



## Between *the* Lines

*Department of Literature  
and Languages*

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## Plot Lines: Following the Thread from Degree to Leadership

*Allison McGee | BA English 2014 with Renaissance Studies Minor*

People used to ask me as an undergraduate what one can actually do with an English degree. The question assumes utility must be linear – that careers unfold like instructions rather than stories. I didn't want that sort of cold precision for my life and thank heavens my career has been anything but. And that, I've learned, is the quiet strength of studying English.

After college, my first job wasn't in a classroom or a theatre, but as a fuel dispatcher in a hut covered in carcinogens. I was grateful for the work. The job itself was wretched and had little to do with literature. The dispatch team needed a clear, functional SOP, and I knew how to shape language so that it worked – how to anticipate readers, order information, and remove ambiguity. That skill carried me into my next role as a project administrator for a national contractor, where success depended on clear communication delivered through a range of different lenses. English taught me how to do that.

Eventually, I moved into education teaching freshman English. I loved it. A year later I stepped into the role of head director of the theatre department. Over eight years, I built a program that served 150 students annually. I taught acting and analysis, managed personnel, marketed seasons, and advocated – constantly – for time, space, and trust. An English degree prepared me for every one of those conversations better than any single technical credential could have.

Between those chapters, I applied to graduate school – and nearly wasn't accepted. I wrote a justification letter that told the truth, framed growth, and articulated how my lived experience strengthened the institution itself. That letter worked. It was my first real lesson in narrative as leverage.

Today, I happily and proudly serve as Managing Director of the Tyler Civic Theatre Center. English trained me to see organizations the way I see stories: layered, contextual, and always in revision. It taught me to listen closely, to communicate with intention, and to recognize the best way forward for the narrative. To current and prospective English majors: your degree is not a dead end – it is an intense new way of seeing. English doesn't promise certainty. It offers fluency – in ambiguity, variety, empathy, and in possibility. Stay curious. The plot will unfold.



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# Plot, Character, and Coverage Limits: A Testament to the Versatility of the English Degree

*Victoria Carpenter | BA English 2023*



On my first day working in insurance, I barely knew what a deductible was, and I had never read an insurance policy. I felt completely out of my depth. Later that week as I was sifting through the hundreds of pages of policy language I was assigned to read, my boss told me he thought my background, and particularly my study of English, was perfectly suited for the job. Despite my uncertainty, my college education had already given me the tools; I just needed to apply them differently.

Three years and four promotions later, I'm a complex technical claims specialist. My job entails assisting entities that have been sued, mostly schools and governments. I investigate claims made against them, guide litigation, and negotiate settlements.

Some ways my degree set me up for success were obvious early on. My first few weeks were filled with textbooks, studying, and test taking. The job also involved a lot more writing than expected, which was great news. Among the similarities I noticed when I began handling claims was the attention to detail and analysis required. I learned in college that a seemingly inconsequential comment a character makes can turn into the basis for a thesis, and even a single word can be full of meaning. Reading between the lines is essential. I use these skills now when I review policies, contracts, and legal documents, which I have always felt comfortable with, as I know how to pick out information from complicated texts and apply it.

At multiple junctures while handling claims, I need to critically analyze how existing or new facts might alter my or a jury's perception of a situation. I look at what I do have, determine what it means for our insured's case, and decide what else is needed to truly understand what occurred. In many ways, investigating a claim can feel surprisingly similar to reading an elusive poem that requires a bit more digging to be unveiled.

In the past three years, I've mentored employees, helped create a training program, and joined the DEI and employee engagement team. I am grateful to UT Tyler for everything I've learned, and I credit my college education as the reason I've found success. When you have a great knowledge base, sometimes success can be found in unexpected places.

# *From Tyler to the Capitol: How English Skills Shaped My Washington, D.C. Experience*

**Leilani Hurtado | Current English Student**

In the Fall 2024 semester, I had the immense honor of being selected as one of two UT Tyler representatives for the Archer Fellowship Program, an immersive academic and professional experience that allows students across the University of Texas system to live, learn, and work in Washington, D.C. As a double major in Political Science and English, the location itself was extraordinary to be in for its historical and modern significance, and the people I encountered along the way were unforgettable. Yet one of the most valuable aspects of the fellowship was seeing how the skills I developed as an English major translated directly into a fast-paced, high-stakes professional environment, especially during my internship on Capitol Hill.

