader and MFA director are also invited to the defense.
2. The student will answer questions, but also ask questions, and will both “defend”’ the thesis and receive more in-depth analysis of its features and suggestions for future stages.
3. The student prepares three copies of the thesis and brings them for signatures to the defense. Sample title page and committee forms follow these guidelines. The committee form is placed first and should be printed on Butler watermarked paper, which is available from the English Department or MFA Office. The remainder of the thesis should be printed on acid-free paper.
4. After the defense, students bring two copies (each including a signed committee form) to the MFA office for the MFA Director’s signature. These copies will be taken to Irwin Library for binding. One copy will be kept as the official University copy in the library and one will be kept in the Efroymson Center for Creative Writing as the MFA department copy. The third copy is the student’s personal copy and can also be bound at the library for a $15 charge.

Sample Committee Form (fonts are optional):

**Name of Candidate:**

**Allen Ginsberg**

**Thesis Defense:**

**Date: May 8, 2005**

**Committee:**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Thesis Advisor**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Thesis Reader**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, MFA Program Director**

**Thesis Title:**

**"Howl”**

**Thesis Approved in final form:**

**Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Thesis Advisor:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Sample Title Page:

Pale Horse, Pale Rider

By

Katherine Mansfield

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

to the Department of English

at Butler University.

April 2005