

# PORTRAITS



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# A NOTE FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

Welcome to the first issue of *Portraits*! Over the years, the WKU English Department has developed a number of profiles featuring what our alumni do after graduation, and we have also presented sketches of some of our majors' remarkable internship experiences. *Portraits* is an effort to feature the surprisingly diverse types of students who major in English and to showcase the cool experiences that many of our current students have while they are English majors.

One pattern that stands out in the collection is that not one, but TWO of our students are double majoring in English and Math! The stereotype is study of these two disciplines are antithetical; however, Rachel McCoy and Murray Huber have selected these two areas with noteworthy results. Another stereotype is that English major can't be athletes: Collin Hopkins (baseball) blows that expectation away!

Our students have had some incredible experiences that have enriched their lives and learning. Delaney Holt participated in the CEPT program gaining extensive classroom experience before student teaching. Emily Houston took on and nurtured the department's literary open mic night. Hannah Good edited WKU's feature magazine, *The Talisman*, and expanded its reach. Dillon Miller studied in Scotland and developed an amazing travel blog.

While our students recognize how the major has helped them become better readers and writers, one of the compelling strands that emerges in the interviews is that they also realize how it has helped them appreciate new perspectives, gain empathy, and even become better people. These students demonstrate that the English major can prepare you to earn a living in a variety of careers, but just as important, it can prepare you to have a rich, full, and meaningful life.

DR. ROB HALE  
HEAD OF ENGLISH, WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

# DILLON MILLER

*Dillon Miller is a junior from White Mills, Kentucky, with a concentration in professional writing and a minor in entrepreneurship. During the spring semester, Dillon studied abroad at the University of Stirling in Scotland.*

## **Why did you decide to major in English?**

I knew I wanted to do English because I've always been good at writing. I've always loved reading, and I've always wanted to use that in a job setting. Being an English major, is really nice actually, because it teaches such applicable skills: close reading, analysis, being able to coherently and effectively defend an argument, being able to write well. These are all things that can be applied to any job. A lot of people criticize English because of its broadness; I say that's its strength.

## **You studied abroad for a semester at the University of Stirling in Scotland. What was that like?**

I could sit here and talk about it all day. I went with CIS Abroad, which is a really great program. They have all kinds of different programs, but I went with their Semester in Stirling program. I've wanted to go to Scotland since...I mean, as long as I can remember. The UK has a different university system than we do, so two classes is actually considered full-time. I took a creative writing class and a literature class about Chaucer.

The Chaucer class in particular was really great, because the university is outside of the main town of Stirling. There's a big castle on top of the hill right in the middle of the town. So from my classroom, all you have to do is look outside, and there's the castle. To be able to study medieval literature in that setting was an opportunity like none other, because you're immersed in that history.

Apart from that, I'm a big outdoors guy. When I wasn't in the classroom or writing essays, I was out and about: walking, hiking in the hills. The wilderness and the highlands and the lowlands of Scotland are very inspiring. It's easy to see why it has inspired so many pieces of literature and poetry.

## **What are some experiences from your time in Scotland that stick out to you?**

There is a hill range next to the university where I was. There's a summit that a lot of students like to walk up, but on the way, there's the ruins of an old farmstead. I decided one day to take my Chaucer book up to this farmstead and I just sat up there for like three hours, and I just read. That was the best reading session I think I've ever had. It was the total immersive sort of rustic experience that you would expect for something like that. If I hadn't studied abroad, I would not have done that.

I went on a two-day trip along the lower east coast on a backpacking trip. I hiked eighteen miles in one day, and I didn't see a single person, the whole day. Then I set up my tent on the edge of the cliff and I fell asleep to the sound of

the crashing waves. The next morning I got up, went to a nearby village and had a full Scottish breakfast, cup of tea included. That was phenomenal.

## **How did your experiences in Scotland impact you?**

A lot of people say when you go to study abroad, it'll make you appreciate different cultures. Scotland definitely has a different culture from us, but it wasn't that different. It was very much familiar to me. Other than a couple of cities, most of Scotland is country, and I was in a smaller town, surrounded by farmland. So the people that I interacted with there were very similar to the people that I had grown up with. It made me appreciate the universality that people can accomplish. It doesn't matter where you're from, if you're a decent person, you're capable of interacting with anybody.

It did make me feel more independent. I had to buy my own groceries, cook my own food, manage my own money. I was in a totally foreign country with people that I'd never met, so I had to make friends. The workload over there is a lot more independent-based. I only had class twice a week, very few assignments in each class. They were worth a lot, but they were very comprehensive assignments. So I'd say going there really improved my research work ethic. They really stress independent research.

## **What are your plans after college?**

I have never really been the type of person to be like, "This is exactly what I want to do and I'm going to go do it." I'm more of the philosophy that you market yourself, you acquire useful skills, you find something that you're good at, and then you find meaning in it. I think being able to contribute something useful to society, and then find meaning in it is really important. I've thought about opening a business later on down the road, with my entrepreneurship minor. I've thought about working with some sort of journalistic publication. I've thought about coming back to a university. If I can have my way in Scotland, I would be like...I don't know, maybe a travel liaison working with people over there, doing tours or something. But I am making the most of what I have now, to get marketable skills, which I think is very important.

## **How has being an English major impacted you?**

It has made me more open and it has helped me formulate opinions about the world. In middle school and high school, I was pretty ideologically isolated. I didn't really have any opinions on anything, and I didn't really know a whole lot about anything other than my hobbies. Being here has helped me find myself. I now have a solid idea of who I am and how I operate in the world. I have discovered that almost everybody that I'm in class with has different opinions than I do. There's something about an English major that really facilitates the communication of ideas, and that's something that I appreciate.