As an intern for a congressional representative, much of my work revolved around writing, research, and administrative support. Alongside mailing out newsletters and designing graphics for our representative, I received opportunities to help draft internal memos, summarize policy proposals, and compile news/media data for legislative staff. These tasks required immense clarity, concision, and awareness of audience, which were skills I had been sharpening throughout my English coursework. So, whether I was writing a policy report regarding international affairs or organizing large amounts of data collection for our office, I found myself often referencing the analytical and writing practices I had learned in my English classes, as all of the lessons in rhetoric, grammar, and research were beginning to feel full-circle.

My background in writing also helped me adapt quickly to the professional tone required in a congressional office. Though intimidating at first, as I had never really worked in a setting quite like the one I found myself in during this time, I was thankfully able to adjust quite swiftly. My ability to understand how language shapes meaning, and how word choice can influence interpretation and readability, proved to be useful and essential when contributing to documents used by staff members with limited time and high expectations. Tasks such as careful revision, anticipating reader questions, and supporting claims with clear evidence were not new challenges, but familiar ones reinforced through my English studies. These skills ultimately allowed me to proudly contribute work that was both effective and reliable for the office.

My time living in D.C. and working full-time on Capitol Hill as a “Hill-tern,” as us interns called ourselves, was an absolute dream come true. Beyond the connections and memories I gained, the experience confirmed how valuable my academic training had been in preparing me for the real world. I realized that, as an English major, I was not only being prepared for professional success, but being uniquely equipped with the toolset I needed to adapt and thrive in these environments!



# How My English Minor Has Shaped My Academic Advising Practice

*Hailey Faith Ragon | English Minor 2025 & Current MA English Student*



**N**ear the end of my undergraduate career at UT Tyler, I enrolled in a creative writing class on a whim, hoping to add something fun to my final semester. Instead, it reshaped my future. That one class instantly reignited my love of reading and writing, leading me to add an English minor to my degree. What started as a small academic adjustment soon became a new trajectory toward an MA in English. I had a dream again, and thanks to the support of my English professors in the Department of Literature and Languages, I was able to pursue this new path with confidence.

Studying English, I quickly realized the common belief that an English degree is futile in today's job market could not be further from the truth. More than just learning fiction writing and textual analysis, I developed skills that are transferable across all career paths, including collaboration, critical thinking, and most importantly, effective communication. Through class discussions, constructive instructor feedback, and consistent close reading, my English courses did more than change how I read and write; they changed how I think. This development has translated directly into my current role as an Academic Advisor for Psychology here at UT Tyler. Whether I'm writing emails that require clarity and care, talking to students about navigating their educational goals and academic struggles, or relaying their needs to leadership within the psychology department, I lean into my English minor skills. The analytical attention to detail I once applied to Hemingway is now being put to degree plans, transfer credits, and the ever-evolving atmosphere of working in higher education. The experiences I gained through minoring in English continue to shape my career, professional identity, and the way I encourage and advise students.

At first, I thought the best part of my English minor was realizing that I still had a dream of becoming a writer. Looking back, I found something even better: the realization that I already was one. And so are you.

The time I spent studying English at UT Tyler has influenced me both professionally and personally, and it continues to inform my role as an advisor. The professors in the Department of Literature and Languages truly care about their students, and that investment makes a lasting difference. I hope this column serves as a testament to their impact, the versatility of the marketable skills built through studying English, and the value of always leaving room for your dream.

# Thinking, Writing, Leading: Doors an English Degree Opened

***Katrina Tie | BA English 2008, MEd in Secondary Education 2012, MA in Clinical Mental Health 2025***

When I declared English as my major at UT Tyler, I had just returned from teaching in China and was focused on one goal: earning my degree as efficiently as possible so I could teach in the United States. I loved literature and writing, but I viewed my English degree only through the lens of becoming an English teacher. I did not yet understand how versatile, or far-reaching, that decision would be.

What drew me most to literature was studying its influence on people and society. Without realizing it at the time, I was developing skills that extended far beyond the classroom. Today, as a licensed professional counselor–associate, curriculum coach, business owner, and doctoral student, I can confidently say that my English degree prepared me for every professional path I have taken.

Majoring in English trained me to think critically, read deeply, recognize bias, and communicate with clarity and purpose. Those skills became the foundation for my graduate work and led me to pursue two master’s degrees, one in Secondary Education and one in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. They continue to support my current doctoral studies in Organizational Leadership. Graduate-level work demands close reading of research, synthesizing complex ideas, and writing for multiple audiences, skills I first honed as an English major at UT Tyler.

