

Lauren Tanner, B.A. 2011

English for Secondary Teaching

By Macy Kitchens

Professional Learning Specialist
Green River Regional Educational Cooperative

“English is just really applicable to everything that you could want to do.”



Lauren Tanner graduated from Western Kentucky University in 2011 with a B.A. in English/Language Arts with a concentration in Secondary Education. She then earned an M.A. in Curriculum and Instruction from Western Governors University in 2016. In 2022, she completed an Ed Specialist Rank 1 program in Instructional Leadership for Principal Certification from the University of the Cumberlands.

Tanner originally majored in chemistry but realized her heart wasn't in it. "I wasn't really thinking about what I was really passionate about," Tanner said. But she soon found her passion for education and realized English was the best route for her. "Once I decided on the education path, an English degree just really spoke to me. The best teachers I ever had were English teachers; the most passionate education I ever saw was in an English class," Tanner said.

The professors in the English department had a great impact on Tanner when it came to choosing a career, particularly Dr. Langdon. Tanner was debating on whether she wanted to go into education, but watching Dr. Langdon teach made her realize she wanted to recreate that with her students. "I had transformational experiences because of professors that believed in me, and so being able to recreate that in a classroom for students who were younger than me and had even more opportunity to be inspired to love literature, to love writing, to believe in themselves, that felt really powerful and inspiring," Tanner said.

After she graduated from WKU, Tanner taught high school English for eight years. She then became a curriculum coordinator and assessment coordinator. After several years of that, she became an instructional coach for teachers. She was interested in moving up the ladder in a way that allowed her to support teachers. "With every step in my career, I'm thinking, 'OK, what would be a way to take what I'm doing now and make it even bigger, make it even more impactful on teachers or students,'" Tanner said.

She now works as a Professional Learning Specialist at Green River Regional Educational Cooperative (GRREC)—an organization that serves 47 school districts in Kentucky. Tanner works for the Deeper Learning grant, a program focused on preparing students for postsecondary education. As a Professional Learning Specialist, she helps provide professional learning support and services to the districts in the Deeper Learning grant, hosting professional learning events and providing on-site support. Tanner is currently planning a weekly virtual professional learning series and developing an in-person learning event for the spring.

Tanner's English degree helped instill a love for learning, which—working in education—is essential for her job. Through her degree, she was also able to study and refine her own communication skills. "I believe that English majors have the upper hand because we have the distinct ability to understand and appreciate the art of communication," Tanner stated. By learning the functions of communication—reading, writing, listening, speaking—Tanner has been able to apply those to different aspects and educational content areas throughout her different careers. "My English degree created the opportunity for me to become a literacy expert that easily translated to other content areas," she stated. "Once I became a Curriculum Coordinator, I found that I could easily apply my foundation of literacy skills to other content areas and help teachers develop their own understanding of disciplinary literacy—the way that reading, writing, listening, and speaking functions within their content area. I didn't have to have a math degree to understand how a mathematician should write," Tanner stated.

While at WKU, Tanner worked at the DELO Testing Center, where she learned a lot of valuable skills, like "developing your own systems of organization, managing your time, prioritizing tasks that need to get done, and communicating with the people that you work with." She has been able to use these skills in her current job and as a curriculum coordinator. Tanner highly recommends that students, especially younger undergraduates, try to work on campus because she believes it is a great way to gain professional work skills while still being able to stay focused as a student. "I definitely recommend to students to try to find different types of work in different types of venues like that because it can really help you be a well-rounded employee," she said.

She also advises English students to keep their options open when it comes to a career. "The global market is changing, and the job that you end up with may not even exist yet. So, consider that you are currently developing skill sets, and start thinking about how those skills can apply to different job sectors," Tanner said. She believes that getting experience is one of the most important aspects students should consider before they start applying for jobs. "If you're missing a particular skill set, go out and find that because employers want well-rounded employees," Tanner said.

Her final piece of advice to English students: “Opportunities don’t usually just fall into your lap; you have to go out and find them, so make connections and get involved, and it’ll open up doors.”