*“A lot of people criticize English because of its broadness; I say that’s its strength.”*





*“Often the strongest writing is the tightest and the cleanest. The skills that I’ve learned in professional writing have really translated to journalistic writing very easily.”*



# HANNAH GOOD

*Hannah Good is a senior from northern Kentucky with a concentration in professional writing and a minor in journalism. She is editor-in-chief of the Talisman, WKU's yearbook magazine.*

## **Why did you decide to major in English?**

Throughout high school I was torn between visual arts and some kind of writing degree, and I never really knew what to go with. My junior year I was trying really hard in a lot of visual arts things, but I just wasn't excelling. It was exhausting me and it didn't feel sustainable as a career, whereas writing I could do all day, and I never really got tired.

## **How did you become editor-in-chief of the *Talisman*?**

I started in sophomore year on the editorial board as copy editor. It was the first year that we transitioned into a magazine, because we were previously a yearbook for over a century. We had our first editorial board meeting a week before school started, and the editor-in-chief at the time was like, "So this doesn't exist yet, and nobody's ever done it before in the history of the *Talisman*, and the people sitting at this table get to decide what it is." The feeling in my stomach, of us all brainstorming what the theme was going to be and what the magazine was going to look like, was just like nothing else. It was perilous and exciting and just so cool. My first year as copy editor I got to read everything that went on the website and to the magazine. I reported a little bit myself, and I did a lot of illustrations, so that made all my dreams come true because I was doing everything I wanted to do.

The next editor-in-chief was the former web writing editor, so I took her place my junior year. I got to lead a staff for the first time, and that was the most fun. I got to learn how to code a little bit, do some web design things, and still got to write a lot. I took my first journalism classes, so I really dove into reporting. I reported one of our biggest pieces last year, which was challenging and difficult, but felt really important. And made me want to do it all the time, non-stop. So it was kind of a natural progression to apply for editor at the end of last year.

## **What's a typical day for you at the *Talisman*?**

It is really different from week to week, but I usually come in and the first thing I do is edit whatever web pieces are on deck, because they have to get through the queue really fast. Sometimes I'll have a big load of magazine stories if a deadline has just passed. It's really a lot of management things, just putting out fires as they happen, and preventing fires by looking at the overall picture. But it's always different from day-to-day, which is so thrilling and wonderful. And fun.

## **How do you use English as editor-in-chief? Has it helped you in your position here?**

A lot of the focus of professional writing is adapting your writing to an audience, and that's been everything to me. Journalism writing is very different from academic writing and we get a lot of people who come in and think that writing long is the best way to get a message across. Professional writing has taught me that is not always the case, and that often the strongest writing is the tightest and the cleanest. The skills that I've learned in professional writing have really translated to journalistic writing very easily.

I think the most effective editors are the ones who can coach writers. I always explain the changes I make to writers. In order to do that, you have to have the language to explain why their construction didn't work, and why a different construction might be better. I wouldn't have that vocabulary as much if I wasn't an English major. I think that helps me help other people learn and become better writers.

## **What are your plans after college?**

I'm going to try to land at some point in DC, hopefully at the *Washingtonian* magazine, which is their city magazine, or NPR's digital desk, which is my other dream job. I would say if I could work on a team like the *Talisman* and just be surrounded by creatives all the time, then I would be happy forever. If I just get to make stuff with people, I'll be happy. And I think I always do freelance art on the side, because it's so natural for me. I just can't imagine myself doing anything else.

## **How has being an English major impacted you?**

Being an English major has made me a more well-rounded person, and also just a better person. In any English classes, you're focusing on how complicated things and people are. You're constantly using your capacity for empathy to either analyze your audience to enhance a piece of writing, or you're analyzing a piece of literature, or any kind of essay, and employing your sense of empathy and figuring out why a character did what they did. Employing those skills helps you be a better person, because you're seeing people as they are, and you're seeing people as messy humans. That helps people have a better sense of understanding and increases your kindness, and also increases your ability to do something about the things you care about.



# DELANEY HOLT

*Delaney Holt is a senior from Burlington, Kentucky, with concentrations in English for secondary teachers and literature. She is currently in the Critical Experiences and Practices in Teaching program.*

## **Why did you decide to major in English?**

Actually, going into freshman year of high school, I wanted to be a veterinarian. I had a really great English teacher that pretty much flipped my entire view about English, because I had grown up my entire life absolutely hating writing. It just seemed useless to me. It just clicked in her class and I fell in love with creative writing and poetry and completely changed my track.

## **How did you get interested in teaching?**

Back in high school, some of my teachers would let me do these mini-lessons because they saw something in me that they wanted to cultivate. So I'd get to do these little mini-lessons on grammar, or something about poetry, something that just got me up in front of the classroom. Plus, I did theater, so I just loved being up in front of people, and just loved the idea of helping other students fall in love with something that someone was able to help me fall in love with. Now, through CEPT [Critical Experiences and Practices in Teaching] and the different programs that I'm in, I'm having this opportunity that constantly gets me in front of the classroom, constantly gets me in front of students and lets me continue to cultivate that love that was sparked in high school.

## **What is CEPT?**

It's a two-semester program before our student teaching, where they partner the first semester with Franklin Simpson High School, and the second semester with Bowling Green High School. We're placed with an English teacher, and we have the opportunity to teach a few lessons, start the lesson planning process, and start making relationships with students. So we can slowly cultivate our own craft before we actually get our own classes. It's something that Western offers that no other university in Kentucky offers. It gets you rooted in your career before you even get a chance to go out in the real world.

