Caleb Ernst, B.A. English & Allied Language Arts, 2010

By Kiersten Richards

English Teacher, Elizabethtown High School

Every day, Caleb Ernst (2010) walks into Elizabethtown High School in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and greets his students. These young adults have no idea that they are subtly being prepared for their future through literature and writing.

Although he wanted to be a teacher, Ernst originally chose journalism when he stepped on the Hill. Once he realized how deep his love for literature ran, he quickly made the switch so that it could be a part of his everyday life. He said that "teaching someone else about a subject that you love is an immensely satisfying experience, and one that is as transformative for the teacher as it is for the student--perhaps more so." He hopes that all students consider themselves teachers whether or not they have a certificate: "we owe it to those who taught us to give some of our time in a similar way."

Reflecting on his years at Western Kentucky University, Ernst ranked his top three takeaways from the English Department: keeping an open mind, having a better understanding of the *world* that is literature, and cherishing a mind full of memories. "Encountering professors and classmates on their own cultural and intellectual ground opened my mind to the true diversity of the world," he said, and it transitioned him from a small-town student into a cultured adult. Understanding that literature is comprised of works from around the world taught him to approach life humbly yet confidently. Finally, cherishing the memories that he made going to poetry readings, football games, and everything in between keeps him stable in the "rush and hubbub of adult life."

To current students, Ernst advised, "Your career will happen faster than you can even imagine, so be proactive. Set achievable but challenging goals, begin establishing professional contacts, and make the most of your time in school so that you will be well prepared when you begin the transition into your chosen field."

WKU®
Department of
ENGLISH