



THE DUCTILE ANCHOR

The newsletter of the Literature & Languages Department at
The University of Texas at Tyler

Can I Buy A Vowel?: How My English Degree Helped Me Win on Wheel of Fortune

James Price

BA in English, 2008 & MA in English, 2016



Have you ever had a dream come true? And by “dream,” I mean something really outside-of-the-box weird, something that would feel utterly surreal if it happened? For me, that happened six months ago, when I became a contestant on Wheel of Fortune, a TV show that I’ve been watching since I was small enough to curl up in my dad’s lap and ask what a vowel was. Yet there I was, standing next to Pat Sajak, asking if I could buy a vowel, in front of a live studio audience.

Once the star-struck daze faded, I was able to conquer my nerves enough to actually play the game on live TV. After buying a few more vowels, solving a few puzzles, and experiencing 25 of the fastest minutes of my life, I walked away with \$53,888 in cash and prizes, including a car and a trip to the Caribbean. \$53,888.

After the confetti fell, I celebrated with my wife, walked off the set, and got back in my car. It wasn’t until that moment that I finally had time to process what on earth just happened to me. I began to think about all the people and circumstances that played a part in my arriving at that moment, and my mind eventually fell on my educational background, specifically my time as an undergrad and graduate student at UT Tyler. My background as an English major truly played a pivotal role in my successful run.

Now that I’ve received my prizes and I’ve had 6 months to mull it over, I have 3 thoughts on how my English degrees helped me win on Wheel of Fortune:

- 1) Public Speaking – If you have ever wondered what the point of doing presentations in class was, this is it. As you play the game of life, the stages and audiences will likely get bigger and less familiar, and you’ll be glad those awkward talks in front of your peers prepared you for standing in front of a crowd and not looking like a fool.
- 2) Lots of Words – I firmly believe an extensive vocabulary was key to deciphering all those blank spaces on the board, and I gained that skill from reading, reading, and then reading some more. My English degree sparked, fostered, and formed my love of words. You all sitting out there with a running list of new words you’ve discovered while reading know exactly what I’m talked about.
- 3) Taking Chances – A lot of you may have had this experience: you tell someone you’re an English major, and they give you the look, and ask, “Really? What are you going to do with that?” People will





always look at your dreams and laugh. “A writer? Really?” “A professor? Really?” “Wheel of Fortune? Really?” Yes, really. The key is simply to try: step out, take that chance, submit that video of yourself, audition, and keep moving forward. And one day down the road, you may just turn around and find out that you won, and you won big.

English Majors are Life Preppers

Chris Rudy

BA in English, 2006/2015



I started my Freshman year hell-bent on becoming an English teacher. My major was never “Undecided.” Little did I know, though, that my career was because life happened. Life is unpredictable, detours are frequent, and change is constant. Fortunately, my liberal arts studies had prepared me to be nimble, adapt, and succeed in that reality.

All of life outside our head involves other people. I’ll contend that our success in any endeavor ultimately rests in our ability to get along and communicate with others. A liberal arts education mandates that you learn a variety of disciplines, navigate challenging discourse in the classroom, establish cognitive and compelling arguments, and write effectively enough to earn the degree you are pursuing. My life has been shaped by my relationships with individuals. I could never have anticipated the path my life would take when I first matriculated, but my studies gave me the tools to intelligently communicate and relate to others. That skill-set cultivated tremendous opportunities, and I was confident enough in my education to pursue those opportunities.

Liberal arts, and English in particular, bring the “gray matter” into education. More often than not, in English there isn’t a correct answer because so much is interpreted. Consequently, only the ink and the page are black and white; the academics reside in the gray. Likewise, life happens in the gray because people and problems are seldom black and white. You must be able to use your gray matter to succeed in the gray.

I am a business man. As the President of Southland Safety, a safety consulting company, my English degree has served me well. I did not leave school with any knowledge of accounting, marketing, or human resources, but I left with the ability to think critically about the hurdles those disciplines present, dissect the problems, and pursue answers. In that regard, I have never left school. I think I read more now than I did before I graduated, but the liberal arts cultivate the pursuit of knowledge and critical thought. Hunger for knowledge is the fuel for growth, and growth is the key to success in life. You must feed and expand your mind, grow as a human being, and build and nurture relationships to succeed. A liberal arts degree gives you a diverse and unique set of skills to succeed in life.





“A Noiseless Patient Spider”

By Walt Whitman

And you, O my Soul, where you stand,
Surrounded, surrounded, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, – seeking the spheres, to connect them;
Till the bridge you will need, be form'd – till the ductile anchor hold;
Till the gossamer thread you fling, catch somewhere, O my Soul. (Lines 6-10)



Alternative Pathways

Jessica Bowdoin

MA in English, 2017



Like many, I started off as an educator. It was an assumed profession; English major equals English teacher. Yet, now, I recline in a spider web of positions; I am the Program Director for OneGoal in Houston, a first generation, college readiness program; I teach both English and education courses as an adjunct professor; I write freelance; and I'm a political activist. My best friends, as English majors, are lawyers, educational coaches, political advisors; they work in advertising, and, of course, as teachers. We represent a truth that most students do not and cannot understand while they are still pursuing their degrees: being an English major has very little to do with the subject itself.