## **In addition to teaching English, you're majoring in literature as well. Where did that combination come from?**

Well, I said that I hated writing, but I absolutely loved reading growing up. So when I started taking different literature classes, the surveys are normally what EST majors take. I saw these cool courses, like Kentucky lit, environmental lit, African-American lit, cultural lit. I was just like, "I want an excuse to take more of this. I want more content. I want to dig deeper into this than just what the surveys give you." So I decided to add on lit after I talked with Dr. LeNoir and figured out that it was possible that I could still get out in four years. I just wanted something richer than the general overview that the surveys gave you.

## **Is there a genre of literature that you're particularly passionate about?**

I'm an American Lit person, specifically environmental lit. I've turned into a total eco-critic. All of my poetry is based in nature, all of my research is based on environmental impacts and how that manifests within literature, and Dr. Berry's really helped guide my voice and guide my writing toward that. Some of the best papers that I've generated have been partnerships with him.

## **What other activities are you involved in?**

I'm in Sigma Tau Delta, which is the English honor society. I've written for the *Talisman* for eight semesters starting next semester. The best piece that I wrote was on studying the limestone history in Bowling Green—yet again, that environmental connection. I'm also in the Potter College Dean's Council of Students. I do a lot of freelance writing for *Potter College Magazine*. I do the Alumni Association newsletter pieces every once in a while. I tend to be that utility person that if someone needs something, they're going to probably send me an email.

## **What are your plans after college?**

I'm hoping to go back home and teach in Boone County for five or six years. I will also be pursuing my Masters of Arts in English at Northern Kentucky University, starting in the fall. My goal is to eventually teach AP Literature and AP Language classes back at home. Long-term, I'm hoping to pursue administration.

## **Do you think you'll be able to combine your passion for environmental issues with English moving forward?**

For my master's that I'm hoping to pursue at Northern, that's the direction that I'm wanting to take my studies. I'm hoping to tie in some Native American lit and see the traditions rooted in Native American literature, how those have influenced literature today, and how we are either taking their advice or ignoring their advice. I'm hoping to turn that into a larger master's thesis.

## **How has being an English major impacted you?**

English is everywhere. I guess the first major thing would be communication. That is the largest thing, especially as a teacher. If you can't communicate clearly and can't communicate to a variety of people, you're not going to be an effective teacher. When it comes to the creative side of things, I think my English major has also encouraged me to look at the world from a broader sense and to interpret everything that's going on around me. I've become so much more observation-based after I became an English major, just from writing poetry and things. It's made me more receptive to and empathetic toward all of the issues and all the people that I meet throughout my time.



*“If you can’t communicate clearly and can’t communicate to a variety of people, you’re not going to be an effective teacher.”*



WKU  
DELANEY HOLT  
BURLINGTON, KY  
Potter College of Arts & Letters

WKU  
Potter College  
of Arts & Letters



*“We always talk about these soft skills, and I don’t really know why they’re called soft skills, because they’re really useful.”*



# COLLIN HOPKINS

*Collin Hopkins is a junior from Louisville, Kentucky with a concentration in English for secondary teachers and a minor in Spanish. He is a catcher for the WKU Hilltoppers baseball team.*

## **Why did you decide to major in English?**

My first semester ever in college, I was going to be a business major, and that just wasn't something I was vibing with. It was just really impersonal. You didn't really deal with anybody or focus on anybody's future, anything like that. That's really what I enjoy about the humanities and English in particular, because I've had a bunch of great English teachers and they've been very influential in my life. I just want to make an impact on other people's lives as well.

## **How did you get started with baseball?**

I grew up in a sports family. My dad played football, so we were all just kind of cast into sports. It was fun. I started out playing football, baseball, and basketball, then kind of lost interest in football, and then basketball. Baseball has always just been my passion. I'm a catcher, so bad knees, but it's really fun.

## **What does a typical day look like for you?**

It's pretty hectic. Usually Mondays are pretty easy for the most part. I start out at nine in the morning, go to class, and then after class I have a two hour break where I go to study hall, which is required for athletics. We have to get at least six hours of study hall a week. So I go to study hall for about two hours, until my next class, and then I go to that class and then usually I grab a quick bite to eat. I go to practice from about two to five. Then we lift and everything. Monday through Friday is a pretty strict schedule starting from about nine and ending at six or seven.

## **How do you balance school and athletics?**

It's difficult balancing those. I try to get as much work as I can done in the study hall hours and then when I get home, I have to work on something and I'm like tired and everything, I just grab a quick dinner and then do some work before I go to sleep. Then wake up in the morning and do some homework. It's usually just constantly doing something, for the most part. Just trying to stay afloat.

## **What are the biggest challenges you've had to overcome as a student athlete?**

Having a good mental state of mind about everything, because it gets difficult physically with baseball, then with the workload it gets difficult mentally. It's just really delving into the work and focusing on understanding it, and enjoying it. Realizing why I'm studying it really helps me have a perspective on it.

## **Have you found that being an English major sets you apart from your teammates?**

I told them I'm studying English and they're like, "Why? You're crazy." I tell them I enjoy writing essays, and they're like, "Okay, that's even more crazy." Like, "why are you doing that?" And I'm just like, it's more personal, you get to deal with people. You study humanities, you get to study why people are the way they are and what they do and everything like that within history. I think it's really enjoyable. So, most of the people on the baseball team are studying business or sports management or something just to do something in the realm of baseball. And for me, I just kind of want to get away from that, start something different.

