

Should Courses Taught By Graduate Students Cost As Much As Those Taught By Professors? At NYU, They Do. - APRIL 2016

By Ashley Jankowski

You did it. You've been accepted to New York University. After scrounging up as much of the \$75,000 tuition as possible through loans and hopes, you're eager to have your mind molded by the greatest intellects around. But you sit down for your first class of the semester, soon realizing that the world renowned professor you were expecting is not even a professor. He's a graduate student teaching his very first course.

NYU's Creative Writing Graduate Program boasts teaching opportunities for second year graduate students. However, undergraduate students taking Intro to Fiction and Poetry are beginning to question the educational quality they are receiving in return for their massive bursar's bill. According to the Tuition and Fee Rates posted on the university's website, the price of a four credit course taught by an acclaimed professor versus a student teacher is identical at \$5,336.

"It's like buying an old Chevy for the same price as a new Mercedes," Emelyn Vandenberg, 20, of Napa, California, said. "Money is limited, I cannot afford to be a guinea pig."

Vandenberg, a Media, Cultures, and Communications major at Steinhardt, decided to take Intro to Fiction and Poetry as an elective without understanding the status of her instructor.

During registration, Albert does not indicate which courses are taught by graduate students. Additionally, student teachers are excluded from faculty listings of the Creative Writing Department, giving undergraduates little knowledge as to the semester they signed up for.

"It's unfair to simply throw us a nervous and disorganized grad student," Vandenberg said.

The department's graduate program is undoubtedly highly selective. Based on information provided for prospective students on the program's web page, 600-800 students apply annually. 35-50 achieve acceptance.

However, as stated in the FAQ section of the site, applicants "do not need to have studied English Literature or Writing" to qualify, nor do they "need to have been previously published".

Undergraduates are demanding to know what *does* qualify them to teach creative writing.

The department head could not be reached for comment on the preparedness of student teachers.

"Graduate students absolutely benefit from teaching, but formal training was limited," Andy Sanchez, chemical engineer and first time student instructor of the course, said. "We just had a

practicum where faculty gave basic tips for selecting readings, and some anecdotes about difficult classroom experiences.”

Sanchez, 25, of Brooklyn, is here pursuing an M.F.A. in creative writing, although his only experience outside of science was his job as an editorial assistant at a small publication as a sophomore in college.

“I believe an engineer is a creative writer,” Sanchez said. “I’m constantly developing original processes with a beginning, middle, and end.”

The truth is, creative writing undergraduates do not want their educators to have to prove their qualification. They do not want to wonder if the gateway to the minor is worth the \$5,336 experiment. Unless the university edits their one-size-fits-all pricing, a decline in creative writers could be upon us.