As a Program Director for OneGoal, I'm not teaching students how to analyze a text or write a research paper, but I do stand in front of people on a daily basis, sometimes parents, administrators, or business partnership members, as I am tasked to argue on my program's behalf, to present research that guarantees our funding or to wage a pathos war on their softer sides to advocate for resources a student desperately needs. When advising students, I use open-ended questions and rhetoric techniques to engage them, and I comb through their entrance essays and resumes for grammar errors that would prevent them from gaining entry into higher education. They are told to read articles, to bring that new information back with them at our next conference and into our conversations, and they are coached to analyze their own successes and failures metacognitively to better understand the next steps they need to take. And, all of these skills stem directly from my English major, and yet I'm not applying the explicit knowledge I memorized in it at all.

The unspoken truth is that the skills English majors excel in, communication, both written and spoken, grammatical proficiency, research analysis, and a knack for knowing one's audience, are sought after by recruiters and HR advisors alike in a variety of professions. They lend themselves particularly well to leadership, like my Program Director position. Yet, many English majors do not apply for jobs that seem to be outside of their world of literature and





writing. But, if you pay attention to the wording in job descriptions, which are often laden with a desire for communication skills, and to the open-ended phrase “a degree or experience equivalent to” in the education section, you will find that most positions are not as lock-step as one might assume. Rather, it comes down to one’s ability to convince the person sitting in front of you of your worth, your experience. And, who better to do so than an English major?

Immutable Skills

Laura Grace Dykes
BA in English, 2005



By the time I had begun my upper division coursework in English here at UT Tyler in 2002, I felt certain that I wanted to be an academic in literature. Upon my graduation in 2005, I entered an English graduate program at the University of Oklahoma. While I was in love with the work, I began to wonder if I had it in me to write and teach full time. I began to question academia as the best fit for what I wanted to do with my life.

So, rather than write my master’s thesis, I got married and had my daughter. I moved from state to state and ended up near Seattle for a few years before moving back to Texas to be near family. I had not worked full time since graduate school, and I was nervous about reentering the workforce. Because of my time as a graduate student and a graduate teaching assistant, I was certain that I wanted to

work in higher education and interact with college students. I just wasn’t sure how to go about that outside of the classroom. I also knew that if I was going to live in Tyler, I wanted to work at UT Tyler, so I began applying for staff jobs. In October of last year I began my current position as an Academic Advisor for the College of Arts and Sciences. I have never enjoyed a job as much as I enjoy this one. I am in an academic environment and working regularly with students.

My fears concerning my time out of the workforce as a stay at home parent were alleviated through the application process when I began to understand that the skills I had gained as an English major were relatively immutable. Critical thinking, analysis, problem solving, and strong writing skills do not go out of style. I can think, I can adapt, I can analyze, and I can write. I used these same skills to apply for a graduate program at UT Tyler in Public Administration. I am currently in my second semester, and I am regularly surprised at how well I am doing in an area so different from literature. But, again, the skills I have gained from my education at UT Tyler and OU are extremely translatable and they serve me well as I navigate a new job and a new degree.

English Skills in Youth Ministry

Audrey Westby
BA in English, 2013





After graduation, I began serving as a Youth Minister at a Methodist church. I worked with teenagers 6th-12th grade, building relationships, leading Bible studies, and planning mission trips. I worried that I might be unqualified with no seminary experience, but I put my English major skills to work, including effective communication, research, and a love of reading.

I communicated through writing e-mails, newsletter articles, sermons, and Bible studies. English prepared me with the basics like using proper grammar and spelling to the more complex such as having a clear thesis and organizing my thoughts in a logical manner. I organized my sermons like an essay, which of course I had plenty of practice writing during my major. At first, I didn't love the public speaking element of my job, but the more I prepared in writing, the more confident I felt speaking.

To improve my communication, I researched constantly, both within the Bible itself and within scholarly books and articles to dig deeper and open myself up to new ideas. I came across numerous opinions and different interpretations of Biblical texts, so I read a variety of resources to gain perspective and solidify my own beliefs. I needed to thoroughly back up my ideas, because my youth were not afraid to challenge me. In college, I learned to question the validity and bias of the source I was researching, and this skill translated seamlessly into my job.

Along with using research, I also took into consideration the opinions of other Youth Ministers, church members, and my youth. My major taught me to consider, learn from, and even respectfully challenge the opinion of others. Through peer reviews and constructive comments from my professors, I learned to be open to giving and receiving feedback and ideas. This exchange of ideas was especially helpful when working with other Youth Ministers. Those opportunities of peer reviewing taught me to be open to criticism and constructive in my suggestions.

Most importantly, my English classes fostered in me

a love for reading and writing. In my English classes, I read books that I wouldn't have picked on my own, and the passion of my professors taught me to see their value. One of my favorite parts of my job as a Youth Minister was reading books in the genre of Christian non-fiction. I can't deny that my English major equipped me for a job steeped in communication and learning.

Refusing to Go Hungry for Music

Raquelle Langlinais
BA in English, 2019



There is an odd perception of what talented musicians ought to be like. If you're a good musician in the genre of Pop, why haven't you moved to Los Angeles? If you know how to write a song where your dog dies and you lose your girlfriend all while drinking a beer, you might as well load up your pickup and head to Nashville!

Many people believe that if someone is musically gifted, then they need to go to a bigger city where they can be "discovered" — whatever that means.