## **What are your plans after college?**

After college, I plan on traveling and eventually becoming a teacher. I'm not sure if I want to teach in a different country or in the United States, but I'm also minoring in Spanish so that I can have that sort of background as well. But I definitely want to teach secondary education, so I can teach high schoolers, and be the person that was influential in my life, to them.

## **How has being an English major impacted you?**

It has definitely just increased my perspective, which I think is really important in dealing with people. We always talk about these soft skills, and I don't really know why they're called soft skills, because they're really useful. Reading people, and understanding them, and being able to relate to them on a personal level is really important. That's one of the most important things that I've learned from being an English major.

# RACHEL MCCOY

*Rachel McCoy is a senior from northern Kentucky with a concentration in literature. She is also completing a second major in mathematics.*

## **Why did you decide to major in English?**

I technically came in undeclared, but I always knew I wanted to do English. I had an amazing teacher in high school for AP English, Mrs. Gerard. She was fantastic, and I just really liked her class. It was my favorite, so I was like, "You know, I'll try English."

## **How did you end up adding math as well?**

Her husband, Mr. Gerard, was my AP Calculus teacher my senior year, and I also really liked his class. I was a math minor for a long time, and then I realized, "Wait, if I don't add something else, I'm not going to have enough credits to make it to graduation." So I was like, "Oh, I'll just make it a math major." That seemed like the easiest solution.

## **English majors have a reputation for being very anti-math. What makes you different from that stereotype?**

My brain works in really weird ways. I can't explain math to other people because of the way my brain processes it; it doesn't work for other people. I think it processes it that way because of my English background and how comfortable I am with reading and understanding material. I have more of an intuitive sense of how math should work just from the logic of reading a book. You know there's a progression, it makes sense; math works the same way. And I see them as very parallel things, which is not normal.

## **Is one subject more challenging for you?**

It depends on what you're doing for each thing. Some of math comes really naturally to me, and some of it I have to think more about and loop around it to get to it. Whereas English, I usually feel like I understand at least something of it from the beginning. I might not like it, but I usually can figure it out. English feels a little more intuitive, but I also have to put more work in to try to see more of it. With math, once you figure it out, you're done. With English, there's a lot more to do even after you figured it out.

## **Do you feel like being a math major gives you a unique perspective?**

Being a math major, like I said, gives you another way to think about it. I tend to see a lot more straight up literary devices and some of the formulaic things in writing. They come through more clearly to me. I'm really good at predicting plots. That's what a lot of math is: you see where something's going and you just make the jump to get there. I do that a lot with literature because of that (sometimes to be proven very wrong).

## **What's the typical reaction to your English and math double major?**

Oh, there's only one reaction: "So you're going to teach?"

## **What's your response to that?**

Well, maybe, because I wouldn't mind teaching. I would find that very enjoyable. But also, they're super marketable skills in the corporate world; to be able to communicate, to write clearly, to be able to work with computer programming. A lot of math is computer-based these days. Those are all very marketable skills in the job world.

## **How would persuade each major of the benefits of the other?**

You can't exist in this world without being able to read and write and communicate. That's the English side that I think a lot of math majors tend to forget.

When you get into upper levels of math, you do proofs. Those are explaining your understanding of math, so a strong understanding of the English language and how to communicate really helps with that. They are more on connected than you think. So that's an argument for both sides.

English majors: it really comes down to if you understand algebra, filling in the blanks, that helps. Especially when you get to modernist writing, they don't put everything in the story and you have to put things together yourself. It helps to be used to, "Hey, you gave me this number, and this number. So now find this."

## **What are your plans after college?**

I'm working on grad school applications right now. I'm probably going to put in a couple of job applications in the spring, just in case grad school doesn't work out. I'm mostly applying to master's programs, so once I get done with that I'll have a master's degree.

The plan from there is to look for something within a university, maybe a teaching position, advising, somewhere in there. Be working, but also probably be trying to chip away at a PhD. But also when I finish my masters, I'm probably going to look for some jobs. One possibility is to start working in the school systems. Once you have a degree, especially a master's degree, it's pretty easy to get a teaching certificate on top of that and be a certified teacher, but in the meantime you could be subbing and working in other positions in the schools.

## **How has being an English major impacted you?**

The English department is very aware that they have to help English majors figure out how to find jobs and how to market themselves, and those skills have been extremely beneficial to me. You get so many opportunities if you're active in the English Department. They do the internship class every single semester. You get a ton of experience that way. There's resume workshops all the time. They're very aware that people think you can't do a lot with English majors, and they're very good at proving you wrong on that one.



*“I have more of an intuitive sense of how math should work just from the logic of reading a book. You know there’s a progression, it makes sense; math works the same way. And I see them as very parallel things, which is not normal.”*





*“I’ve met a lot of English majors who go into different fields but they talk about how much their major still helps them.”*



# MURRAY HUBER

*Murray Huber is a senior from Louisville, Kentucky, with a concentration in literature. She is also completing a second major in mathematics.*

## **How did you end up double majoring in English and math?**

Growing up as a child, I always wanted to be writer. That was my dream. Then later on in high school, I started realizing that I really enjoyed math. I had some really cool math teachers in high school that just made it really fun, and I started realizing I enjoyed that too.

## **English majors have a reputation for being very “anti-math.” What makes you different from that stereotype?**

Well, I definitely get that a lot in both classes. I think it's important that everyone has a good understanding of both the humanities and arts as well as STEM, because I think they're both important in society. I think you can get a broader understanding of the world in general, just by studying both subjects and even being open to both.

## **Is one subject more challenging for you?**

I'd say they just both have different challenges and struggles along with them. In English, sometimes I struggle more with just coming up with my initial idea. Once I get going with the writing it's much easier, but I have to spend a lot of time thinking about it. English will be more preparation and thought, and then math, it's just getting in there and trying the problem and if I come up with the wrong solution, then trying to re-work it and figure it out.

