

PORTRAITS

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Department of
ENGLISH

CONTENTS

FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD	2
ADRIANNA WATERS Concentration in Professional Writing, minor in Professional Writing and Psychology	3
BETHEL AKLILU Concentration in Professional Writing, minor in Citizenship and Social Justice	5
CAMERON FONTES Concentration in Creative Writing, second major in French, minor in Film Studies	7
EMILY FALICA Major in Asian Religions and Cultures, minor in Professional Writing and Political Science	9
KAYLEE COLEMAN Concentration in English for Secondary Teachers	11
CARDER VENABLE Concentration in English for Secondary Teachers	13
MAY QUAID Concentration in Creative Writing, second major in French	15
TORI PALMORE Concentration in Creative Writing, second major in Psychological Sciences	17
JACOB BROWN Major in Mechanical Engineering, minor in Literature	19
MELISSA RUSH Graduated in fall 2019 with BA in Professional Writing, minor in Literature	21
RACHEL HUNTER Concentration in Literature, minor in Gender & Women's Studies	23
CHANDLER MOORE Concentration in Literature, minor in Creative Writing	25
RAHMANE DIXON Concentration in Professional Writing, minor in African-American Studies	27
KRISTEN DARBY Graduated in fall 2019 with BA in Professional Writing, minor in Creative Writing	29
SARAH LYONS Concentration in English for Secondary Teaching	31

A NOTE FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

We are delighted to present the second issue of *Portraits*! Over the years, the Western Kentucky University English Department has developed a number of profiles featuring what our alumni do after graduation, and we have also presented sketches of some of our majors' remarkable internship experiences. *Portraits* is an effort to feature the surprisingly diverse types of students who major and minor in English and to showcase the cool experiences that many of our current students have while they are studying English at WKU.

If there's one thing that unites all the English students whose stories you'll find in these pages, it's the array of opportunities English has opened for them. They write for WKU's feature magazine *The Talisman*, tutor in the Writing Center, complete internships, publish creative and scholarly writing, and study abroad in places as far flung as Japan and South Africa. They have forged connections between their study of English and other disciplines, from French and political science to psychology and even mechanical engineering. Their degrees in English are preparing them for careers in international human rights, editing and publishing, filmmaking, technical writing, grant writing, and teaching both here in the United States and abroad.

Our students have had some incredible experiences that have enriched their lives and learning. Cameron Fontes is the co-president of Time Slips, an organization dedicated to helping elders with cognitive and dementia issues tell their stories. May Quaid won a grant to travel to Ireland and complete research on her novel. Chandler Moore has helped produce documentary films with WKU PBS. Rachel Hunter completed a Fulbright program in England to study children's literature.

While our students recognize how the study of English has helped them become better readers and writers, one of the compelling strands that emerges in the interviews is that they also realize how it has helped them appreciate new perspectives, gain empathy, and even become better people. These students demonstrate that the English major can prepare you to earn a living in a variety of careers, but just as important, it can prepare you to have a rich, full, and meaningful life.

DR. ALISON LANGDON
INTERIM HEAD OF ENGLISH, WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY



Interviews compiled by Madeline Kinser
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ADRIANNA WATERS

Adrianna Waters is a junior from Florence, Kentucky with a concentration in Creative Writing, a minor in Professional Writing, and a second minor in psychology. She is the president of Sigma Tau Delta, WKU's English honors society.

Why did you decide to major in English?

I think I always knew that I wanted to major in English. I love storytelling, whether I am writing or studying the stories. Majoring in English means I have the opportunity to strengthen my writing so that in my future career, I can craft stories that will illuminate other people's experiences.

How did you get involved with Sigma Tau Delta?

I got involved with Sigma Tau Delta when I took the English 202/Honors Forum my first semester at WKU. English 202 is required for all honors English students, and while you do not have to be a Sigma Tau Delta member to take the class or join once you are in it, it seemed like a great opportunity. Professor Rutledge was still the adviser at the time, and he encouraged everyone in the class to become a member. It sounded like a great organization to me, and after looking at their website and reading about all the opportunities they have, I decided to join.

What's a typical day for you as president of Sigma Tau Delta?

It shifts by week depending on what the focus is. At the beginning of the semester, I was doing a lot of recruiting. I also send emails with announcements specific to Sigma Tau Delta and information to push people to get involved in the department. For the first half of the Honors 202 forum we had a lot of guest speakers come in, so I was in charge of reaching out to those people and organizing that as well. I also make sure to find the best time for everyone to come to our meetings and take care of general housekeeping things like that.

Once the convention gets closer, there's going to be a lot of planning since it's in Las Vegas this year. In the past, people haven't had to pay outside of spending money and meals because we've gotten expenses covered and drove to the convention. Since we have to fly and Las Vegas is expensive, I have to find ways to get funding for that.

You've mentioned before that you do playwriting. Can you talk more about that?

My older brother has been into acting his whole life, so I've gotten the side effects of that. My freshman year, my brother told me about a festival that Western does called the Plays in a Day Festival. Essentially, plays are written, practiced, and performed within twenty-four hours. So I went into this not really knowing much about playwriting, but I had so much fun doing it! I got the prompt at probably 8:00 PM and wrote until the morning. It was such a cool experience to write something on my own and see it performed. I really fell in love with the art of playwriting after that.

Since then I've participated in the Plays in a Day Festival twice as well as the New Works Festival, which is like Plays in a Day except you get more than twenty-four hours to do it. It's been really cool for me to collaborate with people outside of the English department through those experiences. Playwriting means sharing the writing process. I learned very quickly that you have to give room for the directors, actors, designers, etc. to create their own art with the script you have given them. This means that sometimes I have to back off, and I have realized it is difficult for me to rely on others, something that I struggle with in all aspects of my life. When I do rely on others, the result is always incredible. For example, my freshman year when I participated in the New Works Festival, I told my director (a freshman theatre major, Cassie Seifert) that I was open to her feedback on my play's draft. I did not actually expect to get a lot of feedback because I did not think there would be a lot of collaboration between us on the actual content of the play. I was surprised, and later thankful, to receive a great amount of feedback that considerably strengthened my play. I learned that even the most personal aspects of writing need collaboration with all types of artists and people to thrive.

What are your plans after college?