I've had several people ask me why I've yet to run away to some larger city that has a real music industry presence, complete with major record labels and ample live music venues to choose from. While it is a flattering sentiment, I've never found it incredibly realistic for my path. I believe that path has worked for some people, but I don't find the role of "starving artist" appealing. There's nothing romantic about struggling to eat.





I began my music project, The Half Guided Hearts in Spring of 2017. I can count on one hand how many shows we've played since then, and we've only released one single. Two years of feeling as if nothing is moving forward. Two years of having moments where I doubted if staying in school was worth it if I love making music as much as I say I do. But two months away from the most valuable degree any one person can possess is starting to put it all into perspective.

I won't have to be a starving artist because I'm qualified for a career with not just a livable wage, but one that can pay for recording engineering, session players, band merchandise, sound gear, new instruments, a van to tour in, and many more essential items needed to maintain a musical career. I can't confidently say that this route could work for every musician, but it has worked for me.

I've spent two years reading wonderful works of American literature and fighting to become a part of this nation's narrative by writing songs. I believe in my English degree, and I will always use the skills I've gained from my academic life to further my creative endeavors.

The Half Guided Hearts single, "Alright" can be found on iTunes, Apple Music, Spotify, Amazon, Google Play Music, and thehalfguidedhearts.bandcamp.com.

Expanding Your Job Search as an English Major

Kelsi Adams

BA in English, 2011 & MA in English, 2013



Embarking on a job search is intimidating. This is true for anyone, but it can be even more daunting for English majors who may not want to pursue teaching. I have friends with similar degrees who now excel in all kinds of fields, including marketing, publishing, and graphic design. Don't limit yourself to traditional career choices as an English major, and, most of all, don't sell yourself short. Expand your job search to see all of your choices.

Explore fields that you might be passionate about and figure out how your skill set as an English major can plug in there, preferably while still a student. For example, seek out internships, ask about job shadowing opportunities, or tackle some freelance work. Personally, the internship I found after graduation was invaluable. It gave me real-world insight into how my skill set can be utilized in a professional setting, and it helped me to affirm the types of jobs that I wanted to focus on in my job hunt.

Once you begin your job search, know how to market yourself well. Highlight the perks of your degree, of course, but also be sure to highlight the personality traits that helped you to excel as an English major. These positive traits were just strengthened by your time in school. You had to be a disciplined self-starter to finish those final papers on time. You had to be creative. You had to be willing to trade in your free time for library hours before you could even begin your paper. This hard work did not discourage you, even though you knew when declaring to be an English major that you might not be guaranteed a clear-cut job after graduation, unlike more specific majors like nursing or accounting. Your success as an English major proved you to be a workhorse with refined communication skills to boot.

You can apply this same drive to any field. Point this out to hiring managers and back up your claims too. Read books and articles about your chosen career. Examine how your personal skill set can be implemented in that field. Bring all of this outside work up in your interviews. Showing how you are used to taking initiative in your academic work, and how you will continue to do that in the job position at hand, will open more doors for you than you might think.





English Major. History Professor.

Dr. Colin Snider

**BA in English Literature, History, Spanish,
2002 [Ohio Northern U]**

**MA in Latin American History, 2004 [U of New
Mexico]**

**PhD in Latin American History, 2011 [U of New
Mexico]**



It wasn't supposed to be this way.

I entered college as an English Literature major. My English courses had been among my favorite throughout middle and high school. I had been raised in an environment where reading happened all the time, fostered by my parents and grandparents (my grandmother herself was a high school English teacher, which helps explain why many were the times we were lovingly corrected on “lay” vs. “lie” or “which” vs. “that”).

But something funny happened. I realized in my freshman year of college that, while I loved literature as a hobby, history was my passion and where I wanted to make a career. By good fortune, I entered college in a position where I could add a History major even while also simultaneously majoring in

English Lit (eventually, a degree in Spanish also got thrown in there, but that's a longer story). By the time I graduated, I was a historian through and through, eager to head off to graduate school to get my MA and then PhD in history to work where my passion rested – in teaching history. English Literature and I had a good run, but I had a career to pursue.

Only years later did I realize, that partition between Literature and History was, perhaps ironically, a fiction in my mind. In seminars, I realized I was reading books differently and taking different perspectives on them than my colleagues. My writing was at its worst when I tried to write how I thought it might sound to write “like a historian,” and at its best (or at least its better) I drew on the lessons of the prose and construction of arguments and rhetoric I had picked up in English Literature. I even returned to fiction and testimonial literature, first as a reprieve but increasingly as historical artifacts in their own right.

In the years since – through graduate school and now as a professor – I have come to appreciate how well the English Literature courses and ways of thinking complemented my training as a historian, be it in reading, analysis, or writing. One of a historian's duties is to empathize with different perspectives in order to understand motives and actions; literature taught me to do so long before I ever took a history course. History was and is my passion, but it turns out, literature was neither “just a hobby” nor a degree that stopped when I graduated college. It was a way of seeing and thinking about the world that has shaped me personally and professionally.

Twenty-plus years ago, it wasn't supposed to be this way, but it is. And English Literature – and the lessons learned as an English major – never went away. And with the benefit of perspective, I wouldn't have it any other way.

(And I still read some fiction before bed every evening.)