## **What's the typical reaction to your English and math double major?**

A lot of people are just like, “Why?” and they think it's weird. A lot of people just say, “Oh, that's very different.” And they're interested and ask similar questions to what you're asking. I've met one other person who has my exact same majors, and she's my same year and everything, so we take a lot of classes together. That's been fun because we've been able to help each other in both classes and talk about both subjects without feeling super different.

## **Do you think you will use both majors once you graduate?**

I've been working on some campaigns for the elections this year, and I definitely feel like I was able to use both sides in that work. Math really helps with organization. I was doing a lot of the volunteer coordinating for Get Out The Vote, a lot of spreadsheets and organizing.

English of course, played into that with communication, written and oral; being able to help out with messaging for the campaigns and Facebook posts.

## **How did you get involved with politics?**

I've always been interested in and cared about issues, but I hadn't really gotten involved until last semester. Jeanie Smith was running for State Senate. She came and spoke on campus, so I got to meet her and learn a little bit about her, and I went to her volunteer training. I also did a little bit of canvassing for Patti Minter and Jeanie last semester, and then over the summer I got more involved. I was an intern for the Kentucky Democratic Party and I was doing more digital type stuff, because I did video editing in high school, so I was doing video editing, graphic design type stuff with them over the summer. Coming back to school, I just stayed really involved with that. I was working for them through that, and I was also working for Jeanie separately, doing a lot of canvassing, phone banking, volunteer coordinating, some graphic design for her, just kind of a mix of whatever she needed. I continued working for Patti as well and ended up doing some field organizing with the KDP for Get Out The Vote.

## **What are you plans after college?**

Originally I was planning to go straight to grad school, but I think I'm planning take a gap year. I'm probably going to work on the governors' races in 2019 and then see where that takes me, possibly go a little bit further into politics. But eventually, I think I do want to go back to grad school and become a teacher, possibly a university professor.

## **How has being an English major has impacted you?**

I think probably the most important thing is just communication: learning how to write and communicate effectively, and not just through writing, but through speaking as well. I also feel like in English class, the discussions we have are really important. I think it obviously helps you if you're going into an English field specifically, but I've met a lot of English majors who go into different fields but they talk about how much their major still helps them. I think talking about big issues and literature and the discussions we have really help you learn how to talk about topics and disagree with people without arguing.



# EMILY HOUSTON

*Emily Houston is a senior from Winchester, Kentucky, with a concentration in creative writing and a second major in international affairs. She currently runs monthly Open Mic Nights, an event for students to gather and share their writing.*

## **Why did you decide to major in English?**

It was the major I declared when applying to Western. I originally had looked into WKU because I was interested in the journalism program. I ended up switching to declaring it as English, because through every stage of elementary school, middle school, and high school, I would always say, "Oh I want to be a vet. Oh, I want to be a doctor. Oh, I want to be a journalist." The only real constant in all of that was me loving all of my English classes that I took. When I was trying to decide what I wanted to study at college I was like, "I should pick something that I enjoy. I should pick something that actually makes me happy, and I can figure out the career stuff later and explore options." I just wanted to study something that would be enjoyable and fulfilling.

## **How did you decide to major in international affairs too?**

I also declared that one fairly quickly, mainly because I knew I had to have either a second major or minor. I always really liked all of my history and social studies classes, and I took AP Government in high school. I was in an international politics class my first semester freshman year. I loved the class, so I declared the major. I originally intended to use English to supplement it, just learning how to communicate more effectively and more persuasive arguments and maybe pursue a career in politics. But in the past year I've decided that I'm still more passionate about English than I am international affairs.

## **So there's a lot of cooperation between your two majors?**

Yes, definitely. I personally think it helps me potentially be a better English teacher. Works of literature are not historically or politically innocent; they're very much embedded in the world that they were written in. I think international affairs highlights that there's a lot going on in any given year that something was published. I feel like that's more something that I learned through studying politics, in a weird way.

## **You also run Open Mic Nights. Can explain what those are?**

We call it a literary Open Mic Night instead of the typical singing, but I wouldn't turn down people singing if anyone wanted to. Anyone who enjoys writing can come and read something that they've written. That can be poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, basically anything they can imagine. It has predominantly been poetry because people are more comfortable reading that out loud. It also lets us come together as a community, and appreciate what everyone is doing in writing. I know I get most inspired to write something when I've heard something really amazing from a friend. The people I'm in classes with tend to prompt me to write something I never would have written otherwise, even more so than professors can at times. So, I think that

Open Mic Nights help provide another sort of collaborative community for people to do that.

## **What are your plans after college?**

I'm applying for graduate schools right now. One, I'm supposed to hear back from in a couple weeks. It would be a fifteen-month program, and afterwards I'd be certified to teach English as well as having my master's, and I would immediately start teaching with that. Long term, I really want my MFA in creative writing. I'm applying for a couple schools right now, just as long shots. A lot of programs prefer you to have more life experience. My plan is to teach and get more life experience, then ideally go back for the MFA, and possibly PhD, because a couple of programs have a joint program where you can get the MFA in creative writing at the same time as a PhD in literature. Then I'd probably transition to something within a university. I've looked into maybe pursuing a master's in educational policy later on, and then going into the political aspect of it, since I have the international affairs background as well.

