

USMA-MFA Dual Degree Program

The USMA program educates urban problem solvers to meet the world's dual challenges of climate change and inequality. The MFA program at AULA trains writers to be outstanding artists who are also engaged citizens pursuing social justice. The purpose of the dual degree is to marry these two, producing excellent writers who will be a part of the next generation's conversation about climate change and inequality.

Program Objective

The dual degree provides the opportunity for students to earn both a Masters degree in Urban Sustainability and an MFA in Creative Writing within a 2.5-year period, reducing the time and cost of completing these degrees separately. Many USMA students have a strong interest in learning to effectively communicate both the problems they have encountered and the solutions they propose to address social, economic, and environmental inequities. Several MFA students focus their work on justice issues that align strongly with the USMA values. Having this seamless path to dual degrees serves students from both populations. It is also entirely mission consistent by virtue of the fact that it brings two programs together that already address directly issues of social, economic, and environmental justice. Training engaged citizen-artists who understand and can communicate effectively about the problems at the intersection of climate change and inequality can only serve to better achieve the stated mission of the university.

Dual Degree Learning Outcomes

Dual degree students are held accountable to all of the USMA and MFA learning goals, as described here:

USMA

Upon leaving the program, USMA students will demonstrate the ability to:

- Apply ecosystems thinking and a human rights framework to the analysis of urban environments.
- Utilize natural and social science theory, concepts, and principles to address urban sustainability challenges.
- Produce effective strategies, at multiple scales, for sustainability planning, policy, and regulation.
- Use effective research, communication, and reflective practice skills in service to urban sustainability.
- Engage in collaboration, advocacy, and leadership to effect transformational change.

MFA

Graduates of the MFA in Creative Writing Program will demonstrate:

- Mastery of creative writing skills of at least one of the following genres: fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, and writing for young people.
- Critical reading, writing, and thinking skills required of a literary artist.
- Knowledge of ethical dilemmas and social values of the literary arts.
- Commitment to a broad range of issues and activities associated with a literary writer engaged with the societies in which the writer lives and works.

Program Overview

The USMA-MFA dual degree allows students to complete two 2 degrees in as few as 2.5 years (5 semesters) at a cost greatly reduced from completing the two degrees independently. The simplest path begins with enrollment in the USMA program, although students can begin in the MFA program or transition from one degree to another and back again. In order for students to complete two degrees in a reduced time, some of the requirements for each degree are satisfied while the student is technically enrolled in the other program.

Curricular Format and Delivery

Both USMA and MFA programs follow hybrid models, with residencies at the beginning of each semester, a 20+ week semester of online/remote work, and a concluding residency for graduating students to present their work. Instructional hours for dual degree students match those used in the USMA and MFA programs, including any synchronous class meetings for the USMA program and any online forums, discussions, or projects expected of other students in either program. Dual degree students are held to the same expectations as other USMA students during the two USMA semesters and as other MFA students during the three MFA semesters.

USMA students have the option to enroll either full or part time in the degree program. This option is also available to dual degree students while they are enrolled as USMA students. The MFA program, however, requires students to be enrolled full-time except in rare situations. Therefore, the dual degree program could take as many as 8 semesters to complete, if a student chose to extend the 2 semesters in USMA to 5 semesters. The full dual degree program should be completed within a maximum of 5 years, although the time limit for completion could be up to 8 years for students needing to step out and come back to complete the degrees.

Dual-Degree Options

Students entering the dual USMA-MFA degree can reasonably proceed along two different paths.

Option 1: The dual degree is optimally structured as a five-semester endeavor with the first two semesters spent in the USMA program and the final three, in the MFA program. Dual degree students who begin as USMA students enroll in the entire first year USMA curriculum, taking the 21 required units with all other USMA students, and adding 6 more units their second semester to begin their capstone projects. USMA students who wish to be dual degree students must apply to and be accepted into the MFA program before the end of their second semester.