ART



Natasha Carcano





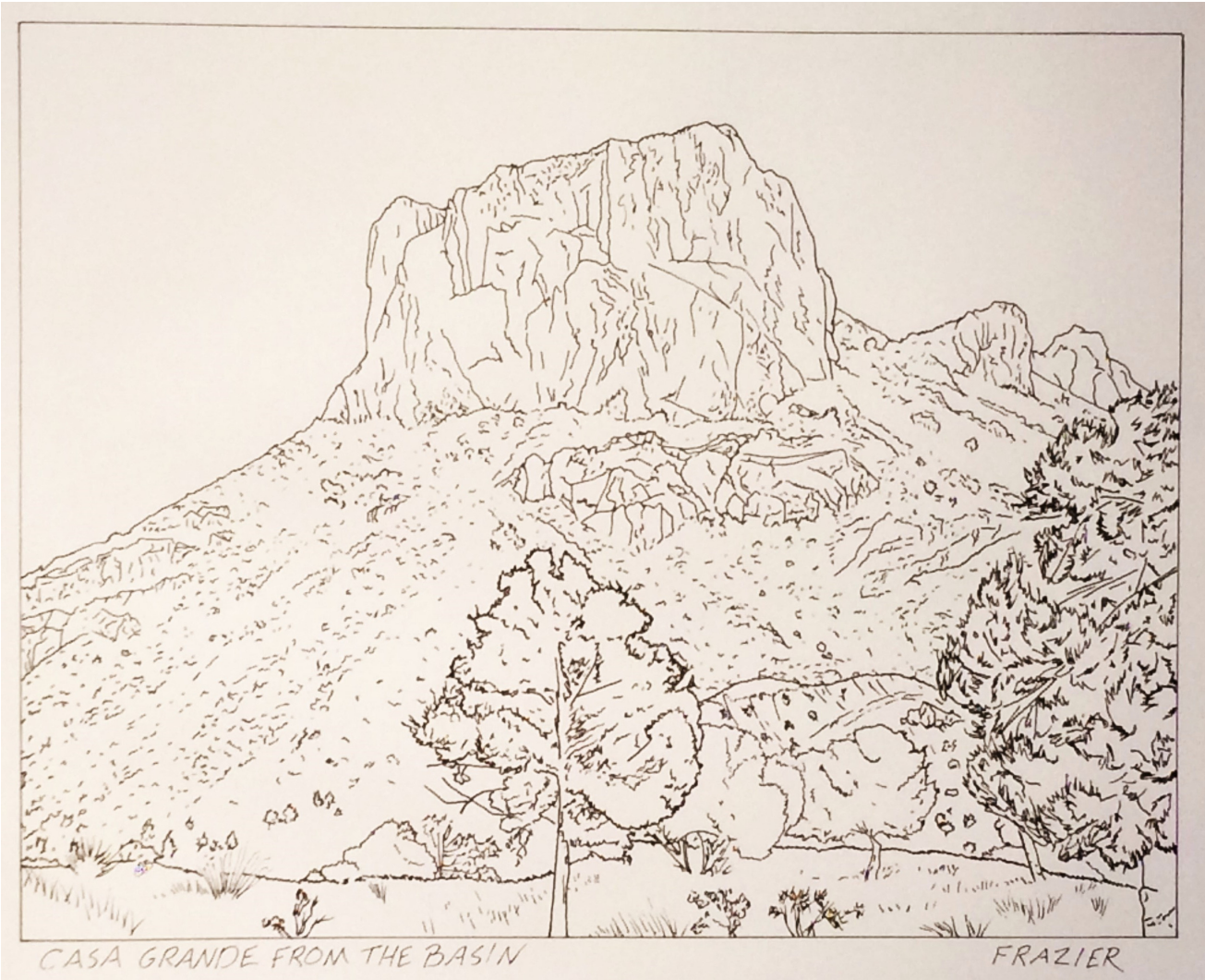
BLUE CANYON FROM LAGUNA MEADOW

FRAZIER

BLUE CANYON FROM LAGUNA MEADOW

Derek Frazier





CASA GRANDE FROM THE BASIN

Derek Frazier





BOOT SPRINGS - BIG BEND

Derek Frazier





The Year I Traded Halloween for Matariki

Jordan Brunner
BA in English, 2020



Never doubt the power of your own curiosity. That is a lesson I'll remember after my semester at Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand. The first lesson I learned was when I was still in Tyler. On a typical day, I saw a pamphlet of a panel on UT Tyler's international opportunities through the University Studies Abroad Consortium (USAC). Let that moment be a lesson of why it pays to see what's happening on campus!

New Zealand, standing in the middle of Pacific and Oceanic regions, is a wonderfully diverse and international place. I saw that in the form of the numerous events on campus hosted by international and indigenous student groups. Everything they say about the country's natural beauty is also true. I had the choice between three cities in New Zealand: Auckland, the national capital of Wellington, and Palmerston North. What drew me to "Palmy," as it's known there, was the promise of smaller city life accompanied by an outdoor lover's dream. If it wasn't the music, festivals, and events in town, it was the awe-inspiring nature all around town. One of the days I remember most fondly was the Maori New Year of Matariki. The indigenous Maori are very involved in New Zealand and Massey.