## **What made you want to become a teacher?**

The most influential people in my life have all been teachers, especially English teachers. They've been ones that I've kept in contact with and who have honestly shaped to me the most as a person. I think it came down to realizing that I could be that for someone else. You're having a daily impact on people's lives and there's something really significant there. Teachers are molding all of these kids in very different ways. Something they say or do could have a really positive or really negative impact on a kid's life. That's kind of scary to think about, but I also think I would try my best to be a good one. There are a lot of high schoolers and middle schoolers out there who don't have someone that will be willing to fight for them. I had really great teachers, but I know a lot of people did not have that support there.

## **How has being an English major impacted you?**

I was always really confident in my writing. My first semester here, I took a couple of classes I might not have been as prepared for as I thought. Not to say that I was an awful writer before, but I definitely think that being in the program here has improved my writing. It forced me that first semester to reconsider the way I'd been taught, the way I'd been writing, and I realized that I had a lot of room for improvement. I think all the professors have helped me get there, in different ways. Also, my closest friendships have definitely been within the English department. I've got friends that have other majors as well, but the people who I feel like I've really connected with and learned from have all been other English majors. The department is just so close-knit, and gives you so many opportunities to get close to students and professors. The English professors are the ones that I have the closest relationships with compared to other departments. It's been a really great experience here.



*“I know I get most inspired to write something when I’ve heard something really amazing from a friend.”*





*“When I wrote the personal statement to apply to the internship program, I put a less-traditional spin on the genre, taking what I would call the ‘English major approach’ — which paid dividends when my office director, herself an English major, took notice.*”



# THOMAS DEATON

*Thomas Deaton is a senior from Elizabethtown with a concentration in professional writing and a minor in environmental studies. In the summer, he interned with the US Department of State.*

## **Why did you decide to major in English?**

While I came into college undecided (and actually with more of a pre-med focus), I had always enjoyed my high school English courses, and my senior English teacher had encouraged me to look into a similar pathway for my major. I shadowed an English class my senior year as part of an Honors College visit, which helped to visualize the structure and dynamic of a college course, both from an English perspective and from that of a high school student. Once I came to WKU, I appreciated the career-centered focus of the professional writing program and liked its ability to serve as a building block for both professional development and transition into graduate school.

## **Could you describe your internship experience at the State Department this summer?**

Working with the Major Events and Conferences Staff, an office detailed to the Office of the Chief of Protocol, I helped oversee and execute the planning and execution of US diplomacy meetings, from the way the Secretary of State's podium appeared in front of a press-conference backdrop to the writing of the analysis reports following these high-level proceedings. The Office of the Chief of Protocol serves as the first handshake to foreign governments on behalf of the United States, and to work within and around this field of diplomacy was intriguing, fast-paced, and an important step in deciding my future career path (with help from my study abroad experience through Semester at Sea). When I wrote the personal statement to apply to the internship program, I put a less-traditional spin on the genre, taking what I would call the "English major approach"—which paid dividends when my office director, herself an English major, took notice.

## **What was a typical day like working at the State Department?**

The day usually started off with different kinds of planning meetings or things that were leading up to the different events that we'd be hosting throughout the year. So it could have been anything to do, from what kind of badge a foreign dignitary is going to be wearing to an event, so that we can identify them without it having to appear in the photo, down to what the specific design of the event itself was going to look like from a press

standpoint. So that was what we did in the morning. Typically, that would dissolve out into our own roles throughout the rest of the day and we'd work on those individual projects, then maybe have some left over meetings of things that need to be touched based on later in the afternoon. It just kind of depended, really.

## **How did you use English on the job?**

A big chunk of what I did relied on the ability to communicate with co-workers, with staff from across the State Department that I didn't know before. A huge chunk of communication at the State Department is written. It's a lot less face-to-face than I think people expect it to be. So it was a lot of, not necessarily memo writing, but applying what we've learned, especially within our concentration, to be able to speak to and get from others, what we were hoping to get, in terms of making sure the right person was in the right place at the right time, all the way down to asking for a weekend to come home and see my mom.

## **What are your plans after college?**

I'm applying to three master's programs in public administration or political communication. It just depends on what school it is, what they call it. [I'm] hoping to apply the audience awareness and the understanding that we develop in the professional writing concentration into a way that I can help further the diplomatic initiatives of the Department of State. So trying to get back to where I was this summer.

## **How has being an English major impacted you?**

As far as broadly speaking, it's actually given somewhat of a tangible course load to some of the things I've always been interested in. Specifically within the concentration, I love a lot of the courses that I've taken as electives. It has the literature courses; those have been a lot more interesting than I maybe anticipated them to be in the beginning, but specifically within the concentration, the Editing and Publishing class... Argument Analysis was a really interesting class for me. So being able to explain out thoughts and arguments in a way that you're forced to think about who's going to be listening to them on the other end, and that's hugely beneficial at setting me up for success in the career that I want to have.



# JESSICA MCCORMICK

*Jessica McCormick is a senior from Jeffersonville, Indiana, with a concentration in creative writing and a minor in French. In the summer, she interned with HarperCollins Christian Publishing.*

## **Why did you decide to major in English?**

The cliché answer is, I've always loved reading. It's always been this magical thing for me, and I've always loved writing stories and creating worlds, and sharing my love of the written language with other people. I came and sat in on a creative writing class my junior year of high school. I loved it and I was like, "This is where I'm supposed to be." I loved the English department and it has definitely not let me down since.

## **Can you talk about your internship this past summer?**

My internship was at HarperCollins Christian Publishing in Nashville. I was a marketing intern for their Thomas Nelson Books team, which is non-fiction. It was my dream come true to work for a publishing company. I got to talk to all kinds of different people from editing to publishing to marketing, which was awesome.