I don't exactly know what I want to do. I have probably twelve different paths right now, so one of them has to work out! I'm interested in going into publishing and editing, that's obviously related to English, but there's also some areas that I think maybe aren't directly related to English that I'd be interested in. I don't necessarily want to be an English teacher, but I'm interested in education and tutoring because of the opportunities that I've had through the English department such as being a writing tutor and working as a teaching assistant. I've also become more compassionate as an English major and getting involved with advocacy, so I could see myself working on communications in that area. I know my ability to find different ways to apply my English major will help me after college when I find what I really want to do.

How has being an English major influenced you?

I went from someone who really didn't do all that much except go to class and that was it, to wanting to take advantage of every opportunity because there's so many that the department offers you. I became really involved in the English department, but I've taken that involvement outside as well. I wrote for *The Talisman* for a few semesters and I'm hoping to copy edit for *The Herald* eventually, but I'm always finding different avenues of using my skills in English and writing. With playwriting, I've found ways to take my skills I've learned in English, not just writing skills, but also collaboration skills, and have realized how much they can apply to different areas. I feel like our professors are always telling us that a lot of people don't know how to communicate well and we have those skills as English majors, but it really is valuable if you take advantage of the opportunities available.





BETHEL AKLILU

Bethel Aklilu is a sophomore from Mount Juliet, Tennessee with a concentration in professional writing and a minor in citizenship and social justice.

Why did you decide to major in English?

[My decision was influenced by] my passion and interest in a career in rights-based work. English can really translate into that in a lot of ways, especially if you get into policy. Just being able to write and take what other people have said and put it in a way that's consumable and valid for our government is really valuable.

What draws you to a rights-based career?

I've always been drawn to it in some way. My parents are immigrants, so seeing the process that some of my family members are going through drew me to international affairs and things of that nature. I've also always been a feminist, even since I was really little. When I got older that started being something that I was really passionate about. Just seeing people live their best lives and helping them have a better standard of life would be such an awesome career for me.

You're going to study abroad with Semester at Sea this spring, so where will you go and what are you most looking forward to?

I'm going to Hawaii, Japan, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, India, Mauritius, South Africa, Ghana, Morocco, and the Netherlands. I'm so excited because for each class we take we have a field class in one of the countries. I'm taking a modern women writers class and our project is to interview an Indian woman, and then write a piece about her.

You're a writer for *The Talisman*. How do you think the skills you use there help you in your major and vice versa?

I think it helps in terms of professionalism mostly. In our classes we read and we write a lot, but we're not actually having to interact with people in an interview type setting. Being able to reach out to people and ask if they want to be a part of something then transferring that to writing are really valuable skills.

What are your plans after college?

I'm interested to work in government, specifically something like the United Nations that's more international. I'm probably going to apply for a Payne Fellowship my senior year, which pays for grad school and you work with the United States Agency for International Development. With that, I would go to other countries and help out there.

How has being an English major influenced you?

English is my second life. I didn't grow up speaking it. I was undecided my freshman year and I didn't think that I was going to go into English. I just generally had no clue what I wanted to do. The fact that I ended up here is great because now I couldn't imagine majoring in anything else. I'm having so much fun. Everything I've learned is so interesting and so important to me. Now everything that I do, I do it with a lot of passion because this is something that I really love and I'm really dedicated to it.

CAMERON FONTES

Cameron Fontes is a junior from Louisville, Kentucky with a concentration in creative writing, a second major in French, and a minor in Film Studies. He is also the co-president of the Companions of Respected Elders (CORE) organization on campus.

Why did you decide to major in English?

I remember I was at M.A.S.T.E.R. Plan, and all the Potter College people were sitting on the colonnade looking at all the posters for the different majors. I saw the poster for English and I was like, "Oh, I would really like that." I had already declared a film major, so I stuck English in the back of my mind, went through my film major for a year, and then realized that [film] wasn't for me. I didn't like the production side [of film] as much, but I liked my screenwriting class so I switched to creative writing. I just had a gut feeling I would like English.

How do your creative writing major, French major, and film studies minor work together?

I've been surprised several times, especially in literature classes. I remember last semester there were times we'd be talking about French roots of medieval texts – a lot comes from French – and so a lot of that stuck out to me because I'm also involved in French studies. Also, from a grammatical standpoint, there are things that I hadn't learned or had forgotten about English that helped a lot in learning French and doing any kind of writing that I do for French as well. With film studies, there's a lot of overlap [with English]. There are a lot of English students in my film studies classes, a lot of film students have creative writing minors, and there's several faculty who teach film and English. There are people from both of those worlds that I've gotten to know really well and have worked with consistently over the past few years. I also really like writing about film, so any writing skills that I've learned in [my English classes] can apply to that.

You're the co-president of the Companions of Respected Elders (CORE). Can you talk about how you got involved with that and how you use your English degree there?

In my first English class, one of my classmates told me that she had a twin sister who was very interested in working with elderly people. I got in touch with her through that [and we started CORE]. We do TimeSlips, which is storytelling, and we encourage any kind of [creativity] from people with dementia and cognitive issues. A lot of people may hold it to the same standard of the story making sense or if it's right, but what we do is validate whatever they have to contribute to making a story, even if the story doesn't make sense. As I'm starting to plan for my honors' thesis and working with our CORE sponsors who are also English faculty, I'm thinking about observing this thing we do with storytelling [TimeSlips] and writing my own creative work based on that. All of that plays into my own personal goal of writing about older female protagonists.

What draws you towards writing about elders and what do you hope to impart on your audience through your storytelling?

My freshman year I did a short screening series with four movies that feature female protagonists over the age of fifty. It was hard to find [those protagonists] because there aren't a ton of them, but also at least 90% of the women are white so there's a diversity issue even within the issue of the underrepresentation of older women. At some point, I came to the conclusion that this is a problem and I'm going to solve it. So I started to do that at every opportunity I could in my creative writing classes, but also for projects that gave me room to be creative in other classes.

In my work I want to present older characters – especially older women – as well-rounded as any other character you would read. I'm not saying I want to romanticize aging because there are parts of aging that are hard, but being honest about their struggles and showing that living your life doesn't end at any age even if physical abilities might decrease or change. There are ways to keep going and adapt.

What are your plans after college?