The class I'll remember the most is Postcolonial Literature, as its purpose demonstrated why the work English majors do is so important. Many are familiar with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and its commentary on colonization of Africa. One less known African author, Chinua Achebe, strongly opposed what he felt was a very ethnocentric and demeaning voice given by Conrad's narrative. Achebe's own 1958 novel, *Things Fall Apart*, was given from the perspective of an Igbo tribe, and serves as a counter-discursive text to *Heart of Darkness*. The discourse and conversations that contrast spurred are at the heart of the field of English. Our field is not only about the hows of the language, but the whys. Why our language is spoken where it is, why it's spoken the way it is, and why it changes and evolves the way it does. This cultural and social acumen (keenness of judgement, vocabulary rules!) deepens our understanding of each other. The semester I spent in New Zealand was one I'll remember for the rest of my life. I could not recommend it enough both to students and to my fellow English majors.

Traveling with an English Degree

Sarah Draper
BA in English & Mass Communication, 2016





“To travel is to live,” or so said Hans Christian Anderson in his autobiography. I have to say that I agree with him. In September of last year I was given the opportunity to live in Bern, Switzerland while working as an Associate in Missions for the United Pentecostal Church International. For me, I cannot think of a better way to travel than to do it while showing love to others and building lasting friendships in so many wonderful places.

However, as I began this new position overseas I realized that my time spent studying literature, history, grammar, psychology, communications (everything that is wrapped up in an English/Communications degree) has helped prepare me for my job here in Switzerland.

My mother always told me that no one can ever take away the knowledge you gain by getting a degree, and I have seen this play out in my life. I have used my degree in so many different ways since graduating in May 2016. Currently, I am editing articles for a regional magazine across different German speaking nations, preparing lessons, doing public speaking and working on editing training manuals for students. I have used my French language skills that I learned while in studying in my English degree and will begin learning German in Switzerland later this year. I have found that I am able to be more receptive to new cultures, languages and ideas because of the discussions and readings that I had while I was a student.

Yes, “to travel is to live,” but I think that when you have social knowledge and usable skills (that no one can take from you) it only enhances the travel that you do. It allows you to thrive wherever you go in the world.

I have been asked many times what I will do with an English degree. What is my answer? Absolutely everything.

Connection through Karaoke

Tina Bausinger

BA in English, 2011 & MA in English, 2013

Repeatedly, during almost any professional development session known to man, teachers are told nothing creates student engagement like positive relationships. How to create relationships is not discussed as often.

At Randall High School, in Amarillo, Texas (home of the Big Texan All-You-Can-Eat Steak Challenge and much more), I teach primarily seniors, and conjuring relationships from students who feel ready to be adults can be tricky. They don’t want to be treated as children, but they are still children, sort of. Daily, we are given about twenty-five minutes of non-class time that is primarily used for tutorials, but we are encouraged to use this time to bond with students.

Because I’m 47 years old, and it’s been a few minutes since I was in high school, I really had no ideas. Much to my dismay, somebody already started a book club. I toyed with the idea of starting a horror movie club, but that gets tricky. Apparently, one of the cool junior teachers teaches lessons on coffee bean roasting. I am at a loss. Plus, I am not at all a hipster, I’m way too old, and I forgot to grow a beard. What to do? After days of fruitless brain wracking, I had an idea.

It’s been said that the Bausingers really know how to party. When Nate was a senior (two years ago), we threw the most epic Halloween party that my mostly elderly neighborhood had seen since the swinging 70s. We had a costume contest/haunted house that is practically legendary. It occurred to me that similar principles might be employed in order to be seen as the “fun teacher.”

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First, with teens, you must always have food. Period, end of story. If you tell kids you will have snacks, they will come. The funny thing is, they aren't even really picky. Mostly I just buy Little Debbie's (Zebra Cakes are the fave--Oatmeal Pies not so much) and Pop Tarts. Downside: this is money from my own account, but it's not much. Bonus: I also gave away ½ price Halloween candy and beef jerky once. I'm not, as you might imagine, slaving away making sparkly cupcakes I saw on Pioneer Woman or anything.

Secondly: you need PR. If I can persuade the AP to include my announcement in the daily reminders, kids will flood my classroom like the Israelites in those Exodus movies. Side question: when the Israelites are fleeing Pharaoh, and are apparently in a hurry, why is there always one guy toting a bird cage? Inquiring minds want to know.

Finally, food is not enough. You must also include entertainment. For about \$100, I purchased a karaoke machine and the kids LOVE IT. I put the lyrics I find on YouTube on the projector, and they cannot be stopped. You know you've hit home when the kids SnapChat their performances and talk about it in all their classes.

Learning English from Spanish: How a Second Language Taught Me My First Language

Preston McElyea

BA in English & Spanish, 2019



When I first started taking Spanish classes at UT Tyler, I did not understand how they could be beneficial to my English major. I could not see at the time what the hours of memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules was doing to my growth as an English student. After recently completing the requirements to receive my B.A. for Spanish, I can now see how helpful the study of a foreign language has been to my study of English as I've developed a greater comprehension of grammar and a more thoughtful approach to writing.

Spanish grammar taught me English grammar. Thanks to standardized testing in Texas, I thought that I had a good understanding of the English language. What I thought I understood on a deep level, I learned I only had a surface understanding of it. Learning all the grammar rules for Spanish helped to either reinforce what I already knew, but more importantly, it helped me learn what I should have already known. If I was going to learn Spanish, I realized that I was going to have become a better English student. This concept further translated into how writing in Spanish made me a better writer in English.