At the beginning of Semester 3, dual degree students enter the MFA program. They design a project period proposal under the guidance of an MFA mentor and function as fully-enrolled MFA students working on a long critical paper, which in the dual degree program equates to the completion of the capstone project begun during the previous semester. Dual degree students come into the MFA program with advanced standing, and thus have the same three semester requirements as any MFA student who comes in with that status. The fieldwork done in USMA fulfills the MFA field study requirement and, as noted above, the capstone fulfills the critical paper requirement. All other MFA requirements remain for the dual degree students. The dual degree students following the Option 1 degree path thus complete 27 USMA semester units, then register for 3 MFA semesters, each 12 units, for a total of 36 MFA semester units. For them, this makes up the entirety of the combined curriculum, a total of 63 semester units for the two degrees (in comparison to 84 units if completed independently.)

Option 2: In this scenario, dual degree students begin instead with the MFA program. This student first applies to the MFA program and spends two semesters as an MFA student. By the end of the first year, that student then applies to the USMA program and, if accepted, shifts to being a USMA student in Semester 3. The student spends Semesters 3 and 4 in the USMA program, and then shifts back to the MFA program for the final Semester, completing the USMA Capstone as part of the final MFA manuscript.

The student in this situation may or may not be able to finish both degrees within five semesters. Exact timing to complete the degrees depends largely on what work completed during the MFA program satisfies the USMA degree requirements, and vice versa. Students are advised on an individual basis, in collaborative conversations with both department chairs.

Degree Requirements

The dual degree takes advantage of the existing USMA and MFA curricula and holds students to the same requirements as single degree students. However, students can fulfill certain requirements for one degree while enrolled as students in the other program.

Unit requirements

- Overall units: 63 semester units
 - 27 semester units from the required USMA curriculum completed as USMA students
 - Urban Sustainability (6 units)
 - Eco Systems Thinking (3 units)
 - Urban Infrastructure (3 units)
 - Research & Writing for Practitioners (3 units)
 - Sustainable Urban Economies (3 units)
 - Fieldwork Planning (1 unit)
 - Fieldwork (2 units)
 - Capstone (6 units)
 - 36 semester units (3 project periods) completed as MFA students

Curricular requirements

- Attendance at all USMA residencies required of single degree students while enrolled as a USMA student
- Completion of USMA capstone project, including presentation at USMA residency
- Completion of MFA residency requirements for 3 semesters

(Students in the MFA in Creative Writing program are required to attend at least seven seminars and the genre writing workshops during each residency. Listed here are the specific seminars dual degree students would be required to attend.)

- Arts, Culture, and Society I & II
- Genre writing workshops
- Graduating Student Reading
- Specialized orientations
- Completion of MFA Art of Translation Seminar
- Completion of MFA annotated bibliography
- Completion of MFA final manuscript

Program Assumptions

The dual degree has been designed so that within as few as five semesters, students are able to satisfy all of the requirements listed above. In order for this to happen successfully, the faculty have agreed to the following assumptions:

- Dual degree students register as either USMA or MFA students during each semester of their enrollment, transitioning from one program to another at the time best determined with the department chairs.
- Dual degree students who begin as USMA students enroll in regular USMA coursework through two semesters in the program, completing all core curriculum and fieldwork requirements of single degree students.
- Dual degree students who begin as MFA students complete the work of MFA single degree students while enrolled in the MFA program.
- Dual degree students who begin as USMA students begin their Capstone projects while USMA students, but complete them while enrolled as MFA students.
- Dual degree students who transition to become MFA students in the third semester enter the MFA program with advanced standing. During their first MFA semester, these students complete the capstone project, which fulfills the Long Critical Paper requirement of the MFA degree.
- Upon completion of the USMA capstone project, dual degree students present at the USMA residency following the completion of the project.
- USMA fieldwork satisfies the MFA field study requirement. MFA field study may satisfy any or all of the USMA fieldwork requirement, depending upon the nature of the field study.
- Any semester in the MFA program can satisfy the elective requirement of the USMA degree.
- Dual degree students earn the USMA degree once they have fulfilled all USMA requirements, including a capstone presentation.
- Dual degree students earn the MFA once they have earned 36 MFA units and satisfied all MFA degree requirements.