



Creative Writing in Higher Education: Global Perspectives and Prospects for Implementation in Iran

Zainab Saberpour¹

Received:15/11/2025 Review:8/2/2026 Accepted: 16/2/2026

Abstract

Over the past few decades, creative writing has been consolidated as an academic discipline within higher education systems worldwide. It has played a pivotal role in cultivating professional writers, enriching contemporary literature, and strengthening the relationship between universities and society. This article examines the structure, objectives, and pedagogical approaches of creative writing programs at leading universities in the United States and the United Kingdom. From the standpoint of curriculum design and pedagogical methodology, these programs typically integrate a diverse combination of specialized workshops, literature and literary skills courses, creative theses, elective and interdisciplinary modules, and professional training. The second section of the article addresses the necessity and feasibility of establishing creative writing as a formal academic program in Iran. Through an analysis of the approved master's curriculum in creative writing, the study demonstrates that, despite Iran's considerable cultural, literary, and academic potential, the institutionalization of this discipline encounters significant challenges. These include limited pedagogical experience, scarcity of native text books, and institutional resistance to curricular innovation. The article concludes by proposing strategies for the effective implementation of creative writing programs in Iranian universities.

Keywords: *Creative writing and higher education, creative writing workshops and university degree programs, curriculum for the creative writing specialization, creative writing in higher education in Iran.*

¹ Corresponding Author, Assistant Professor of Persian Language and Literature, Tarbiat Modares University
z.saberpour@modares.ac.ir ORCID: [0000-0003-0477-0611](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0477-0611)



1. Introduction

The institutionalization of creative writing as an academic discipline has become a significant development in global higher education over the past century. Originating in the United States and later expanding to the United Kingdom and other regions, creative writing programs have contributed to the cultivation of professional writers, the enrichment of contemporary literature, and the strengthening of university–society relations. As the article notes, universities today must “teach practical and applicable skills alongside theoretical knowledge” to prepare graduates for cultural and professional engagement. Creative writing, situated at the intersection of artistic practice and literary scholarship, offers a pedagogical model that integrates creativity, critical analysis, and experiential learning.

Despite Iran’s rich literary heritage and strong cultural interest in writing, creative writing has not yet been institutionalized as a formal academic program. Although the Ministry of Science has approved a national curriculum for an MA in Creative Writing, the discipline faces structural, pedagogical, and institutional challenges. This study aims to analyze the global development of creative writing programs, examine their pedagogical structures, and assess the feasibility of implementing similar programs in Iranian universities.

3. methodology

This research employs a qualitative, document-based, and comparative methodology. Data were collected from:

- official curricula and program descriptions of leading creative writing programs in the United States and the United Kingdom (including Iowa, NYU, Brown, Oxford, and East Anglia)
- scholarly literature on the history, pedagogy, and institutionalization of creative writing
- the approved national curriculum for the MA in Creative Writing in Iran
- Persian-language research on writing instruction, creativity, and literary education

The analysis proceeded in three stages:

1. Descriptive analysis of the historical development and pedagogical foundations of creative writing programs globally.
2. Comparative analysis of curriculum structures, course types, and pedagogical approaches across selected universities.
3. Feasibility assessment of implementing creative writing in Iran, based on cultural, institutional, and curricular factors.

This method allows for a systematic evaluation of both international models and local conditions, without relying on quantitative or field-based data.

Historical Development of Creative Writing as an Academic Discipline

Page | 21

Creative writing has deep historical roots in both Western and Islamic literary traditions. Persian and Arabic rhetorical works such as *Tarjoman al-Balāgha* and *Hadā'iq al-Sihr* were explicitly designed to train poets and writers. In the modern era, the discipline emerged in the early twentieth century with influential texts such as Henry James's *The Art of Fiction* and E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*. The establishment of the Iowa Writers' Workshop in the 1930s marked the first formal academic program, introducing the workshop model that remains central today. By the late twentieth century, creative writing programs had proliferated across the U.S. and U.K., supported by professional organizations such as the Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP).

Structure and Pedagogy of Creative Writing Programs

Analysis of leading programs reveals several shared components:

- Writing Workshops: The core pedagogical method, emphasizing peer critique, revision, and the development of craft awareness.
- Literature and Craft Courses: Grounding creative practice in narrative theory, poetic form, stylistics, and literary history.
- Creative Thesis: A substantial manuscript equivalent to a publishable book.
- Interdisciplinary Electives: Courses in philosophy, media studies, theater, or the arts.
- Professional Training: Instruction in pedagogy, editing, publishing, and digital writing.

Programs vary in orientation: MA degrees emphasize theoretical and research-based study, while MFA degrees prioritize artistic practice and studio-based learning. However, both rely on the integration of creative and critical approaches.

Current Status of Creative Writing in Iran

Despite strong cultural interest in writing and a long literary tradition, creative writing remains absent from Iran's university system. The study identifies several challenges:

- Dominance of philological and historical approaches in Persian literature departments
- Limited pedagogical experience in teaching creative practice
- Scarcity of Persian-language textbooks on creative writing
- Institutional resistance to curricular innovation
- Lack of trained faculty specializing in creative writing pedagogy

Nevertheless, the approval of the national MA curriculum marks an important step. The curriculum includes courses in classical and modern Persian literature, narrative theory, and fiction/nonfiction workshops. However, gaps remain, including:

- absence of poetry workshops
- limited attention to creativity studies
- insufficient integration of digital media and contemporary genres
- imbalance between theoretical and practical components

Feasibility of Implementing Creative Writing Programs in Iran

The comparative analysis indicates that Iran's curriculum aligns with global standards in its emphasis on workshops and the creative thesis. However, successful implementation requires addressing structural and pedagogical challenges. The study identifies several enabling factors:

- Iran's extensive literary heritage
- strong public interest in creative writing
- growing demand for content creation in cultural industries
- availability of experienced writers outside academia

Yet, institutional constraints—such as centralized curriculum control, limited faculty expertise, and resistance to practice-based disciplines—pose significant obstacles.

