



Cole McDowell, Class of 2016

By Melissa J Rush

University of Notre Dame Graduate Student M. A., Early Christian Studies

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The [Honors College at Western Kentucky](#) and the extensive Study Abroad and Study Away programs made WKU an easy choice for Cole McDowell when it came time to make a decision on his collegiate career. McDowell 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.

Currently a graduate student at the [University of Notre Dame](#), McDowell is in the process of earning his Master of Arts, Early Christian Studies. This program is jointly sponsored by the Department of Classics and the Department of Theology, requiring him to take courses in history, ancient languages, and theology. McDowell’s degree from WKU in English Literature has 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 credits trips taken during classes with Professor Rutledge’s English classes, including the Faulkner and Hemingway class, with giving him a broader world

perspective on life. He particularly was touched by an eye-opening study abroad course to Cuba. WKU English Department Head, Dr. Rob Hale shared a personal thought on his former student; "I got to know Cole on the trip to Cuba and was impressed by his intelligence and curiosity. I'm not surprised at all that he leveraged his passion for learning into the wonderful opportunity at Notre Dame."

When asked what advice he would offer current students, or those considering an academic future at Western Kentucky University, McDowell had incredibly wise insight. "Study whatever interests you, but set your sights on a post-graduate target about half-way through your degree. I found this 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."

McDowell noted how fast his four years at WKU went by, and while tying up loose ends the final semester, graduation seems to sneak up on a student. "It's certainly a day of pride and potential, but it's also a little sad to leave the close community at WKU. There's nothing quite like the undergraduate experience."