

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

By Sarah K. Miller

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Jill Owen graduated in 2011 from WKU with a double major in English and French. She continued her education by obtaining her master's degree at the University of Kentucky. At UK, she studied French and Francophone studies. She also taught undergraduate French language courses as a teaching assistant. "I remember my first semester was quite a shock as I began to teach undergraduate classes for the first time and balance classes with more reading to do than I had ever done in a semester before," Owen said. "It was a really difficult adjustment for me, not unlike the adjustment from high school to college, or even from my master's to my PhD... It just takes time to get used to that level and volume of 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." She said that her 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."

Currently, she is an associate instructor for the Department of French and Italian at Indiana University while she works toward her PhD. She wants to obtain this degree because she hopes to teach literature classes at the university level someday. "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," she said "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.” Even though it is quite stressful at times and the hours are long, Owen said she would not trade this experience for anything else. “It’s quite a blessing to be able to say that. I guess that’s how I know I’m in the right spot.”

Owen’s love for teaching came from watching students develop their own skills. “Teaching is absolutely one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done,” Owen said. “Especially when I teach first-semester French, 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’s advice for students is to become engaged with academic conferences. “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.”