5. Results

Creative writing has evolved into a mature academic discipline globally, supported by well-established pedagogical models and institutional structures. Iran, with its rich literary heritage and growing cultural demand, is well-positioned to adopt and adapt this discipline. The approved national curriculum provides a foundation, but successful implementation requires addressing pedagogical gaps, institutional constraints, and resource limitations. If developed thoughtfully,

creative writing programs can revitalize literary education in Iran and contribute meaningfully to contemporary cultural production.

The findings suggest that creative writing can play a transformative role in Iranian higher education by bridging academic study and artistic practice. International experience demonstrates that creative writing programs contribute to:

- the development of professional writers
- the enrichment of national literature
- the strengthening of university–community engagement
- the diversification of academic offerings in the humanities

For Iran, the institutionalization of creative writing offers an opportunity to modernize literary education, respond to cultural and professional needs, and cultivate a new generation of writers and critics.

However, successful implementation requires:

1. Pilot programs at selected universities with strong literature departments
2. Faculty development initiatives, including training in creative writing pedagogy
3. Collaboration with writers, publishers, and cultural institutions
4. Development of indigenous textbooks and teaching materials
5. Integration of digital writing, screenwriting, and interdisciplinary approaches
6. Establishment of professional associations and academic networks

The study concludes that while challenges are significant, the cultural and academic potential for creative writing in Iran is substantial.

References

- AWP (Association of Writers & Writing Programs). (2025a). *2024 annual report*. Retrieved from <https://www.awpwriter.org/common/Uploaded%20files/About%20AWP/2024AnnualReport.pdf>
- AWP (Association of Writers & Writing Programs). (2025b). *Strategic Plan 2019–2024*. Retrieved from https://www.awpwriter.org/common/Uploaded%20files/About%20AWP/AWP_StrategicPlan.pdf
- Blau Duplessis, R., & Osman, J. (2012). Creative writing and creative reading in the poetry workshop. In H. Beck (Ed.), *Teaching Creative Writing*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dawson, P. (2005). *Creative Writing and the New Humanities*. Routledge.
- Fenza, D. (2008). Afterword. In G. Harper & J. Kroll (Eds.), *Creative writing studies: Practice, research and pedagogy* (pp. 165–168). Multilingual Matters.

- Fotouhi, M. (2017). *An Introduction to Literary Studies*. Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies. (In Persian)
- Foruzanfar, B. (1948). The mission of the Faculty of Literature of Tabriz. In E. Majidi (Ed.), *Collected Articles and Poems of Professor Foruzanfar*. Dehkhoda. (In Persian)
- Harper, G., & Kroll, J. (2008). Creative writing in the university. In G. Harper & J. Kroll (Eds.), *Creative writing studies: Practice, research and pedagogy* (pp. 1–9). Multilingual Matters.
- Harper, G. (2012). A short history of creative writing in British universities. In H. Beck (Ed.), *Teaching Creative Writing*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Henry, D. (2012). A short history of creative writing in America. In H. Beck (Ed.), *Teaching Creative Writing*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hoorizad, N., & Hasanvand, M. K. (2019). Examining the impact of teaching creativity methods in the painting workshop course (Case study: Undergraduate painting students at Al-Zahra University). *Theoretical Foundations of Visual Arts*. (In Persian)
- Jafari Kamangar, F. (2022). A critical view of the creative writing syllabus at Farhangian University. *Critical Research Journal of Humanities Texts and Programs*, 22(3), 151–169. (In Persian)
- Kealey, T. (2008). *The Creative Writing MFA Handbook: A guide for prospective graduate students* (2nd ed.). Continuum.
- McGurl, M. (2009). *The Program Era: Postwar fiction and the rise of creative writing*. Harvard University Press.
- Miller, A. L. (2022). Does creative coursework predict educational, career, and community engagement outcomes for arts alumni? *Creativity Research Journal*, 35(2), 196–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2022.2132751>
- Mohabbati, M. (2013). *Literary Criticism in Classical Persian Literature*. Sokhan. (In Persian)
- Myers, D. G. (2012). On the reform of creative writing. In H. Beck (Ed.), *Teaching Creative Writing*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Seyedan, E. (2020). A critical approach to the syllabus of writing and editing in the undergraduate Persian language and literature curriculum. *Critical Research Journal of Humanities Texts and Programs*, 20(4), 289–315. (In Persian)
- Suchy, S. T. (2023). Creative writing in higher education: A literature review of the marketplace relationship. In L. Waller & S. K. Waller (Eds.), *Higher Education – Reflections from the Field (Vol. 2)*. IntechOpen.
- Vandenberg, P. (2004). Integrated writing programmes in American universities: Whither creative writing? *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, 1(1), 1–8.
- Vanderslice, S. (2008). Sleeping with Proust vs. tinkering under the bonnet: The origins and consequences of the American and British approaches to creative writing in higher education. In G. Harper & J. Kroll (Eds.),

Creative writing studies: Practice, research and pedagogy (pp. 66–74).
Multilingual Matters.

Vanderslice, S. (2024). *Teaching Creative Writing: The essential guide*.
Bloomsbury Academic.

Wandor, M. (2012). The creative writing workshop: A survival kit. In H. Beck
(Ed.), *Teaching Creative Writing*. Palgrave Macmillan .