I'm planning on applying to Vanderbilt for an M.F.A., but I'm also researching other programs. I'm also planning on applying for a Fulbright to do creative writing in the UK somewhere. If neither of those work out, I still want to work with elders somehow and create my own projects on the side to just keep writing and doing my own work.

How has majoring in English influenced you?

I've met some of my best friends through this department, which has been very worthwhile. I've gotten to work with them, which to me is great that I've found people that I don't want to hang out with just outside of class but also in class doing intellectual and collaborative work which deepens those relationships. I've met faculty that have been very influential and have exposed me to new areas within aging or within writing that I wasn't familiar with before. Now that's opened up a whole new world for me of possible paths my career can take and things I can do with my writing.





EMILY FALICA

Emily Falica is a senior from Scottsville, Kentucky with a major in Asian Religions and Cultures (concentration in Korean language) and minors in professional writing and political science. She is a student representative for WKU's Study Abroad and Global Learning office and has studied abroad in Morocco, South Korea, and Costa Rica.

Why did you decide to study English?

I added professional writing as a minor because my fields of religion and political science call for a lot of writing. Whether it is professional correspondence or research, I wanted to be ready. The professional writing minor made it clear I would be equipped for these fields if I took the classes. I can study these theories and ideas all day, but if I can't communicate them to future employers or coworkers it doesn't matter. As a senior, I can reflect on my research writing skills since I added English to my degree and it has completely transformed my ability to write.

How do you use the skills that you've learned in your English classes as a Study Abroad and Global Learning representative?

A lot of my responsibilities as a SAGL representative are just talking to students, but a lot of that entails emailing them, having to do a lot of research for them, and putting together documents for them because maybe they aren't too sure about the process. The skills that I've learned in professional writing concentrate on being able to communicate with people in a professional written format. Because I have to put these documents together for students and then sometimes do administrative work in the office as well, it's made my job easy to know how to do it because my professors have already taught me how.

How does your minor in English complement your major in Asian Religions and Cultures and your other minor in political science?

Political science goes hand in hand with the Asian Religions and Cultures because it's talking a lot about how culture works with politics in the East Asian region. A lot of the projects that come up with that are writing research papers, but in a professional, academic way. Having a concentration in professional writing makes it really easy for me to know what kind of tones and audiences I need to approach when writing professional documents about cultures and religions that aren't necessarily seen as ideals in Western culture.

You've studied abroad in places that not a lot of English students go. What was that like, and how did those experiences impact you personally and as a student?

It's impacted me the most academically because I was able to read literature that's not Western literature. For example, being able to go and take literature classes in Asia meant I got to read things from authors we may never consider reading [at WKU] and it totally changed my perspective on how we view each other, how we view literature, and how we communicate in culture. It's hard to say how [studying abroad] has impacted me personally because it's literally sculpted and changed my entire life. It's made me realize where I want to work, where I want to live, the kind of person that I want to be, and how I want to treat other people as well. It's given me chance to get outside of small town Kentucky and see a totally opposite part of the world.

What are your plans after college?

I'm currently applying for some internships in study abroad administration because I want more kids to study abroad. I'm also applying for some editorial writing positions for some magazines. My backup job is teaching English in South Korea. I have a lot of plans leading up to when I go to grad school.

How has studying English influenced you?

Studying literature has helped shape how I view a lot of different cultures' ideals and rhetoric from lots of different people which is really important when you study religions. Professional writing has really helped shape me in a way so [I'm confident that I can] email people or write a good resume. I'm not scared to go out there and get something because I know I can sit down, write it out, send it out, and it's going to be good. I can't think of any field where having a minor in any of the English concentrations wouldn't be useful. No matter what you're doing, no matter what path you're going towards, minor in English because you're going to learn how to communicate effectively.

KAYLEE COLEMAN

Kaylee Coleman is a sophomore from Louisville, Kentucky with a major in English for Secondary Teachers.

Why did you decide to major in English?

I decided to become an English major because from when I was a kid up until now, I've always been one to crave a good story I could get lost in. As I've gotten older, I've transitioned from just loving the stories, to also enjoying seeing how the author artistically gets across a theme that is relatable in a way to all audiences. I think this, along with the influence of two of my high school English teachers, is why I have chosen to pursue an English degree, specifically in education. While in those high school classes I was able to watch these teachers get kids, who didn't love English and school like I did, excited and involved in class discussions about deep and relevant topics through reading classic, seemingly not relatable novels. I would love to have the same impact on students that these teachers had on my classmates and me. Besides this, being an English major helps you acquire skills that are necessary in any field. It helps you to communicate in various formats at a high level, think analytically, and think creatively.

You studied abroad at Harlaxton this year. What stood out to you about that experience and how has that influenced you?

The most impactful thing was being taken away from everything that you're comfortable with. I didn't go with any close friends, so I didn't have any people that I was really connected to, and I didn't have any familiar surroundings. It was cool to be able to look at myself without all of that and see what makes me "me," and also getting to meet other people who are from various different backgrounds where we're all connected through this one similar experience.

You're interested in history. How does that influence how you approach things in your English major?

In the future, for me to be able to be a good English teacher and teach good literature, I need to know the historical backgrounds of those novels. A lot of times people are writing a response to something that has happened, and you can only get those messages out if you know what was happening [historically]. That's also one of the ways that I think literature can help us in the future - through tying it to history and seeing how they interact.

What is your favorite part about the English department and the classes that you've taken?

I like that a lot of our assignments are reading and writing because, even though it is really challenging for me, it helps me to grow more than just memorizing information and putting it back on a test. I also really enjoy the English faculty. They're all super kind and they want to help me with things that may not even apply to their classes. I met with Dr. Winkler for another class where I was doing a research project that had something to do with linguistics and she was more than willing to take time out of her schedule for me. I've never met any [faculty] who isn't willing to do that. They're all great!

What are your plans after college?

If I stay on this track, then I would be a high school English teacher. I did an internship at a history museum in Louisville over the summer with their education department, so, in the future, I'd be really open to looking at a job in a museum setting with education.

How has studying English influenced you?

It's helped me learn to think more critically about situations and know about things like bias, or reading into things and figuring out the context of situations.





