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## COURSE INFORMATION 2021

*I think I am the doppelgänger whom, until I appeared, African literature had not yet met. And in some sense I would question anyone calling me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you. In other words, the direct international experience of every single living entity is, for me, the inspiration to write.*

Dambudzo Marechera

## MA in Creative Writing

Rhodes University's MA in Creative Writing is committed to innovative approaches to literary production that expand the possibilities of writing. At once, critical and creative, the programme emphasises the essential relationship between reading and writing. There are full time and part time study options. The full time, full residency option runs for one year every year, and the part time, low residency option, over two years every second year.

### APPLICATIONS

Applications should be made ONLINE via the Rhodes ROSS system: <https://ross.ru.ac.za/pgadmissions>. When completing your application, please select "Humanities" as the faculty, and "School of Languages and Literatures" as the department. There is no need to complete the "supervisor" field, as this will be determined later. Please ensure all supporting documents required by the University are included in your application, including previous University transcripts (from all previous institutions studied at) and certificate(s) of good conduct.

Candidates are also required to submit an **Application Portfolio** of creative work as part of their application (30-35 pages). The portfolio should be an indication of the kind of writing we can expect from you. Even if you are unsure of your writing, it should always reflect your true intentions. This writing can be previously published or unpublished – as long as it is written by you. In terms of genre, again, show us what you want to do or where you want to go (prose, poetry, hybrid genres, graphic novels/comics, non-fiction, and so forth). Always weight your application portfolio with the kind of work you wish to pursue in terms of both genre and content. If you are a journalist, for example, show us examples of your journalism, but also show us what you'd like to do with your journalistic skills. After all, we can't teach you how to be a better journalist – you are that already. Show us where you'd like to develop your creativity, the direction in which you think your writing might go. It is also perfectly acceptable to simply show us what you consider to be your very best writing, should you have no real strong feelings about where your writing could go. For Graphic novels/comics/photo comics: 10 relevant still images must be provided in addition to the writing portfolio. These can be conceptual art, comic pages or photographs sent as a pdf.

See FAQs 6-9 below for more on the Application Portfolio.

### Admission Requirements

Students need an Honours degree in any discipline or the NQF equivalent (e.g. a 4-year B. Journ degree).

*You are responsible for checking with the University's Academic Administration office that your application is complete and has been received. No applications will be considered after the end of August 2020. We will try to announce the list of successful candidates by late early December. Please note that no correspondence will be entered into in the case of unsuccessful applications. However, we will offer to comment on your portfolio should you so wish.*

### TUITION FEES

These change every year, and can be found at [www.ru.ac.za/applying/fees/](http://www.ru.ac.za/applying/fees/) within the fees booklet under the first general heading of "All Faculties other than as specified below". Part time students pay the full fee for each of the two years. If a student drops out or fails to fulfil the programme requirements, fees are not refundable.

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

There is a non-refundable fee of R200 for course materials deducted from your student account (full time and part time students).

## **CONDITIONS OF STUDY FOR PART TIME STUDENTS**

You will need a good internet connection (preferably fibre or adsl). *If you use cell phone networks you must ensure that they are reliable and will provide you with enough uninterrupted bandwidth for two to four hours every week. You must also make use of a headset (earphones and microphone) – preferably USB powered.*

## **BURSARIES AND FUNDING**

**Mellon Foundation:** There are a limited number of scholarships for full time students covering both fees and living expenses, provided by the Mellon Foundation. Contact the Rhodes office of Postgraduate Funding ([pgfunding@ru.ac.za](mailto:pgfunding@ru.ac.za)) for an application form. The closing date for these scholarships is the end of October, but we advise you submit your scholarship application at the same time as your course application. Scholarships for 2021 are reserved for students wishing to write in isiXhosa (x5) and for those wishing to specialise in Graphic Novels in any language (x2).

