Course Work and Requirements

What are the basic requirements to receive a degree from the University of Iowa’s Nonfiction Writing Program?

The degree requires a total of 48 semester hours. Three of these hours must go toward the completion of your thesis in your third year in the program.

How do people generally meet the 48 credit requirement?

1. Each student must take a total of five 4-hour workshops within the program. One of your required workshops must be what is designated as a Special Topics workshop, such as “Literary Journalism,” “The Ethnographic Essay,” “The Radio Essay,” or “Experimental Essays.” And all students are required to take the ”Thesis Workshop” in the fall semester of their third year. (Students who have completed all other requirements and who choose to spend their third year off campus may make special arrangements with the Director to forego the "Thesis Workshop"). (These five required workshops will total 20 hours toward your degree.)

2. Each student must also take seven 3-hour seminars within the program. Among these six seminars, you are required to take “The History of the Essay” during the fall semester of your first year in the program and “The Professional Writer” during the spring semester of your second year in the program. (These seven required seminars will total 21 hours toward your degree.)

3. Each student must take 4 thesis hours with their thesis advisor during their third year in the program. (These required 4 thesis hours should be divided evenly between the fall and spring semesters. They will total 4 hours toward your degree.)

4. This now leaves you with 3 additional hours to play with in order to meet the requirements for the degree. These additional hours may be filled by taking another workshop or another seminar from within the Nonfiction Writing Program’s curriculum.

Of course, the above 48 credit hours are not the only courses you can take at the University. These 48 hours can quite easily be filled as long as you are regularly taking one Workshop per semester and at least one seminar. There is plenty of room in your schedule therefore to sample courses from around the University, which we certainly encourage you to do. Keep in mind however that only courses offered through the Nonfiction Writing Program can be counted toward your degree from the Nonfiction Writing Program.
There are two exceptions for the above rule, however:

(1) Students who are serving as TAs in the Rhetoric Department may also take “Teaching in a Writing Center,” which is offered through the Department of Rhetoric. Taking this course during your first or second year as a TA in Rhetoric will qualify you to be hired as a writing tutor in the Writing Center. Students who take “Teaching in a Writing Center” are therefore allowed to count that course toward their degree in the Nonfiction Writing Program. Unless you are given special permission otherwise, only students who serve as TAs in Rhetoric are allowed to take “Teaching in a Writing Center.”

(2) Similarly, students who are scheduled to teach a nonfiction workshop as a TA may count the “Teaching Nonfiction” course toward their degree. “Teaching Nonfiction” is offered in the Fall Term only.

NOTE: While we don’t put limits on the time it takes for a student to graduate, the Graduate College does: ten years. Keep in mind, however, that after three years the possibility of aid from the NWP runs out and after ten years, your course credits begin to evaporate, semester by semester. Ten years seems more than a reasonable amount of time within which to finish your degree. After this time passes, your degree is forfeited.

What is the History of the Essay course?

The History of the Essay is designed to give everyone in the nonfiction Writing Program a common understanding of the history of this genre in which you’ve chosen to seek a higher degree. The course is rotated among the Nonfiction Writing Program’s faculty. While all incoming students must take the course, it’s also open to any other interested graduate students in the University, and may also be taken a second time at some point during your tenure in the program (just as long as you are taking the course with a different faculty member).

What’s an average semester load?

The average is 9-12 hours. Ideally, you want to have little besides thesis hours and one or two extra courses remaining in your third year (so between 3-8 hours). If you take only 9 hours each semester, that will leave you with 12 hours to fill during your third year, so most likely you’ll want to take at least a couple of 12-hour semesters prior to your third year.
NOTE: Normally, the maximum number of credit hours you may take is 15 per semester. However, a little fudging is sometimes possible, but only if you're taking a mix of undergrad and grad courses. The Graduate College Manual explains:

“Students registered in the Graduate College may register for no more than 15 semester hours in all courses eligible for graduate credit (100-level or above). In a schedule of mixed graduate and undergraduate courses, 2 hours of undergraduate credit may be substituted for 1 hour of graduate credit, with registration limited to a total of 18 semester hours. This equivalency applies to the calculation of academic load only. Graduate credit is not given for courses numbered under 100. The maximum for the eight-week summer session is 8 semester hours. Corresponding maximums for the three-week summer and winter sessions and the six-week summer session are 3 or 6 semester hours, respectively.”

What's the difference between 3000, 4000, and 5000 level classes, and do I get graduate credit for all of them?

3000- and 4000-level courses admit undergrads. 5000-level courses do not (at least not without special permission). All receive grad credit. Anything below the 3000-level does not.

What about grades?

Most classes in the Nonfiction Writing Program are offered on a pass/fail basis. As a graduate student, you must maintain at least a B average to maintain good standing. You should, in fact, try your best to maintain an “A” average in courses offered outside of the program. NOTE: We recommend that you take your outside courses as S/U (also known as pass/fail), since the grades you get for them will be the only contributors to your GPA. In order to do this, you will need to have the instructor sign a Grade Change Option form, which you can obtain via the Registrar's webpage, or from Program Assistant Cherie Hansen-Rieskamp (room 308D EPB ~ cherie-rieskamp@uiowa.edu).

When can I sign up for classes?

The dates for registration are announced each semester. Enrollment becomes available towards the end of the semester. The exact dates vary from year to year, but early registration usually begins in November for spring courses and April for summer and fall classes.

Students sometimes wait to register until the last minute. Remember, a course you might really want could be cancelled by the College if not enough students register ahead of time. Likewise, a course you might really want could be full by the time you register. And failure to register on time may mean you don’t receive your financial aid funds when you’re
expecting them. It’s best to stay on top of this. Ask Cherie if you’re not certain when to register.

**How do I sign up for classes using ISIS?**

Log on to [ISIS](https://isis) using your Hawk ID. Click on Registration at the top of the page and follow instructions. If you have further questions, stop by and see Cherie.

**How do I create an Independent Study?**

You speak to the professor you’re interested in working with first. Keep in mind however that there’s no guarantee the professor will be available to advise your independent study, and as a rule we discourage Independent Studies if they will be taking the place of an already-scheduled class.

Prior to starting the independent study, you must complete a Record of Graduate Independent Study form (which can be found outside Cherie’s office). This must include a written prospectus stating the objective of the project, the work to be done, and the evidence of completed work (for example, written or oral exams, critical essays, etc.). The form must be signed by the independent study instructor before you can enroll. Independent studies may be taken for a maximum of 3 semester hours. You may only count one Independent Study toward your degree in the Nonfiction Writing Program. When you register for an independent study you must also include your instructor code number, this information is found in a drop down list on ISIS.

**Can graduate students receive credit for a summer internship—especially an internship which is directly connected to their work in the NWP?**

Most likely, especially if it relates to your professional development. You need to present it as an independent study and have both the independent study faculty advisor and the Program Director sign off on it. An internship might entail work at a radio station, newspaper, magazine, nonprofit organization, PR firm, etc. You’ll have to set this up beforehand with the Program Director—not retroactively—if you’d like such a request permission to have the internship count as credit toward your degree.
**What is the Overseas Writers’ Workshop?**

The [Overseas Writers’ Workshop](#) is an occasional program that enables Nonfiction Writing Program students to take writing courses in foreign settings. In May of 2005, approximately 15 students from the program traveled to the Philippines to participate in the annual National Writers Workshop of the Philippines for three weeks. In subsequent years, groups have traveled to Cathar country in the South of France (2006), Hong Kong/Macao (2007), Slovenia/Croatia/Northern Italy (2008), Australia (2009), Corfu (2010), Philippines (2011), Cuba (2012), and Australia (2013).