Beyond academics, my English background has shaped my professional identity. As a trauma-informed therapist, my work relies on careful listening, identifying patterns in stories, and helping clients reframe narratives that no longer serve them. Literature taught me how to understand emotions, motivations, and meaning. It taught me that stories are powerful—and that how we tell them matters.

In leadership and curriculum roles, English skills appear in unexpected ways. I write professional development materials, design trauma-sensitive training for educators, and communicate across disciplines to create meaningful content for students. Whether drafting policy-aligned documents, presenting to administrators, or building a counseling practice, the ability to adapt language to different audiences is essential.

An English major does not narrow your future; it expands it. If you are wondering what you can do with this degree, the answer is simple: more than you can imagine. Your words matter. Learn to use them well, and they will take you everywhere.



# Experiences at Riverside Conference

*Mikahl Doll & Cherish VanDygrift | Current English MA Students*



As graduate students with no conference experience, it is an intimidating prospect to put your research out there, apply for a conference, and (with some luck) present on a panel. Moreover, we must acknowledge the additional pressures of cost, travel, food, and the horrors of forcing yourself to mingle. So, when Cherish VanDygrift and I, Mikahl Doll, took Dr. Catherine Ross up on the opportunity to become student research partners, we had all of that to consider as we prepared ourselves for a new academic experience.

Our work centers around finding evidence and discussing the education of women and girls in Victorian England. Our collective works came together in such a way that we were confident enough to submit to the British Women Writer's Conference. After some waiting, our proposals were approved, and we started making preparations to attend in May of 2025. It was time to gain experience as professional scholars! We revised our presentations over and over before meeting one another in South Dakota.

The conference took place in Sioux Falls, overlooking a river which was often occupied by geese. The first morning was nerve wracking. Finding a table to eat breakfast made you feel like you were back in high school, unsure of where you fit in. The tables were a mix of experienced scholars and graduate students. Also like high school, eventually you get brave enough and ask to join a group or someone is kind enough to ask you first. As you make small talk about which presentations you are excited about attending, strangers become peers willing to share their ideas and experiences. Cherish benefitted from the optional mentor program which was a focused, intentional extension of the collaboration opportunities at conferences like these.

As we attended presentations and gave ours, we came to recognize the importance and privilege of taking part in such an event. Veils of mystery are lifted and so many questions around what it looks like to submit an article for publication and what it looks like to be an active scholar were answered. The advice we would like to extend to students considering taking a leap of faith is: Do it. Professors at UT Tyler are rooting for your success and there are so many people out there, like you, who want to grow, learn, and support one another's academic pursuits.

[We would like to thank UT Tyler for funding our travel.]

# Prepared to Succeed

## **Mark Griffin | English MA 2024**

In the Spring of 2020, during the global pandemic, I decided to make a career change and pursue my interest in literature and pursue a PhD in English. The following semester, I enrolled in UT Tyler's MA program, and much to my surprise, my interest was met with enthusiasm, encouragement, and, most importantly, support.

During my time at UT Tyler, I had countless experiences with professors who contributed to my growth. The guiding theme of my experiences is that each professor recognized my dedication by challenging and directing me and providing scaffolding for my progress toward my goal of applying to a PhD program. What I want to highlight is that UT Tyler's English MA program set me on a trajectory for intellectual growth and prepared me for the opportunity to continue the next stage of my journey. While I don't have the space to share in detail all those experiences, what is important is that I was taught the skills necessary to succeed as an academic, teacher, and scholar.

In a series of developments, UT Tyler's program taught me to be an effective writer. Learning to write a Strong Paper™ prepared me to write, submit, and present a conference paper—something a year before I never would have thought possible—with Dr. Propper's guidance.

This program also taught me how to be an effective and impactful teacher. Working with Dr. Wu and Dr. Sidey, I received the training and mentoring I needed to prepare and make a positive impact on students as they began navigating their college careers.

Lastly, this program not only taught me how to conduct effective research but also how to write as a scholar. Under the mentorship of Dr. Jessop and Dr. Sidey, I was challenged to start seeing myself as the scholar I wanted to become and conduct and write effective research that made me a strong candidate for PhD programs.

While I have inevitably failed to mention others, please know that each professor recognized and cultivated my interest, and that the impact from fellow students were equally important. During my time at UT Tyler, I learned just as much from other students as I did from faculty. So, know that regardless of where you are on your journey, UT Tyler and those attending are here to help you get to where you want to go.



