

Michael Croley, B.A. Government, Minor in Writing, 2000

By Chelsea McCarty & Madelyn Chambers

Professor, Denison University

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A member of WKU's Honors Program, Michael Croley graduated with a BA in Government and a minor in Writing in 2000. He earned an MA in Creative Writing at [Florida State University](#) in 2005 and an MFA in Creative Writing from the [University of Memphis](#) in 2007. Croley began his teaching career in 2007 at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Today, he is a professor at Denison University in Granville, Ohio.

Croley believes that his membership in the fraternity Lambda Chi was a great learning experience for both his academic interests and personal growth. "The fraternity experience was emblematic of me searching for something we often find in literature, which is a connection to humanity," Croley reflected. "What moves us and confounds us, brings us joy and sadness, is often not very different from the person sitting next to us in class. We just don't know that yet."

Croley acknowledged the influence that the late WKU Professor Mary Ellen Miller had on his success. "She did the thing that all great teachers do: she took me seriously," said Croley. Through Miller, Croley learned that to be a great writer, he must focus on great writing. Other WKU professors that influenced Croley's academic growth included Walker Rutledge, Dr. Frank Steele, Dr. Patti Minter, Dr. Dan Myers, Dr. Cassandra Pinnick, and Dr. Charley Pride.

In December 2015, Croley was selected as one of 37 winners of the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) (NEA) grants for 2016. NEA grants are given to individuals for continued work on research topics or creative work. They are highly competitive, and to be selected is a prestigious honor. "It's less about the money than the acknowledgement that the work I sent in was deemed worthy of an award," Croley

said. Croley will use his grant to research and write his third novel, which will focus on President Lyndon B. Johnson. Croley's first short story collection, *Any Other Place*, was published by Blair in April 2019.

Croley is confident that English students can achieve post-graduate success because he knows the true worth of an English degree. "An English major is a student who can synthesize information, can think critically, and can form connections that most people either miss or couldn't make in the first place," said Croley. "If you're graduating with a degree in English (and you've been a smart, engaged student), I think your options are pretty limitless, but you have to believe that."

Croley recommends that English students learn how to market themselves to potential employers. "You know that stories are the keys to how we see ourselves and the world, and that the distillation of poetry harnesses those truths," said Croley. "What companies need are folks that understand that and then can wade through those stories to the truth of them." Most importantly, Croley noted, "Don't be afraid."

