

Shanna Ballinger, B.A. English Language and Literature, 2013

By Max Chambers

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“With an English degree, you learn so much that’s applicable more broadly than those clearly defined paths in other majors.”



Shanna Ballinger (née Downey) graduated *magna cum laude* from Western Kentucky University in 2013 with a bachelor's degree in English Language & Literature. She is currently a Law Clerk at [Clagett & Barnett, PLLC](#). She is also a Juris Doctor candidate on full scholarship at the [University of Louisville Louis D. Brandeis School of Law](#), where she will graduate in 2020.

As a native of Logan County, Ballinger was excited to attend a school so close to her home. Ballinger began her academic career as a Middle Grade Education major but switched to English when she recognized that she wanted to attend law school. She knew a “strong writing background and analytical thinking” would prepare her for the endless briefs and research she would complete in law school.

Ballinger appreciates the skills she learned in WKU’s Department of English. In particular, she enjoyed her literature courses with Dr. Sandy Hughes. “I took American Studies my junior year, and that year the theme was Justice, Crime, and Punishment in America. Now, I’m really interested in practicing in poverty areas because I feel like there’s a lot of injustice just because you’re poor.” Dr. Angela Jones’ Editing and Publishing course also helped her achieve a prestigious position at [University of Louisville Law Review](#).

As a law clerk, Ballinger primarily drafts law documents. “I’m proofing what the attorneys have done to make sure that it’s consistent, correct, and has no errors. We just

filed a brief with the appellate court for an adoption, and I got to do a lot of research and write the brief. The attorney used my writing and filed it with the appellate court, which was really cool." As a research assistant for a family law professor, Ballinger researches and edits documents using the Bluebook Guide. She credits her English degree with directly preparing her for these positions.

When she isn't working or studying, Ballinger spends time with her two sons and reads historical fiction books. She is also working on writing a novel "in the vein of classic 'The Twilight Zone.' It's soft science fiction, but also deals with broader social themes."

Ballinger advises current English students to focus on the valuable skills they are learning through their English education. "There's not a defined path or job at the end of the tunnel. But I am a great editor. I can read a lot of dense stuff really fast. I am a good writer, so my communication skills are good. They are valuable skills that employers want in a lot of different fields, and they're really applicable towards everything."