## **What kind of responsibilities did you have during your internship?**

I managed the Thomas Nelson Books Twitter page, I did press releases, and I learned how to create marketing plans, which was really cool. I would be given a book that we had in the future and I would come up with target audiences that would be interested in the book, promotional ideas to get the book to sell well, and then I'd create a lot of social images, on Canva to promote the books that we had just released.

## **Even though you weren't a marketing major, did you find that your English skills were able to transfer over? How did you use English on the job?**

Definitely with the press releases in writing. They really appreciated having someone they didn't have to edit. They knew they could trust me with writing social media posts, that kind of thing. Just being grammatically correct and interesting definitely applied there too. I also got to help write for their blog, *Page Chaser*. That was a fun creative outlet for me. It's definitely a BuzzFeed type of blog, so it's more fun, more creative. So they were really excited when they had a creative writer on the team.

## **What were your biggest takeaways from the internship?**

That I definitely do want to do writing, and do want to write in my job. I like marketing in that I can use my writing ability. I definitely took away that I love working in the publishing industry. Still not sure which field specifically, whether it is editing, or whether it is marketing, but I've learned I do have skill sets in different fields, and that I can use them to translate into whatever job I have.

## **You have a creative writing concentration. What kind of creative writing do you do?**

Probably poetry at the moment. I really thought it was going to be telling short stories, but I really enjoyed my intermediate poetry class. I'm taking it with Dr. Hunley right now, and I'll be working with him for my creative writing capstone next semester. I'm really excited about that because he's combining my French minor with my creative writing major. We'll be taking French poems, and I'll be translating them into English, then combining my favorite things from the French poems to create my own.

## **Are you involved with any other activities on campus?**

I did a year-long internship with Kelly Scott, in the Dean's Office, which I really enjoyed. We helped with the Fall Festival, The Cultural Enhancement Series—all the fun things, like Stress Buster Week. It's a really fun way to get involved on campus. I'm an editor for *Zephyrus*, the fine arts magazine. I really like getting a chance to read everybody's submissions each year. And I'm in Sigma Tau Delta, the English honors society, so I got to go to a convention last year in Cincinnati to present my fiction piece.

## **What are your plans for after college?**

I'm applying for jobs at the moment, which is scary and exciting. I'm thinking something like what Kelly Scott did, since I enjoyed that internship and my HarperCollins internship so much. I found that communications coordinator / communications specialist really works well for me, because it does bring in English, with writing press releases and media materials, so something like that, where I can organize—I'm a really good organizer, and so just to be able to be in charge of multiple things at once, something that keeps me busy and my finger in a bunch of different pies. I think that would be cool. Something with communications at the moment, maybe in higher education like Kelly.

## **How has being an English major impacted you?**

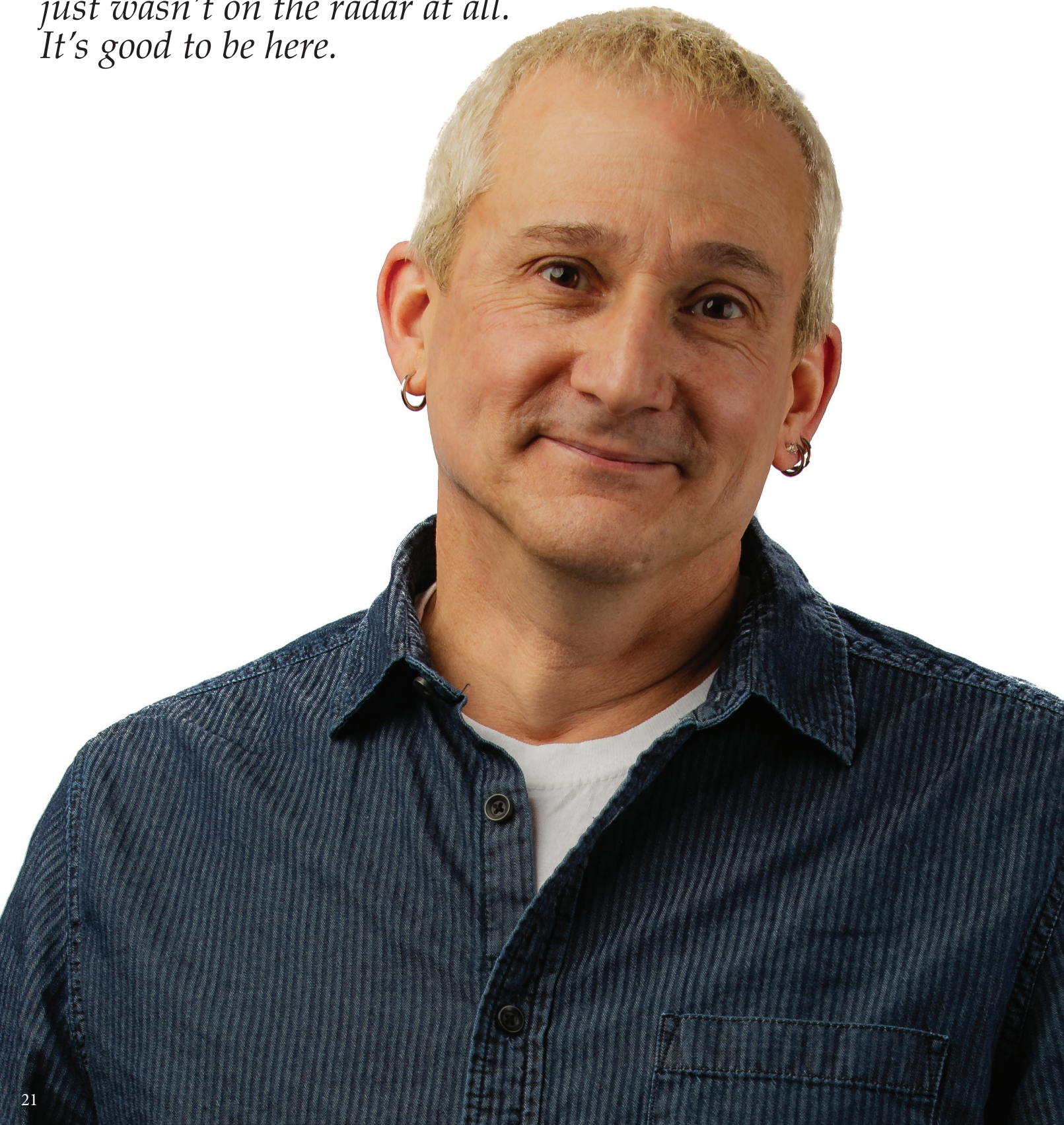
I think just teaching me how to empathize with other people and how to communicate in a thoughtful manner. I really like that you get to have a back and forth and a discussion in most of those classes. When you read, you are hearing other people's perspectives and learning how to empathize, not just see things from my point of view. I think that will help me moving forward, working with other people in my future jobs and just getting along better with other people.