CARDER VENABLE

Carder Venable is a senior from Portland, Tennessee with a concentration in English for Secondary Teachers. He is a tutor in The Writing Center, as well as an embedded tutor in the WKU English Department.

Why did you decide to major in English for Secondary Teachers?

I always knew I wanted to teach and I was always most comfortable in English. It was a natural fit for me to fulfill this goal because I'd always been in love with the subject in high school and had great secondary English teachers as role models.

What motivated you to participate in the Embedded Tutor program?

Dr. Fife, who's in charge of the Writing Center, emailed me and asked if I wanted to do it because she knew I'm an EST major. Most of the embedded tutors are grad students. I'm one of two undergraduate tutors, and we go into an English 100 class or a lab and work very closely with the students and the professor teaching the class. We also have office hours in the Writing Center, so we really help out with the students who need it in their English 100 classes. Part of why I'm doing it is because I want to be a part of the graduate assistant program here and this is what a lot of the grad students do, so I'm getting a lot of experience through that.

What's a typical day like for you working in the Writing Center?

Every day is a mixture of people who schedule appointments ahead of time and then people who just walk in. When I'm working with a student, the first thing I do is ask what they need help with and what the prompt is for their paper. We work through it together, I usually read it over, and then we talk about issues. We aren't there to write the paper for them, though. If I see mistakes I go over it with them, but I mostly have them go over it in their own time. We do encourage people to schedule a follow-up appointment and we hope they come back.

Working there is great for me because I have a lot of students that come in whose second language is English and I want to get my master's in Teaching English as a Second Language here at WKU. It's a new set of challenges for me, but I'm excited about that.

What kind of teaching influences from the English faculty would you like to take with you as you become a teacher?

Every professor I've had in the department has had their own way of doing things, which is great because

I get to view all sorts of different teaching strategies and what works. I actually have a document on my computer where, if I see something that is really cool that a professor does, I put it down there as an idea for when I teach. All of my professors have had a profound influence on my own teaching, and, honestly, I wasn't expecting it. I was expecting to just go through school and get my degree so I can teach, but, honestly, it's been such a great couple of years with the faculty here. I feel really welcomed by them and honored that they have recommended me for so many opportunities.

What are your plans after college?

I'm going to graduate in the fall, which isn't a very opportune time to get a teaching job. I'm looking into transferring my teaching license from Kentucky to Tennessee, and see what kind of jobs are available. I may look into interim teaching jobs, but before I get a full-time job I want to come back to WKU to get my master's and enter their graduate assistantship program. In the meantime, I'm either going to do an interim teaching job or a reading intervention job in my home county.

How has studying English influenced you?

It's taught me empathy. It's also great to go to class every day and do what you were doing already, except in a more structured way. I can't wait to organize my curriculum in a way that students can do the same thing. We're just doing what we love. Really, the English department is like a family to me. I love Cherry Hall. I love walking into it because I know that every professor I have here is going to be great.

MAY QUAID

May Quaid is a senior from Demopolis, Alabama with a concentration in creative writing and a second major in French. She is currently writing a novel for her honors thesis.

Why did you decide to major in English?

I've always had an interest in writing and literature. I wanted to do creative writing to give me an opportunity to create work that could be peer reviewed while also learning ways to grow stronger in it. I have always enjoyed reading and discussing literature, so I found that English was the natural place for me to go in college.

You're writing a novel for your honors thesis. Can you talk more about that?

The novel is based on Irish folklore, specifically fae and fairies. I'm currently finishing up my fourth draft, which will be almost the final draft of this novel. Over winter break I have funding from the Honors Development Grant and the FUSE Grant to go abroad to Ireland for ten days to do research so I can polish my draft when I return.

The major themes are dealing with conflict between a fae and a witch, so I'm trying to present this idea of otherness. Both of the main characters have to deal with prejudices against each other and also prejudices being forced onto them from their cultures. It's dealing with finding your own identity and connecting with people who are different than you. I want to be able to give the readers characters they can connect to. I feel like I want to write characters that aren't usually within the norm, or relationships that aren't shown as often. I want to have the readers find a story and character they can fall into and see themselves reflected with. I want readers to know it's okay to be themselves and that they have others like them and that there is support for the hard things of life.

You mentioned that you have an interest in more diverse areas of study. Why do you believe it's so important to study these topics?

I'm really into post-colonial studies and gay and lesbian studies. I feel subjects like that don't get looked at as often, and I also feel like [post-colonial studies and gay and lesbian studies] is something that's important outside of the English department because not only are they set in literature but they are also set in society as they were and as they still are. Post-colonial studies is really important to me because it lets those who aren't normally paid attention to be heard and recognized. Gay and lesbian literature is really important to me because I'm queer myself and all of my writing focuses on queer characters, so to read books that are written about queer characters that are a part of a literary canon is really important to me.

Why did you decide to major in English and French?

It's these two languages that are different, and I'm having to combine the two. In the spring I studied abroad in Caen, France to take classes for my French major, so I didn't do any

English classes over there. It was really interesting though to meet people who don't speak English as their first language, but they speak English so well. It helped to greatly improve my French skills. In a way French has helped my English and English has helped my French, so they work together in a way.

What are your plans after college?

I plan to go back to France and teach English overseas. That's not one-hundred percent confirmed yet, but that's something that I'm hoping for.

How has being an English major influenced you?

I feel like my English major has helped me form critical thinking skills. I've learned how to read something and consider deeper into it, how to see things, and it's also helped me become more connected with humanity. I think the whole idea of English is its part of the humanities and how it shows more of what being human is. I've learned to be open to ideas that aren't my own and have learned to analyze and look at those ideas with a critical mindset. People might consider English as just an American thing or a British thing, but I find that English is so much more. It's like a world language, and literature is so much more – it's like the world is literature. As a writer, I feel like it was very important to get an English degree because I needed that exposure to things that I never would have seen on my own. I think that's one of the most important things about the English department is exposure and learning new things.





TORI PALMORE

Tori Palmore is a senior from Metcalfe County, Kentucky with a concentration in creative writing. She is also completing a second major in psychological sciences.

Why did you decide to major in English?

I spent the first three years of my college experience considering different majors, but dedicated most of my time to a degree in psychological sciences. As my time to graduate came closer, I didn't feel that I was doing what I really wanted. I'd always enjoyed English in school and am an avid reader. I eventually made the decision to go with my gut and do a double major so I could study what I love.