**National Arts Council:** Postgraduate bursaries in creative fields including creative writing are offered by the National Arts Council, [www.nac.org.za](http://www.nac.org.za) or 011 838 1383. These are offered for a brief period in **September** (best to check by phone exactly when this will be) before anyone knows if they have been accepted to the course. However, the NAC allows bursary applications to be submitted before confirmation of acceptance into the MACW. *Please be advised that the NAC can take a long time to acknowledge successful applicants (March/April). You will need money before then, and you will also need to prepare yourself in the event that your application is turned down.*

**Rhodes Postgraduate Funding:** The Rhodes Postgraduate Funding office provides loans, normally covering fees only, and only for full time students. Contact as above.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Upon acceptance to the course, students are provided with a short reading list which they have to investigate over the two months before the course begins. *You are not expected to buy these books.*

**Reading:** At the start of the course proper, students are given an extensive modular reading list which will integrate with the short list selections thereby mapping out a potential reading trajectory they can adapt to their needs. They are given assignments to write creative reviews of various books read during the year, which are incorporated into their reflective journal. A related assignment requires students to research contemporary South African writing via literary journals, using the unique resources of Amazwi (previously known as the National English Literary Museum, NELM) in Makhanda (Grahamstown).

**Reflective Journaling:** Students are required to record their ongoing learning experience as writers in a reflective journal. In the journal, they reflect critically on their learning experiences, comment on the coursework assignments, and discuss their reading research. The ability to reflect on one's learning is a crucial component of postgraduate studies, and an invaluable process for writers to engage with.

**Tyhini:** Students are encouraged to submit work to external journals and magazines for publication during the course so as to learn how to deal with the range of responses typically expected from editors. The course journal, *Tyhini*, is published every year, featuring a selection of work produced by

current creative writing students. The journal is launched in early November immediately following final submission. Back issues are available (see FAQs).

**Events:** There are readings by various authors that take place at schools and other public venues during the course, as well as during the National Arts Festival and at the launch of the *Tyhini*.

*As postgraduate students we expect you to respect all deadlines without having to be prompted and chased after the fact.*

### **COURSE STRUCTURE (Full Time)**

The full time course is divided into two semesters. In the first semester, the seminar programme takes place, and the emphasis is on exploration through various coursework assignments, on intensive creative reading, and finding a writing discipline and rhythm that works for each student. There is one on one supervision every week as well as a weekly reading group. Halfway through the first semester students choose the coursework stream in their preferred genre (prose, poetry or graphic novels), and begin to work on their theses.

The seminar programme is structured by each teacher's creative interests and expertise. Each weekly cycle starts with a Monday seminar and culminates in an assignment set for Friday peer feedback sessions where assignment drafts are discussed. The student has the weekend to re-write the piece in response to feedback and submit it online on Sunday evening.

In the second semester, students continue their theses without coursework but with regular one on one supervisory contact. The thesis has to be a minimum of 30 000 words for a prose project, approx. 35-40 poems for a poetry project. No thesis may exceed 80 000 words.

### **COURSE STRUCTURE (Part Time)**

The part time course accepts candidates in even years with applications taken in the preceding (odd-numbered) year. The part time course follows the same curriculum as the full time course, split into four semesters:

**Year 1 first semester:** the same coursework as that which the full timers complete over 16 weeks is done over 32 weeks – that is, a seminar and assignment every two weeks. The seminar consists of an audio recording of the full time seminar and its assignment, uploaded on Mondays as an mp3 file via Rhodes University's online learning portal, RUconnected. Students have the rest of the week to engage with the seminar and to produce a first draft of their assignment which is then discussed in small groups of 4 or 5 using a combination of written comments and an audio group feedback session. After the comments, they submit a final version. Reading groups are held every second week when students read published fiction or poetry texts in an online audio group and respond.

**Year 1 second semester:** coursework continues, but in addition, as with the full time course, students choose a genre stream and, later in the semester, begin their thesis. The seminar-assignment cycle focuses on the thesis with its assignments feeding into aspects of the thesis project.

**Year 2:** students continue their thesis with their supervisors. A draft is handed in at the end of August and the final version in November.

**Intensive weeks in Makhanda:** Part time students are required to spend three separate weeks in Makhanda - one week each in February and July of their first year, and one week during their second year (usually April), and arrange to cover their own accommodation and travel. In these intensive weeks, they meet each other, teachers and potential supervisors, and the full time students. They

participate in writing, reading and feedback sessions.

