

Dr. Jill Owen **B.A. English, Literature, 2011**

By Sarah K. Miller & Max Chambers

Lecturer, Baylor University

“I love the university atmosphere, and I just want to be a part of it for the rest of my career, so here I am, a professional student aspiring to become a professional educator.”



Jill Owen obtained her bachelor's degrees in English and French from Western Kentucky University in 2011. She also obtained her master's degree in French and Francophone Studies at University of Kentucky and her PhD in French and Francophone Studies from Indiana University, writing her dissertation on the bedroom in 19th-century French literature. Owen will become a permanent Lecturer in French at Baylor University in August 2019.

Owen's bachelor's degree from WKU taught her many skills in analyzing and discussing literature that she uses on a daily basis. “The survey courses I took and the special topics courses opened my eyes to world literature and gave me the solid foundation on which I have built my current research in 19th century French literature.” Owen's literature courses also prepared her for the challenging adjustment from undergraduate work to graduate work. “I look back now at the first graduate-level papers I wrote for those classes my first semester, and I laugh at how little I knew! But everyone has to start somewhere. However, my literature classes at WKU prepared me well for the level of analytical thinking I was expected to produce at UK.”

While completing her PhD, Owen worked as an associate instructor for the Department of French and Italian at Indiana University. She sought a PhD so she could teach upper-level literature and French courses. “I decided on French literature because it combines the two passions I cultivated during my time at WKU: literature and the French language. There is nothing more exciting to me than picking up a novel from the 19th-century (my area of specialty), and then reading it and discussing its depth and beauty in its original language. It might be boring to some, but it certainly is thrilling to me! I enjoy what I do more than I think I would enjoy anything else.”

Owen's love for teaching came from watching students develop their own skills, and this passion has fueled her throughout her graduate education. "It's a wonderful experience to watch students come into my classroom at the beginning of the semester with little to no knowledge of French and in just 15 or so weeks become capable of listening, reading, writing, and speaking all on their own. And I also love teaching more advanced-level students who begin to be more creative with French and can make it their own. The excitement generated when students make connections, take risks, joke around, and express ideas with the language is contagious. I still can't believe I get paid to do it! I'm not going to let them know I'd do it for free."

Owen advises current WKU students to engage in academic opportunities outside the classroom. "Be in constant communication with professors, go to conferences—if only to listen, build connections and relationships now that can aid you in working toward a career doing what you love. The world is in need of excellent communicators and analytical thinkers, and the English degree offers that to students."