How does your major in psychological sciences pair with your major in English?

It gives me an interesting perspective on people and characters. It helps me make connections, like why authors do certain things and also to be able to pull things apart and look at them more objectively. With science, all I was ever reading was data articles and empirical articles, so adding English onto that makes me feel like I have a wider range of what I can read and how I can interpret it.

How has creative writing benefitted you since you started?

Writing helps me to work through a lot of emotions and anxieties. A lot of my stories were prompted from our professor, and I came out with a pretty broad portfolio. I didn't realize how sentimental and nostalgic I'd gotten until I started writing and realized a chunk of my portfolio was really family-focused. I also had a poem which focused on my struggle with depression, and I found it really challenging and rewarding trying to convey emotion in a concrete way. My professor would always say "show don't tell," and learning to do this was instrumental in being able to create a story in such a way that would be transferrable in understanding. My goal overall was to be able to, for example, show someone what depression feels like if they've never experienced it. Writing has helped me a lot to communicate more effectively, and it's also given me the confidence to grow in the department.

What's your favorite part about the English department?

I've loved all of my professors. They're so great, and I feel like I was able to really connect with them. You can tell that they really care, and you can tell with certain professors that they really want to help you succeed. I've been here for three years, and I didn't feel like I was really a part of Western until I started in the English department. It just goes along with the "flavor" of English because it's more of a personal thing.

What are your plans after college?

Right now, I want to be a professor. I feel like I'm still in the mindset of accepting not knowing [what I want to do], but being a professor is what I think I'd like to do.

How has being an English major influenced you?

It's been great! My grades have improved so much, which has been a great self-confidence booster. I had a creative writing class with Professor Jagers and it really helped me find out what I can do and what I write like. A couple of my pieces were actually pretty good, so it was cool to have that surprise of feeling like I can do something with this. The community [has also had an impact] because it's easier to discuss ideas. Being able to speak my mind and listen to everybody's opinions has really enhanced my college experience.

JACOB BROWN

Jacob Brown is a junior from Franklin, Kentucky with a major in mechanical engineering and a minor in literature.

Why did you decide to minor in English?

The reason I minored in English was because of how much I enjoy reading and writing. I also had plans to go to law school originally, which I don't think I'm going to do now, but I do plan on going to grad school in the future. Reading and technical writing ability are very important to continuing that, as well as doing well on your entrance exams, and writing papers, and your thesis letter.

How does your major in mechanical engineering and your minor in literature work together?

For engineering, you do so much writing anyway that it really doesn't matter. The difference is that you're encouraged to have a voice and opinion in English, but in engineering you're never supposed to write with first person pronouns. Having better communication skills and being able to communicate more complex ideas in a more efficient manner is really what it comes down to because science that isn't effectively communicated isn't really well done. As different as my interests and skills may be, the underlying critical thinking and analysis that goes into problem solving for engineering can also be found in reading analysis and argumentative writing. They share the same core principles.

Do you think that studying engineering and English gives you a unique perspective in your classes?

Definitely. My engineering classes give me more of a hands-on perspective. In my World Literature class we were talking about steam engines one day, so I brought my steam engine to class. My English classes give me a different perspective and different points of view because STEM is very diverse, but it's a lot more homogenous than English is.

How do you think your degrees in engineering and English make you stand out?

I think I stand out from other people in the English department due to my vastly different interests and skill sets that are more engineering-related, like math and science as well as hands-on engineering skills like machining and fabrication. In the engineering department, I stand out because English gives you better social skills and better writing skills, which are skills that some people don't normally have.

What are your plans after college?

I'm probably going to go to graduate school and get my master's in engineering. After that, I'm probably going to work as a prototype R&D engineer. I'd like to do either defense design for the government or military, or go into SpaceX and do plane design. I know I don't want to sit in an office all day. I want to be hands on, wherever I end up working.

How has studying English influenced you?

It's been really fun. Every class is hard, but English classes are easier than engineering classes. It's been nice to have at least one or two classes every semester that I don't have to worry about all the time. My English classes have me reading books and then coming to class to talk about it, but my engineering classes have me finding structural strains on a building and all of the contact points which is a lot. I haven't had a negative experience with any faculty of the English department and have thoroughly enjoyed every course that I have taken.





MELISSA RUSH

Melissa Rush is a fall 2019 graduate from Bowling Green, Kentucky with a degree in professional writing and a minor in literature. She has recently accepted a position as a grant specialist with a non-profit organization called Centerstone.

Why did you decide to major in English?

Originally, thirty years ago, I was a business major. I have a long history in retail management, but I wanted to come back and do something completely different. I sat down for about two weeks, went through every single degree that WKU offers, and I felt like an English degree with a professional writing concentration was the most adaptable to any industry. It has proven to be such. I have the ability to communicate; I still have all of the accounting and business skills – I can work in both worlds. For me, that was just the perfect fit.

What was your attitude about deciding to come back to college?

Slightly terrified. There were no computers in 1987! However, I had nothing to lose, only everything to gain. I was excited, but also a little worried about how I would be received by my classmates. [I wondered] if I would be seen as the old lady or if I would be seen as a peer, and I was [seen as a peer]. I'm still in contact with so many people and keep up with everybody. I'll be back for graduation in May for those who didn't graduate with me. [Coming back] was definitely daunting, but the professors in the English department go above and beyond.

You've recently accepted a new position as a grant specialist at Centerstone. Can you elaborate on what you do there?

Centerstone is a nonprofit organization that works with substance abuse, emotional and mental issues, and veterans' PTSD. One thing that I really enjoy is that my direct supervisor, her supervisor, and the CEO of the company are all women, which is a nice change from the business world. Often in the corporate world it's mainly men, so this will be a really refreshing change of pace. I also love the idea that I can actually use my degree in a nonprofit field and still make a good living doing so.

Has being a nontraditional student influenced your perspective on the college experience compared to some of your peers?

I think I actually had a better college experience. I wasn't really worried about dating. I wasn't worried about social activities. Of course I went to football games and basketball games, but I wasn't necessarily worried about being out late on a Thursday night. The social aspect [of college] wasn't an issue for me. A lot of things that I went through in college the first time that I went were neutralized. Plus, I'm far more mature. Homework was something that I actually enjoyed.