*I came and sat in on a creative writing class my junior year of high school. I loved it and I was like, "This is where I'm supposed to be." I loved the English department and it has definitely not let me down since.*





*Things happen in your life, and you do something different. If somebody said five years ago that I would be doing this, I would have been surprised. It just wasn't on the radar at all. It's good to be here.*





# PHIL CIULLA

*Phil Ciulla is a junior from Nashville, Tennessee with a concentration in English for Secondary Teachers and a minor in English as a Second Language. After thirty years, Phil decided to return to college to finish his education.*

## **Why did you decide to major in English?**

As a non-traditional student I decided to finish my degree in English after realizing I had credits from past years and a two year AA degree in Arts. If I'm going to be a teacher, that's something that you can do in your later years. Where I am right now – fifteen years away from retiring – if I'm going to start something new, that's something I can continue doing for those amount of years.

## **What is your attitude about deciding to come back to college?**

There was a lot of apprehension. I said, "Can I do this? Can I do it financially?" There was a lot of self-questioning. Then on the other side of it I had done retail management. I said, "Do I want to keep doing that?" So the impetus for doing something different was "I don't want to do this anymore." So I thought about what I have in my toolkit – my education background – you know, is there something that I want to do? So I really thought about it and decided that going back to college is something I wanted to pursue.

## **Do you feel that being a non-traditional student gives you a different experience than some of your classmates?**

Professors will say "Well, Mr. Ciulla remembers when..." so that's funny. Mostly, I feel like I'm willing to talk about stuff that a lot of students might be apprehensive about. I also have my life experience, so a lot of what I'm doing, as far as things I've seen in my life. I can put that into experiences when they're talking about stuff in the classroom.

## **Can you describe aspects about the English major that you feel are most valuable?**

We have people come into the classes that say that they've gotten an English major and tell us what they've done with it. Dr. Hovet has had about five people come in and tell us what they started out doing and what they're doing now which is sometimes a totally different spot. I think either way, if you have a background in English, you're going to relate to people better, you're going to be able to write better – whether it's forms for work or anything like that – it just makes it a lot easier to navigate. Many people don't do that. It seems like there's always going to be a need for people with a literary background or a writing background because it's always going to be in use.

## **What advice do you have for anyone considering coming back to college?**

Things happen in your life, and you do something different. If somebody said five years ago that I would be doing this, I would have been surprised. It just wasn't on the radar at all. It's good to be here. I'm really enjoying my time here. Once you get in here, you feel at ease after a while, and it's not as strange. Now I'm doing it –there's still apprehension – but it's not that difficult to take that leap. You can do it. I didn't think I could, but then I thought "Wow, this is possible."

## **You went to the Sundance Film Festival this past January. What was that like?**

That was a lot of fun. You get to see films six months before they come out, you get to listen to music, and meet so many people. You could turn to anybody at Sundance and be like, "Hey, what movie did you see?" and then we would talk about stuff. I met people that worked for Disney for their diversity program, which I thought was great. I also met somebody that was a producer and director that has worked on twenty-six different films, and we just sat there and we were able to chat about stuff. You don't know who you're going to run into. I think that you can learn a lot.

## **How has studying English tied into your love for film?**

When I look at stuff – like a movie – I think about how the only thing that doesn't cost any money is the story. It takes somebody some time to do it. The story can break a movie, or it can make it great. There's so many movies where you'll go, "Who did this?" but it's a story, and that's usually what I look at. Many times I put it in the same terms as literature; you can learn so many things from a movie that relate to human nature. It's somebody telling a story, whether it's personal or something made up. Either way, it's valid and good.

## **What are your plans after college?**

I'd like to graduate, teach for a few years, and when I'm done teaching probably go overseas and teach English as a second language. I'm thinking maybe Italy or Spain, then I'll see where that takes me.

## **How has being an English major impacted you?**

It's awakened a lot of stuff. Things happen in your life that you don't expect, and where I am now is a new chapter; it's something new and different. It has a foothold in what I did thirty years ago and didn't complete, and now is an opportunity to do it. There's days when I come to campus and say "You know, this is pretty good. I like being here." There's possibilities that I didn't see six months or a year ago. I'm glad I'm here. It's a "new-old experience" is the way I would put it. Did I think I would have gone to Sundance? Maybe...probably not. There's a lot of options for what you can do.





*"English is everywhere."*

*- Delaney Holt, Senior*

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