

Cole McDowell, M.A. B.A. English, Literature, 2016

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“Study whatever interests you, but set your sights on a post-graduate target about half-way through your degree.”



Cole McDowell graduated from WKU with a bachelor’s degree in Literature in 2016.

He received his master’s degree in Early Christian Studies from the University of Notre Dame in 2018. He is currently enrolled in a six-year formation program at the Catholic University of America in preparation to be ordained as a Roman Catholic priest.

For McDowell, the [Mahurin Honors College](#) and the extensive Study Abroad and Study Away programs made WKU an easy choice; he also felt drawn to WKU’s student friendly campus. While studying at WKU, McDowell received several special accolades, including The Scholar of the College from Potter College of Arts & Letters, the Gordon Wilson Award for Excellence in English, Potter College Outstanding Student Award for Religious Studies, and the A.M. Stickles Award for Excellence in History.

McDowell credits his Study Abroad/Study Away trips, including Professor Rutledge’s Honors Hemingway and Faulkner class, with giving him a broader world perspective on life. McDowell was particularly touched by an eye-opening study abroad course to Cuba. WKU Department of English Head Dr. Rob Hale was also on this trip to Cuba. “I was impressed by his intelligence and curiosity,” said Hale. “I’m not surprised at all that he leveraged his passion for learning into the wonderful opportunity at Notre Dame.”

McDowell’s master’s degree in [Early Christian Studies](#) required him to take courses in history, ancient languages, and theology. His degree from WKU in literature allowed him to transition studying the theology and history of late antiquity and excel at analyzing ancient Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian texts in their original languages. The ability to critically analyze any text is a direct reflection of his study of literature at WKU.

McDowell is currently pursuing a [Baccalaureate of Sacred Theology \(STB\)](#), which is the equivalent of a master's degree. "The program consists of four areas or 'pillars' of formation: intellectual, spiritual, pastoral, and human. Intellectual formation requires that I spend two years studying philosophy and four years studying theology. Spiritual formation requires that I develop a stable spiritual life of daily prayer. Pastoral formation requires me to spend approximately four hours a week in different areas of service. Human formation consists of participating in community life at Theological College, learning to develop healthy, discerning relationships with others and with myself."

McDowell's English degree and seminary studies both exercise his passion for analyzing texts. "A fundamental component of many world religions is textual interpretation, and Catholicism is certainly no exception. I am reminded particularly of my courses in literary criticism at WKU that inform students of the different ways to read and derive meaning from a text."

McDowell advises current students to consider the goal of their degree and engineer their education to fit their aspirations. "Study whatever interests you, but set your sights on a post-graduate target about half-way through your degree. I found the program at Notre Dame in the spring of my sophomore year, and I spent the next two years fashioning my coursework in such a way that I would be a competitive applicant for the program. At the same time, if you know how to sell yourself and your work effectively, you should be able to study whatever you want without any fear of the future."