You were very involved with the internship program while you were here, so how did that add to your experience?

Dr. Hale had me as his intern twice. The first time, I interviewed thirty alumni which showed me and everyone who read the profiles all of the things that you can do with your degree. That was really an eye-opening experience, and it made me a better writer. The second internship was more self-driven. Dr. Hale allowed me to choose an event per week and highlight what the English department does. For a side project, I worked on a report on how [WKU] is very below nontraditional student [enrollment] statistics compared to our benchmark schools. It was something that I was passionate about because of my experience as a nontraditional student, and Dr. Hale just turned me loose with that. I recommend any internship on campus if you can take one. For me, it wasn't for the resume part of it. I wanted the exposure, the experience, and I wanted to be a part of campus.

What are your plans moving forward?

I've always been relatively fearless. Coming back to school at a later age, having gone through it the first time, it takes that fear away. It takes away the fear of talking to strangers; it takes the fear of walking into a classroom and feeling like, "Oh, I don't belong." This position that I've taken wasn't what I had planned on doing. I was looking more in the editing field, but when I started writing grants, that felt like a really great fit for me. It's okay to try something different, and if it doesn't work out there are other things I can do. [Being here] has taken away the barriers that a lot of women my age will put on themselves. I think that you never stop learning, and you're never too old to reinvent yourself and go in a completely different direction than you thought.

How has studying English influenced you?

As much as I have always been a huge reader, the sheer volume of books that I have accumulated from professors' suggestions outside of our reading list is insane. I finally starting reading again for fun. I've also taken so much from every single professor, and knowing that they are there [for me], period. I feel like I could call anyone in the English department and say, "Hey, I need help," and they're there. I think that's the uniqueness of the English major.

RACHEL HUNTER

Rachel Hunter is a junior from Owensboro, Kentucky with a concentration in literature and a minor in gender and women's studies.

Why did you decide to major in English?

I really love seeing how literature is crafted and how it relates to different forms of literature across cultures and time periods. I love seeing the connections of how one piece of literature influenced so many other works and how literature is used to comment on social and political circumstances during different time periods.

How does your minor in Gender and Women's studies work with your major in English?

I saw how a lot of what's being taught is written by white male authors. I saw the difference in how women are portrayed by male authors and how women are portrayed by female authors. My minor also allows me to connect things such as gender theory or sexuality to texts and to see how female and male characters may subvert the prescribed roles of gender for that time period, which helps me get at the question of why the author chose to subvert these roles in the first place.

One of my favorite classic female authors would be Charlotte Brontë, specifically because of *Jane Eyre*. This was one of those books that was written by a woman showing the female experience. It also touched on larger social issues of the time such as imperialism, showing women were, in fact, educated and capable of having and conveying an opinion.

You've studied abroad twice in England. What was that like?

It was an awesome experience seeing different cultures, not just through literature, but through actually seeing them and experiencing them. The first time I went over, I was with the Fulbright summer program to study children's literature. It was really interesting seeing how authors have to get into the mindset of a child. We went to Harry Potter World, and it was cool connecting that to the book I was reading by experiencing it and seeing all the kids there who were having the times of their lives. I was too!

My second time abroad, my favorite thing was reading *Jane Eyre* and going on a field trip to see where the Brontë home was. I got to walk the moors where Charlotte Brontë walked, and that was such a cool experience. It put the setting [of her work] into a more realistic perspective to see what she saw in the English landscape.

What's your favorite part about the WKU English Department?

You can go to anyone for help. You can see a professor in the hallway and it doesn't matter if you've had them in class or not, they're more than willing to sit down and talk

with you. Students are like that too. If they've had a class that you haven't had, they give you suggestions or tips for getting through the class and making the most of it. It's a community of us all trying to succeed, and professors want to see you succeed. I don't know how it is in other majors, but I'd say we're all very close-knit so everyone genuinely wants to help you. That's something that I've loved.

What are your plans after college?

More college! I want to go on to get my master's and my doctorate to be a literature professor. I'd like to focus on something along the lines of ethnic or world literature because I like seeing the connections, but I don't know if I want to focus in on a certain type of ethnic literature or not. We'll see!

How has being an English major influenced you?

I'm definitely more well-spoken. I wouldn't say that I'm the grammar police, but I notice that too now. I also analyze movies. I can't watch a movie without analyzing the theme and thinking about why they wrote the script the way that they did. There is also a note of general positivity and open-mindedness in the English department. I enjoy being a part of classroom discussions and presenting my ideas while listening to other's ideas as well.





CHANDLER MOORE

Chandler Moore is a senior from Madisonville, Kentucky with a concentration in literature and a minor in creative writing. He is also completing a second minor in film studies.

Why did you decide to major in English?

Honestly, I never imagined myself doing anything else. Ever since I was a kid, I loved people reading to me and taking in stories. It was my favorite thing to do, and the people that influenced me most were my English teachers. For me to major in literature was a no-brainer. When I got to WKU, I knew the two things that I wanted to study were literature and film.

How does your film studies minor pair with your concentrations in literature and creative writing?

I really like folklore and myth. I think the best storytellers are the Greeks. With literature you get the hero's journey and it's kind of cheesy and everyone talks about it, but it's the basis on which we tell stories. Because of that, I think film has taken influence from classic storytelling. They go hand in hand. Without written storytelling, you wouldn't have visual storytelling.

You mentioned that you focus on underrepresented people when you write your own stories – specifically people living a small town life. Why is that so important to you?

A lot of people don't talk about the struggles of small-town life. Coming from a small town, I saw that a lot of people were closed-minded. I love the idea of man vs. society or people vs. the hometown, but I also don't think it's right to neglect or ignore where you're from. I think that you have to bring those elements into your writing. There's just a lot of untold, unspoken history about small towns that can come out naturally through writing. I think that the best stories come from a small town life.

You work for PBS here on campus; how do you use your English skills there?

It's a similar thing of using film and literature. I love documentary filmmaking. Being able to take what I know about a narrative and putting that into broadcasting is really great. I really like working there. I started at the beginning of my sophomore year and there's never been a time that I didn't love the environment. It's really creatively fulfilling. I am often tasked with editing together projects. When I edit, I try to think of it in terms of storytelling. What is most important for the audience to know in the beginning to understand where the narrative is going? Furthermore, if we are shooting a program live, it is in my best interest to know how my shot fits into the overall "story" we are broadcasting.