Being an English major, written assignments have never been too intimidating to me. The first time I received a written assignment in Spanish, however, I had no idea what to do. For one, I had a limited Spanish vocabulary. Additionally, I was still learning when to use certain grammar constructs. As a result, I was forced to consciously think about the words and the sentences I was putting on the page. This conscientious thought has helped me in my English classes because I realized how often I thoughtlessly ramble on in my assignments. As a result, learning to write in Spanish helped my performance on written assignments in English.

Although I have always spoken English, I learned through the study of Spanish that I am far from having a complete understanding of it. By learning Spanish, I have also been learning English. It might be noticed through my increased understanding of grammar, along with my improved writing, how learning a second language has been a major benefit to the study of my first language.

The Politics of English

Armetta Roy
BA in English, 2019



When individuals ask me what my concentration is I've found myself reciting a quick message, "English and no, I don't plan to be a teacher." As society moves forward so should the way students think about utilizing their English degrees. I study English with a minor in Political Science and by combining the two disciplines throughout my undergraduate career I have been able to do some amazing things.

In the Summer of 2014 I attended a program called "New Leadership Texas" and visited Austin for the first time. Now, five years later, I will be returning to the program as the Political Action Project Coordinator, heading the academic component of the week-long UT Austin-based program that allows women from across the state to learn more about the legislative process. If you think about it, one unchanging facet of politics is being able to deliver a message that people will believe and support. Who are better message craftsmen than English Majors? Using the appropriate language for your target audience, proofreading, locating evidence, and compiling everything for a finished product is what we spend four years learning how to do.

Some might ask, "What is your secret?" To that question I have two responses. First and foremost, finding your passion is essential to succeeding in anything. I know that my passion is writing and politics.

Secondly, the ability to network and not being afraid to meet new people is a huge part of success. I repeatedly tell students -- "Get to know your professors" -- because they are truly pivotal in your higher education experience. In my experience I have found that many of my professors are outstanding mentors as well as educators. The connections that you establish during your college career can affect your post-graduate career and even your opportunity at scholarships, internships, and so much more.

Along with these points, I would encourage students to get involved on campus. Go to an event you're interested in or attend a meeting for an organization you've never heard of. The more diverse your network is the more opportunities you will come





across. Furthermore, there is almost always a scholarship or funding to assist you in reaching your goals. Do not let the cost of an opportunity stop you from pursuing it. Take it from a rural commuter student who has used GoFundMe multiple times to further my academic enrichment over the years. To current and future students of English and those still undecided, I encourage you to identify your individual strengths and then turn them into marketable skills that align with your passion. Looking back now on my entrance into UT Tyler in the Spring of 2014 I can honestly see the academic and professional growth I have obtained through my English concentration. The politics of English are simple: read often, write more often, and never underestimate your worth or the value of your degree.

Tell Me Something

Michael Cerliano

BA in English, 2008 & MA in English, 2016



I graduated from UT Tyler in 2016, and since then, I've taught in the English department at Texas Woman's University. Recently, I was nominated for TWU's Students for Teaching & Assignment Recognition (STAR) Symposium, an event whose purpose "is to highlight and recognize the innovative teaching strategies of TWU faculty." Naturally, I was

pleased to be nominated, but I was also a bit surprised--what had I done to deserve a nomination? What about my teaching was "innovative" or, to borrow another phrase from the official description, "engaging or effective"? Looking at the nomination, I saw that it was for the first assignment I taught in my Composition I class: writing a narrative.

The narrative is intended to be a diagnostic assignment that gives me an idea of the writing skills possessed by my students so that I'll know what issues I'll need to address in my teaching and feedback. It's a fairly straightforward assignment. Simple, even. The prompt itself is two sentences long: "For this assignment, you will compose a narrative of 500-800 words describing an interesting or significant moment. This story may be drawn from your own life, your family or the world's history, or be a work of creative fiction." When I assigned it, I felt like there was nothing particularly special about the narrative itself, but I took a moment to let my students know something that they may have never heard before: they are writers, and since writing matters, their stories matter.

And what stories! As I read through their drafts, I was struck at the range of experiences they felt comfortable sharing with me. Some of them wrote about their difficult early lives, including events that were exceptionally traumatic, such as growing up in extreme poverty, recovering from abuse, or living in a refugee camp. Others chose to open up by sharing their hopes and dreams with me. Still others took the chance to try their hand at some creative writing, turning in flash fiction across different genres.

I feel like that's the greatest value of an assignment like this. While it's good to assess writing skills, it seems just as important to remind students that stories are what we use to construct ourselves and interact with the world around us. We give meaning to our lives through the stories we tell, and in telling their stories, students are able to take control of their narratives. For many of them, this is the first time they've been told that their stories matter. I hope that they won't forget it. After reading their stories, I know I won't.