### **ASSESSMENT**

Formative assessment is ongoing throughout the year via lecturer and peer feedback, as well as an anonymous reader report of the draft thesis in August/September. Summative or final assessment to award the degree is done by two external examiners per student. The weighting of the assessment is 75% for the thesis and 25% for the final portfolio of reflective journal extracts, coursework assignments, essays and book reviews. The MA final mark is awarded in three categories: pass, fail or pass with distinction.

### **ABSENTEEISM**

The MACW takes absenteeism very seriously. Rhodes University has a standard procedure and form to complete should you wish to request a leave of absence

[\[https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/registrar/documents/forms/LeaveofAbsenceApplicationForm.pdf\]](https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/registrar/documents/forms/LeaveofAbsenceApplicationForm.pdf). Please note that a leave of absence is requested *before the fact*. Only in

extreme circumstances will LOAs be granted after the fact (acts of God, acute medical emergencies, etc.). If a student misses a seminar (or a reading group, or feedback group) they will be issued with a warning. Should they miss another session they will be asked to withdraw from the course.

**Part Time Students:** Not being able to participate in online sessions due to problems with your headset or any other equipment you use for these sessions constitutes absenteeism. It is your responsibility to ensure that your participation in online sessions is as technically flawless as possible. This means extensive testing before any designated online session. *It is never permissible to "just listen in on a session" because you cannot get your microphone working.*

### **COURSE DATES**

The MACW course dates do not always coincide with the university terms and holidays. *Exact dates will be supplied closer to the time.*

**Full time course starts:** First or second week of February.

**First intensive week:** for all students, part time and full time, as well as all teachers. This is usually held in the last week of February. Part time students are required to attend from Monday 9 am to Friday night, that is, *to be in Makhanda by Sunday night and to leave on Saturday.*

**Full timers Easter break:** April (you will still be expected to work over this period).

**National Arts Festival:** July.

**Second intensive week [even years]:** July (usually the week after the National Arts Festival).

**Third intensive week (part timers' second year – odd years):** April (usually the week after Graduation).

**Full timers draft thesis + portfolio deadline:** (to be announced, but around mid-Sept).

**Full timers final (examination) thesis + portfolio submission:** (to be announced, but usually early Nov).

**Part timers draft thesis + portfolio deadline:** (to be announced, but usually Mid-August).

**Part timers final (examination) thesis + portfolio submission:** (to be announced, but usually late October).

## FAQ

### **1. What does “innovative” mean?**

innovative adj. /'ɪn-əˌveɪ-tɪv/ 1. being or producing something like nothing done or experienced or created before. 2. ahead of the times. 3. (of ideas and methods) new and different; fresh, clever, having/using or showing new methods or ideas; original, modern, new, novel, innovational.

### **2. What is the application deadline?**

The application deadline is the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2020. *No applications will be accepted after that.*

### **3. When will I know whether or not my application was successful?**

You will be informed by email or phone by late November, early December.

### **4. Is there any appeal process if my application is not accepted?**

No. We suggest that you apply again the following year and make sure that your application portfolio fulfils the necessary criteria as laid out in this FAQ.

### **5. What must I pay?**

You must pay a registration fee of R100 to Rhodes University; your course fees, also to Rhodes University; and a course materials fee of R200 deducted from your student account.

### **6. Can my application portfolio be a combination of different genres, say prose and poetry? Is there a minimum or maximum length?**

Yes, it can be a combination, but you are strongly advised to weight it in favour of your preferred genre.

### **7. What if I apply with an application portfolio of only isiXhosa poetry and later on in the year I want to write English flash fiction?**

Unless you have been producing English flash fiction for most of your assignments you will not be permitted to switch.

### **8. Is there a preferred style (font and spacing) for the portfolio?**

For readability, we prefer a 12 point font and single spacing. Preferably start each piece of writing on a new page.

### **9. I have written a 30-35 page short story. Can I send this as my full portfolio?**

Yes, but it would improve your chances if you demonstrated some variety. Rather send an excerpt from your story together with other pieces of writing.

### **10. Is the course for writers in English only?**

The 16 week coursework section is taught in English, but the assignments can be written in English, isiXhosa, Afrikaans or Kaaps. The extended creative writing project can be written in either English, Afrikaans or isiXhosa and will be supervised in that language. We will discuss language options with you in February.

### **11. Can I send in writing in different languages in my portfolio?**

Yes, English or isiXhosa or Afrikaans or Kaaps a combination.