Typically, if it is a project that takes time to develop, I try to think about how the shots or audio can play into the overall narrative I'm trying to tell. I have to ask myself, "does this make sense structurally?"

What are your plans after college?

I'm thinking about applying to grad school, but I'm also thinking about applying to jobs that have skills that I want to learn. I want to spend my twenties learning skills and seeing what sticks. I'm interested in multiple mediums of art. I would actually really like to not have to use my degree right out of college and spend my twenties looking for jobs that allow me to explore those mediums. I'm interested in filmmaking, photography, printmaking and digital art. I'd love to work for a magazine or a multimedia company for a few years and just spend some time hopefully being paid for creative outlets. If I were to choose a career it would be showrunner, because I love the originality and creativity that comes from working with others.

How has majoring in English influenced you?

It's helped me learn a lot about myself and what I like to write. It's also taught me concrete skills, like how to think critically. I've learned a lot about story structure, but also how to break the structure. I would say some of my mentors in the department have really helped me too - Dr. Hovet, Professor Folk, and Dr. Reames especially. They've all taken me under their wing and have [encouraged me to] "Do great things, please!"

RAHMANE DIXON

Rahmane Dixon is a junior from Houston, Texas with a concentration in professional writing and a minor in African-American Studies. She is also a member of the WKU Forensics team.

Why did you decide to major in English?

English is more than a language. It molds one of the most basic forms of communication that is vital for academics, business, and interpersonal relations. Literacy intelligence aids in the success of these sectors, for most communication nowadays is nonverbal. I want to convey this importance to adolescents who struggle to express themselves.

How do you use your skills that you've learned from your English classes on the Forensics team?

My classes help me a lot with speech. My professional writing specialty definitely helps me see things more linear. It lets me see things not in a big picture. I'm very detail oriented, thanks to my degree. English also gives me things to bring to speech. It gives me topic ideas, it gives me framing to formulate future events. As far as forensics, [English] definitely taught me how to use my voice in print. It gave me a way to have a style which is unique thanks to [English and forensics] coming together.

How does your major in English complement your minor in African-American Studies?

It's very interesting. Especially this semester, all of my classes merge now that I'm deep in my major. [I'm taking] African-American Literature, and it's dealing with linguistics and [African] history. It's taught me a lot more about myself and where I've come from. It's also made me look at the world differently because I learned that language is so important and it's one of the premises for interpersonal connection. Learning it from a Black Perspective, but also a global perspective has helped me become more socially and culturally aware.

What's your favorite aspect of the English department?

Everybody is so passionate. It takes a special mind to major in English. Right now, I have a class with Dr. Poole who has definitely given us a space to delve deeper into literature and language. There are people in there who are specialists in American Sign Language, there's people who specialize in women's literature, and so it's interesting seeing all the backgrounds come together in one department.

What are your plans after college?

Originally, I thought I was going to go to law school, but I realized after talking to a mentor and doing some shadowing that I was doing it because I could, not because I wanted to. What I really want to do is work with inner-city kids and teach language and how to express themselves on and off paper. It's a skill that people assume others have, but they may not know how to hone it or they haven't received the proper teaching. Writing is important from

how to write an email, to a paper, to a project, to a proposal. You're going to need it. I really want to teach it to people who probably don't have those skills that I'm blessed to have.

How has studying English influenced you?

It's actually changed my life. Growing up, I was told I was supposed to go into politics, but I've always been creative on the inside. Coming here and having an English department that is so passionate has definitely opened up that window for me. I'm definitely not one of those people who have the story of "I always knew I wanted to write." I didn't. I always knew I could, but I thought it was a skill everybody had, I didn't know it was a talent. I've definitely used the department to express myself in new ways and used these last couple of years to just do all I can in the department.

I also want people to know that you don't have to want to be a teacher or a professor to be an English major. It's an integral part of life because it cross-applies to so many different aspects of life. I'm learning way more culturally and socially being an English major because I'm forced to pay attention to language and how people communicate. I've learned the most from the English department.





KRISTEN DARBY

Kristen Darby is a fall 2019 graduate from Elizabethtown, Kentucky with a degree in professional writing and a minor in creative writing. She recently accepted a position with KirkpatrickPrice, a local IT auditing firm.

Why did you decide to major in English?

Originally, I was a theater major, but I decided that I wanted a more practical degree. The love of my life has always been English. I read a lot as a kid and I always loved fiction. My real love was creative writing, but I wanted to make my degree a practical one so I went with professional writing.

How did your disciplines in professional and creative writing overlap?

The heart of an English degree in general is the ability to synthesize information, whether that's information you were given or information that you came up with yourself creatively. Either way there's an eloquence that comes with any English major, so the ability to write well is what I think connects the two. Someone who graduates with creative writing or professional writing will be able to write well, speak eloquently, and synthesize information. There's a lot of overlap.

How did your degree bring you to KirkpatrickPrice, and what do you do there?

My degree literally brought me exactly to that employer. [KirkpatrickPrice] is very involved with our English department. I was in my last semester and I was looking at jobs everywhere. I was applying to professional writing jobs in Texas and California, and anywhere else. In the last two weeks of school, Dr. Jones told me that she heard there was an opening at KirkpatrickPrice and the job was never posted anywhere. I called their customer service line and left a message, then they reached out to me. I had my first interview before graduation, then I had an interview with the CEO, Joseph Kirkpatrick, three days after graduating. I ended up getting a job in my field less than a month after my graduation date, which is like a dream come true.

KirkpatrickPrice is an IT auditing firm, [so to make sure the reports are readable] they pair professional writers with an auditor and we write the reports for them. There's a lot to learn, and it's quite difficult in technical work because I know nothing about information technology. With a degree in technical writing you can write about anything without technically knowing what it means – you just have to write it well.

What was your favorite part about the English department while you were here?

The English department really does feel like a family. All of the professors genuinely care about their students, and if you're an English major chances are you'll find a lot in common with all of your peers. Everyone is friendly, supportive, and so helpful. If you love English, whether you're a reader, writer, or editor, you won't find a better group of people.