Remembering Dr. Stephanie Odom



a talented and good colleague, whom the Literature and Languages faculty will miss with broken hearts. Indeed the entire university will miss her. For the past four and half years, Dr. Odom was bravely battling cancer. Even so, her illness did not prevent her from contributing to her students' lives and to her UT Tyler family. She was a strong woman with a warm heart. We will always remember her and mourn her passing. – *Dr. Hui Wu*

Dr. Odom was perhaps the first to teach me how fully human professors are, and how slow students, like myself, are to realize this. Working under her guidance my first teaching semester was such a blessing. She extended constant grace to me as her GIS student and Teaching Assistant. What overflowed in Dr. Odom's words, her laughter, her very presence was a joy carried with quiet dignity. She had a unique gift for speaking life and encouraging her students to diligently pursue their passion. I will always be grateful for the time she freely gave me. I could not have asked for a better professor, mentor, and friend. – *Chance Gamble*

With a heavy heart and sadness, I am announcing the passing of Dr. Stephanie Odom officially in compliance with her family's wishes. She died of cancer at night on December 5, 2018. Dr. Odom joined the Department of Literature and Languages as a tenure-track assistant professor in English in Fall 2013. She graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a PhD in Rhetoric and Writing. Prior to pursuing her doctoral degree, she earned an MA in English from UT Austin and a BA in English from Austin College. Dr. Odom taught a variety of courses at UT Tyler—from lower-division English Composition to graduate level courses. Dr. Odom's teaching was well-received by students at all levels. Students spoke about Dr. Odom as a caring, nurturing, and encouraging professor--always responsive and available. Dr. Odom was also an active scholar who published collaboratively with colleagues on campus and beyond and provided outstanding services to students and community. She was the first faculty advisor for the WISE student organization as well as the Film Club. Dr. Odom was

I am in debt to Dr. Odom. I had to honor of working with her in Spring 2014 to design and instruct multiple courses at UT Tyler as a graduate student. She had a way of challenging me to evolve and mature my pedagogy, while managing to help me feel absolutely capable of completing the daunting task of first year teaching. Through various conversations, she sparked a love for teaching in me; her passion was obviously infectious. But mostly, through those discussions, she taught me the value in connecting with students and taking a step back to see the joy and opportunity for growth in the challenges that arise, especially in teaching and composition. – *Brittni Tracy*

Dr. Odom taught me so much about my own writing and how to think about teaching writing. She was always available and willing to help in every way possible, making me feel just as involved as an online student as if I was there. Outside of class, I bugged her with several questions about framing and





developing writing for my own classes, and she was always willing to listen and guide. I think about her classes and how she taught when teaching my own students, and I hope I do her justice by passing on what I learned from her. – *Maggie Raymond*

There are many things and moments that I will always remember about Stephanie. She was an amazing instructor who was a role model in how to be a caring, empathetic instructor without ever sacrificing rigor or limiting her expectations of her students. As a friend, her joyous nature, her love of animals, her optimism, her love for life, and her sense of humor were all infections. Most of all, though, I'll remember her amazing, hearty, vivacious laugh that filled a room and made everyone share in and feel her joy and love. – *Natalia Menkina-Snider*

Dr. Odom taught one of my first classes in the online graduate program. Although I only knew her via web conferences, she was always personable and kind. She was brilliant and willing to share her knowledge. She was an integral part of my smooth transition into graduate studies. What little I knew of her made a big impact on me as a student. I know she will be terribly missed by those who were close to her. Extending deep and heartfelt sympathy to her family and friends. – *Liza Hicks*

Recently, in an online post, someone remarked that distance learning would inhibit the professor/student relationship. Dr. Odom's caring personality easily overcame distance as an obstacle to learning, understanding, or relationship building. Her passing is painful because she had an amazing ability to make everyone feel important, relevant, and close, both physically and personally. My latest class with Dr. Odom was my GIS during the fight for her life. Her courage and kindness in the midst of all of that uncertainty continued to put me, her worried and sometimes frantic student, first. She also suggested books for me, and the one I love the most is "Stylish Academic Writing." She told me it would make me laugh, and now I keep it front and center on my bookcase. She reached a point when she just couldn't type anything or write, and reading my second draft (painful at the best of times for anyone) became impossible. In the midst of her struggle,

she sent me a voice memo to help me get back on track. I will always love and miss Dr. Odom, and I am grateful to her for helping me become a better writer, teacher, and person. – *LaWanda Eckert*

Regal. Ardent. And always invested in her students, family, and friends: These are my core perceptions of Stephanie. My time with her was, for the most part, relegated to committee and department meetings. However, there was that one spring semester when she asked to visit my feminist theory class because she was interested in the readings. She entered the classroom quietly and took her seat in the back. She listened as the students discussed that session's novel reading and criticism and she soon became excited by the debate. She offered her own ideas and questions, which then took our explorations to a higher level. I know the students enjoyed seeing one of their faculty committed, as they were, to our community of knowledge. Today I see Stephanie's presence in our students: what they learned and credit to her, how deeply she is missed. – *Dr. Anett Jessop*

I first met Dr. Odom as a wary undergrad advisee – where I learned the registrar didn't want to take a decade's worth of transfer credits from various institutions across the United States. I sighed in frustration and left our advising meeting thinking that if they didn't accept enough credits, I'd simply go back to being a stay-at-home mom and give up my dream of finishing my degree. However, Dr. Odom was relentless, optimistic, and cheerful about helping me continue. She wrote emails to other advisors and registrars on the spot and told me we would stay on top of it. Thanks to her, I not only finished my undergrad but also graduate degree and am now teaching at the college where I completed my studies. This spring I'll present at a national conference on a topic that she first sparked my interest in, and I hope to do her justice. – *Lena Liedtke*