### **12. I have not done any creative writing, but would my journalistic writing be eligible for the portfolio?**

Creative non-fiction or narrative journalism is considered creative, i.e. writing which incorporates the techniques of fiction such as character, dialogue, description, narrative. You may submit poetry, fiction (composed of one or several stories, a portion of a novel, or a combination of these), creative non-fiction or hybrid texts.

### **13. I have been working on a novel for the past two years. Would I be able to get guidance on it from my supervisors and finish it as my thesis project?**

No. All writing submitted for the course must be written while on the course. We would expect you to write a new work as your thesis project. When the course is over, we would advise you to go back to your earlier manuscript and apply the new skills and insights you have learned on the course.

**14. I have taken some creative writing courses in the past and I have written and published two books. Could these be considered as credits so that I do not have to do the coursework part of the MA?**

No. We consider the coursework to be absolutely essential, even for experienced writers. Every teacher brings a different approach and at least some of these approaches will be new to you. The coursework assignments will bring you feedback from your teachers and fellow students which will give you fresh insights into your writing.

**15. What does 'full time' actually mean? Would I be able to do the full time course if I lived in Pretoria?**

No, full time means studying full time and based in Makhanda (beginning of February to end of November). You will have to attend seminars, feedback groups, reading groups and sometimes meetings with teachers and supervisors every week.

**16. What does 'part time' actually mean?**

Part time students complete the programme over two years, working mainly from home. They attend two week-long contact sessions in Makhanda in the first year (February and July), and one in the second year (April). Teaching is done through audio recordings, and course assignments are submitted electronically, followed by online comments and audio interaction in small groups.

**17. Are there any conditions attached to part time study?**

Yes. In addition to the above, if you are accepted onto the part-time course you agree that you will connect to the internet via an ADSL or better connection; that you will make use of a headset with microphone; that you will participate in the online sessions from within a quiet environment, and that you will attend the three contact sessions.

**18. What bursaries or financial assistance is offered?**

We have a limited number of full scholarships courtesy of the Mellon Foundation. Mellon MA in Creative Writing Scholarships are limited to full time study by South African applicants only. They are awarded on the basis of financial need, creative writing ability, and equity considerations. Contact the Rhodes office of Postgraduate Funding ([pgfunding@ru.ac.za](mailto:pgfunding@ru.ac.za)) for an application form. Your writing ability will be assessed from the writing portfolio that you send with your application. The value of each scholarship is R105,000.00.

***NB: See current info about scholarships, loans and NAC bursaries on p2.***

**19. If I am a part time student, what happens if I cannot attend the intensive writing weeks in Makhanda?**

Attendance during intensive/contact weeks in Makhanda is obligatory – no exceptions. Besides the teaching done in those weeks, they are essential for meeting and engaging with your teachers and fellow students, and potential supervisors. Students are required to attend from Monday 9 am to Friday night, that is, to be in Makhanda by Sunday and to leave on Saturday.

**20. If I am a part time student, will the course pay for my accommodation and travel for the Makhanda intensive weeks?**

No. We will try to help you to find reasonably priced accommodation and transport, but you will have to organise and pay for accommodation and travel yourself.

**21. Is there anywhere I can see the work produced by previous students?**

Yes, you can buy past editions of our magazine Tyhini, which features work from all students taking the course in any particular year. Available from the course administrator ([macw@ru.ac.za](mailto:macw@ru.ac.za)) for approx. R200 (price may vary, and will include postage if required).

**22. I have always wanted to read and discuss with others the great books of literature such as War and Peace. Will I be able to read any of these during the course, and will we have discussion sessions on them?**

No. If you wish to focus on the great texts, you should rather apply to the English Department where texts are studied for their general reception. Creative writing focusses on the production of texts and so we tend to make use of shorter, more contemporary works, most of which no one has ever heard of. When we discuss them, we do so as writers outside of any literary culture, asking what the text does and how it does it rather than what it means.

**23. I would like to brush up on blockbuster and commercial, contemporary literature. Will I be able to do so during this course?**

Probably not. We prefer shorter, innovative and experimental work, but we are always open to mixed and mutant genres.

*There's many a best-seller that could have been prevented by a good teacher.*  
**Flannery O'Connor**