# Lifelong English Experience

*Brian Oviedo | English BA 2025*



Questions still arise about what I want to do with my career, and my response expands every year. I am a recent English major graduate from UT Tyler, and I have started the MA program, again at UT Tyler. While completing my master's degree I want to work internships or jobs in Dallas that will put my English skills to the test.

Through the course of my English career, I have learned to critically think about aspects of life outside of the academic world. I have learned to appreciate literature as more than the simple definition of reading and writing. Everyday I apply the study of literature to my life. I can identify the importance of topics, in analytical and critical thinking. Through literature I have been able to find new meanings in my social and personal life, and with the learned English skills, I possess a greater intellect than I did before. English is not my first language, and to be able to form effective academic sentences is something I will cherish all my life.

Studying English has offered great academic strengths and life-changing experiences, such as studying abroad. I had the opportunity to study in London, United Kingdom for an entire semester. My relationship with life and academics will never been the same. I experienced life from a different perspective. The classes I took with the academic professors at the University of Hertfordshire pushed my analytical, writing, reading, and comprehensive skills.

Studying on the peaceful campus of UT Tyler I have been able to devote time to my favorite thing in the world, dancing. And while studying abroad, I attended dance classes and was able to participate in dance performances that have forged a greater connection to dancing. To the question of what I want to do with my life, I now respond with "Everything." I want to work as a technical writer, editor, educator, researcher, and dance instructor. I know that after completing my master's program, I will achieve great things thanks to all the valuable lessons I have learned here.

# Major Perks for English Majors: Working in an Office Setting

## *Amber Banks & Samantha Walls | Current English Students*

**A**mber: My name is Amber Banks, and in the summer of 2024, I was approved to work at the K-16 Literacy Center. During my initial interview with Dr. Mohkitari, he explained the Center's goals in more detail and made me feel confident in my ability to help. The primary goal of the center is organizing and planning an on-going project called Parent Powered Literacy (PPL), where we assist local parents by giving them the tools to strengthen their children's reading skills before the 1st grade. To prepare for this, I was tasked as a research assistant to help create a book inventory for the center, organize and file relevant information, and communicate with parents interested in the project.



Samantha and I use our skills as English majors to think critically and creatively, collaborating with our team in the office to reach our goals each semester. With the experience I cultivated from my courses, I found office settings like this to be very rewarding. In the office, I found the flexibility to adapt, perform, and collaborate with coworkers, much like I had to do for class. I had the confidence to speak up in meetings, complete tasks, and prepare things as if they were graded assignments. Being able to follow detailed instructions, produce my own work, and come up with helpful ideas for the project during meetings, I was more prepared than I thought thanks to what I learned as a student.

Samantha: As for new opportunities offered to English majors through UT Tyler, I spoke with Amber in the fall of 2024 after one of our Grammar and Editing classes with Dr. Propper. Amber mentioned that the Literacy Center needed Undergraduate Research Assistants who were familiar with document design and writing needs. As an ENGL Major, I was hired to work at the Center January of 2025.

Dr. Mohkitari runs the office and oversees the education that is given to parents in the community. He tracks their literacy growth through the Parent Powered Literacy program. My English degree is essential for what I do at the center. I use my degree to track data, create documents, inform parents about reading literacy, and network with connected faculty. I use tools such as writing and grammar daily, especially when it comes to parents having a rounded education in the fundamentals of reading aloud with their children. I help with the Longview meetings in person and get to experience first-hand the joy the parents receive when the tools we share about at-home literacy work for their child. Without my English degree, I would not have had this opportunity to help people in the community.

# Bolder at Boldface

*Ian Martin | Current English Student*



Last summer, I had the opportunity to check out a creative writer's conference in Houston. I'd spent my spring semester buried under assignments, meeting the mark for my classes, but losing passion for personal projects. I was constantly aware of how badly I needed to write, but the further I got into my studies, the further I felt from myself. Eventually, I realized I'd become afraid to write at all.

In one of my last classes of the semester, Professor Blake told us to check out Boldface. He said it was a writer's conference, whatever that could be. I figured it was something to do that might inspire me. I was, at the end of my junior year, a writer who wasn't writing.

I booked the cheapest AirBnB I could find. I packed my notebook and an extra shirt. I drove to Houston before dawn, and my week began.

Graduate students led each course, and they were quick to break down any pretense that usually comes with academia. My teachers were dedicated to telling us how we could make money with our writing. Their advice was practical, warm, and focused on our needs. Our classes were small, our days were full, and our writing was intimate. I was in creative writing rehab.