Although I only had the opportunity to meet and work alongside Stephanie for a short time, I learned quite a few things from her. My first learning experience was a lesson in elocution. As a native New Yorker, I made the unfortunate mistake of





pronouncing a well-known East Texas grocery company as Brookshire's, emphasis on "shires" (a la the Cheshire Cat) as opposed to the proper East-Texan pronunciation, Brookshers (a la "Can I borrow your truck?" "Sure"), which Stephanie was quick to note. My second learning experience with Stephanie also surrounded questions of voice and style. As a teacher-scholar, Stephanie was able to communicate difficult and complex problems, ideas, and experiences with an uncanny sense of clarity, wisdom, and assertiveness. Further, her capacity to articulate the often invisible stakes, consequences, and questions built into a teaching method or scholarly approach is a useful model for instructors and scholars, especially those who (like myself) may be in the early stages of their careers. I know Stephanie fostered these types of experiences across the university, and I was grateful to be able to learn from her. – *Dr. Tara Propper*

When Stephanie Odom was my professor, she gave her students all of herself. She created lecture videos so we could understand the concepts we needed to learn. She prepared lessons, graded papers, answered questions, and lead discussions, secretly fighting far harder than any of us realized. When she could no longer hide just how sick she was, I was shocked. She had been enthusiastic, energetic, and eager to discuss the principles of rhetoric with her students. And when that strong, vibrant woman didn't return to make another lecture video, it was like reading an amazing book with an ending that didn't seem to fit and came far too soon. I can't tell you much more about her, but I can tell you she was strong and she was passionate, and she gave it her all. And her students won't forget. – *Katrina Goforth*

I was lucky enough to work with Stephanie consistently during my first year here at UT Tyler. The first time I met her was during a Composition Curriculum Committee on a rainy-but-warm day in August last summer. Stephanie was incredibly open to hearing my thoughts on student writing, teaching, and the types of classroom experiences I attempt to foster in my own courses. Throughout our conversation, she responded with insightful questions as opposed to definitive answers and showed a genuine interesting in exploring new ideas

when it comes to teaching or research. Stephanie treated me as if I had been a faculty member in the department for years (rather than someone who had yet to defend his dissertation a few months prior), and I know she approached all her colleagues and students with the same level of support she continued to show me as I became part of the Tyler community. – *Dr. Matt Kelly*

I met Stephanie during my first year in the English M.A. program. She was a lot of things: a brilliant scholar, a dedicated teacher, a passionate advocate for justice. Most importantly, she was a terrific friend. In my own life and career, I hope that I can live up to the example she set, and I take comfort in knowing that, at the very least, she will always live on through the lives she touched during her too-brief stay on this earth. Would that we all could be remembered in such a way. The world is less without her, as is UT Tyler. – *Michael Cerliano*

Two months after Dr. Odom died, my husband died of breast cancer too. The loss of two beautiful souls at the hands of the same disease is not just tragic, it is cruel. Dr. Odom was the first domino for me in my English degree. She was my professor in ENGL 3308 and taught me how to go beyond the surface of a work and find the deeper truth; the one that not everyone would find. It was like a treasure hunt. She began by having us analyze several songs by the Lumineers. I had never thought of applying my English degree to music. It was life changing. That skill and a life-long love of the Lumineers was Dr. Odom's invaluable gift to me. This lyric from the song "Sleep on the Floor," will always make me think of Dr. Odom and my husband and what they would say to the people they were stolen from. Never stop searching for treasures:

"If the sun don't shine on me today
And if the subways flood and bridges break
Will you lay yourself down and dig your grave
Or will you rail against your dying day"

– *Kimberly Assunto*





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Would you like to fund a scholarship or sponsor a department event? Contact the CAS Dean's Office, Dean Neil Gray (903-566-7368, ngray@uttyler.edu), the chair of the Department of Literature & Languages, Dr. Hui Wu (903-566-7289, hwu@uttyler.edu), or the CAS Development Director, Elizabeth Carlson (903-566-7271, ecarlson@uttyler.edu).

CALL FOR FALL 2019 COLUMNISTS

What topics would you like to see covered in the next issue of The Ductile Anchor? We are looking for columnists for the F19 issue. Alumni: what have been your experiences since graduating from UT Tyler? How have you been using the skills from your major in English or Spanish in your careers? What surprising directions have you taken in your profession due to your Humanities-related skill set? Share your experiences and advice with our current students. If you would like to propose a column for the next issue of *The Ductile Anchor*, please contact the Faculty Editor (Dr. Ann Beebe, abeebe@uttyler.edu).

PDC ON FACEBOOK

The Department of Literature and Languages has a closed group on Facebook—"UT Tyler Professional Development Cohort." All current students and alumni from our department are eligible for membership. Send a request to join the closed FB group today.

Current students - do you have questions about internships, careers, or the job search? Post a question for the alumni. They want to serve as your mentors.

Alumni - do you need advice about professional situations or leveraging your skills into a second career? Start a discussion thread on the PDC.

The department's PDC has over 300 members. Imagine the networking potential of this closed group as we add current students and locate our 1000+ alumni out in the workforce! If you are not yet a member, please send a request to join. If you are a member of the PDC, please send invitations to other current students or alumni.





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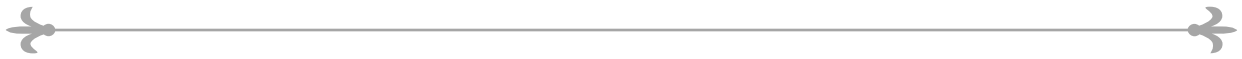
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TELL ME, WHAT
IS IT YOU PLAN
TO DO WITH
YOUR ONE WILD
AND PRECIOUS
LIFE?

Mary Oliver, "The Summer Day"