What are your plans moving forward?

When I graduated, my initial plan was to find a job. Now that I've secured a job in my field, my plans going forward are to continue adulthood. [I want to] settle down, and I'm also really excited to still be involved with WKU. I'm going to be at all of the Professional Writing Club meetings, so I'll be in those panels with Dr. Jones.

How did studying English influence you?

My vocabulary is a lot better, I'm more well-spoken, and I can write a lot better than I did before. The thing that it's influenced the most is that I used to not enjoy schoolwork. When I switched my major I actually started to enjoy it. I love the research aspect of writing papers. [English] has made me a lot more curious, a lot more detail oriented, and a lot more outgoing.

SARAH LYONS

Sarah Lyons is a junior from Shepherdsville, Kentucky with a concentration in English for Secondary Teachers.

Why did you decide to major in English?

I started off as a sociology major because I love the study of people, relationships, and grouping. What I learned about myself over that first year was that I loved reading more about the personal relationships and grouping of people than I did about the global statistics and ratios of people. I took English 200 the first semester of my freshman year, and I couldn't help but get intrigued by Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. It was at this point that I realized my underlying passion for characterization, annotating, and literature. My professor convinced me to take Literary Theory my second semester of freshman year. It was in that class that I decided to change my major from English literature to English for Secondary Teachers. I was in class, and he was dissecting passages from Jacques Derrida, and I was so impressed with his ability to make the content understandable. I remember thinking, "I want to do that. I want to dissect challenging content and make it enjoyable for other people. I want it to make sense."

You've presented at two conferences here at WKU. Can you talk about what that was like?

[The first conference I presented at] was the 49th Annual WKU Student Research Conference in March. I presented an essay over modern films with babies, and I focused on *The Son of the Mask*, *Rugrats Go Wild*, and *Boss Baby*. I looked at psychoanalysis and perception theory – which I learned in my Literary Theory class – and tried to get a better understanding [of the films]. The second conference was the WKU Undergraduate Literature, Language, and Culture Conference. For that, I presented an essay comparing creative nonfiction to the Statue of Liberty. The idea [I was presenting was] that where the Statue of Liberty is, what it acts as, what its form and purpose is, can be confusing. That's exactly what creative nonfiction is all about. It's about blurring the lines and kind of playing in the middle.

You mentioned that you like to "push the boundaries of formal writing." What does that mean to you and why do you think that's important?

In the English world, there's this big debate about whether you do creative writing with unusual formats and explorative language, or if you stick to a template and follow basic guidelines because that's what people want from you. I want to be an English teacher, so establishing a balance in the middle is important to me because I don't want to just give my students a baseline template. I also don't want them to go too out of the box and not be structured for whenever they do standardized

testing, AP testing, etc. The reason why pushing those boundaries is so important to me is because I want to be able to do both sides and establish a balance in the middle where you can learn, be creative, but also follow rubrics and guidelines.

How else do you hope to use your experiences from the English department to influence your future students?

I've been very lucky with my degree. Because I'm an EST major, I get this really cool opportunity to take [classes from every concentration]. I get a little taste of everything, so being able to combine all the different worlds of writing is my goal and it was kick-started because of the diversity of the classes that I've taken.

In addition to that, I've had incredible teachers who have done things [such as] giving me projects that didn't really have a format. I had Dr. Knoll, and she said, "Whatever you're passionate about, go for it, and then choose a format." [For that project], I wrote an entire poem in Middle English and I'm super proud of it. As a student, it taught me a lot about what boundaries are in writing and how to appeal to a structure but also to have creative exploration, which is important to me. As a teacher, that taught me that you can have [structure and creativity] if you're strategic.

What are your plans after college?

I want to be a teacher ranging from eighth to twelfth grade. I'd like to stay in southern Kentucky; that's one of my goals. My big goal is to make other people love reading and writing, and you can be taught how to love it.

How has majoring in English influenced you?

I've gotten to write about things that I want to write about, which [has been] really unusual for me. In high school, I was really limited with what I was able to talk about. I've learned that I really like baby movies. I've learned that I really like linguistics and understanding the structure of language more than I thought that I've learned. I've learned that pushing boundaries is really important to me in the world of writing. I've learned that I'm really passionate about writing and annotating – shocking, I know – and I've learned how useful that is for me as an effective study tool. I've also learned that I like coffee!

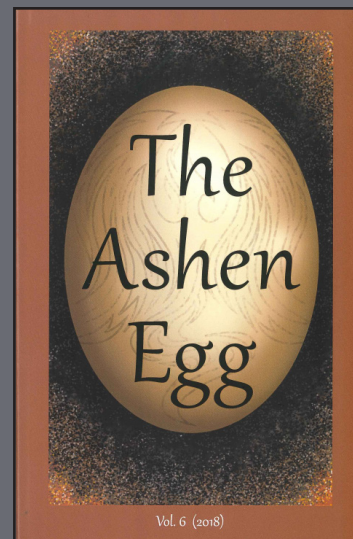
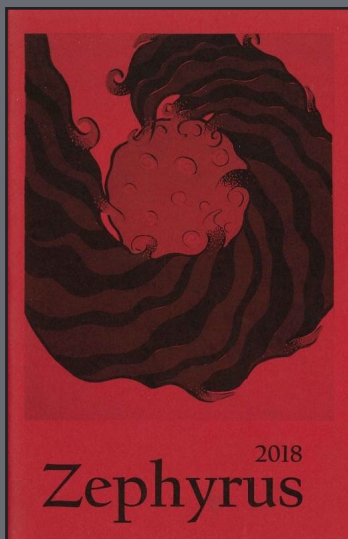




HENRY HARDIN CHERRY HALL

ALUMNI PROFILES & STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

If you enjoyed this issue of *Portraits*, be sure to check out our alumni profiles and student publications. Our alumni have gone on to pursue a variety of career paths that are both traditional and unexpected for the English major. These stories, as well as the ones you have read in this collection, are a testament to the versatility of the English degree. Likewise, many students have published original creative and analytical work in our two student publications: *Zephyrus* and *The Ashen Egg*. Thank you for reading, and we hope that these stories have sparked an interest or appreciation for English!



Visit www.wku.edu/english to view our alumni profiles, student publications and more!





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