Every class was dedicated to creativity. The conference, while at a university, had no need for grades, tests, or any other measurements of success. All that it offered was a place to expand my skills. I was able to see a massive change in my habits, solely because of the community I formed with my fellow writers. The graduate students encouraged us to explore our imaginations, and the social pressure to show up with something good was enough to spurn my motivation.

The conference brought published writers in as guest speakers. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reminded me of my passion. Peter Turchi told me to listen. J. Bruce Fuller taught me to be proud of where I'm from.

In a week, I'd filled my composition book. I saw the pathway to an MFA; I understood publishing; and I had a community of writers who'd be there whichever way I went.

Finding community meant I'd made friends and seen my anxieties reflected in all of them. Our isolated practice had convinced us our work was fruitless. Through Boldface, we realized we weren't alone. We were listening to each other's stories, whatever they might become. I was writing—unafraid.

# Becoming a Better Writer- There's Always Room for Improvement

*Alfonso Lopez | MA English 2020*

Having always had a passion for reading and writing, it was easy to decide which path to take and continue my education. After doing some research on many different M.A. programs near the Dallas/Fort Worth area, I found UT Tyler provided the most diverse selection of courses and topics. That was what initially grabbed my attention, but as I continued each semester, I became engrossed in the different classroom assignments and discussions, learning from and working with different professors whilst being challenged academically. These experiences allowed me to improve my expertise in reading and writing helping me become a better high school English teacher. I was able to bring all these reading, writing, and research skills into the classroom and challenge my students as my professors had challenged me. Overall, if you asked me what I valued most from my experience at UT Tyler, it was being challenged as a reader and writer.



Beyond teaching high school English, I was able to continue using these skills to explore other areas in and outside academia with what I learned from UT Tyler to do some of the following: create curriculum, write grant proposals, edit webpages, proofread documents, analyze data and write reports, and much more. I cannot express how valuable my time was as a student at UT Tyler, and even years later, I think about the valuable class discussions and essays that helped me practice many of these skills I still use today. I've always believed that there's always room to get better, no matter where you are and what you're doing.

If you are someone who enjoys growing as a student, you should certainly consider UT Tyler for your master's degree. You will learn so much in your time and become a better reader and writer in the process, as I did.

No doubt you will learn many other things beyond reading, writing, and research, but that's the great part – it is all up to you; you have the freedom to choose what you study. So, consider UT Tyler and learn about topics you've always wanted to read and learn more about. Along the way, you'll gain many valuable skills. For me, these skills have led me to other personal and professional opportunities and hopefully the same will happen for you!

# Are Podcasts the New Novels? Why English Students Should Step UP to the Mic

*Ashley Worley | Current Digital Storytelling & Interactive Design Minor*

**What do you think of when you hear “storytelling?”**

**H**aving grown up raiding the library of fantasy novels, the word summons images of dragons and worn-out books. But storytelling is not a specific medium. It’s a skill. One that anywhere, at any time, you may be called upon to use – in my case, on July 12, 2025 at 4:30 p.m. in Chicago, Illinois.

As far as I know, podcasting is not something we often associate with storytelling. It’s tempting to consider podcasts as nothing more than voices rambling on the airwaves, background noise for our morning commute. Especially if you’re an English major or minor, you might have been drawn into the field by your love of literature or classic poetry. But how can we share good stories in a world where attention is our most precious commodity, and we need things faster, shorter, and multitasker-friendly so we can get the story while folding our laundry?



When I was invited to join Dr. Catherine Ross at the inaugural HigherEd PodCon in Chicago, my first thought was, “What do I know about podcasting?” After meeting so many wonderful podcasters at the conference, however, I learned the field is composed largely of entrepreneurs. Almost no one starts a podcast because they’re an expert at podcasting. They simply have a story to tell, and the passion to share it.

Those same storytelling skills, in fact, came in handy for giving our conference presentation (yes, at 4:30 p.m.). The same techniques I’d learned from the books in my local library were repurposed into notecards, slides, and extemporaneous speech.

In a time where audiences have “more ear time than eye time,” as one presenter put it, podcasts can serve the same purpose as books, broadcast television, and radio shows. Though tailor-made for the busy audience, they can be so much more than background noise. Podcasts today are one of the most accessible storytelling mediums, capable of reaching listeners anywhere, anytime, and giving voice to anyone willing to step up to the mic.

If you have a story you’re passionate about sharing, podcasts are a medium worth considering. Don’t be intimidated by the technical demands – as I learned at the conference, there’s an entire online community of podcasters ready and willing to help. And if you ever feel out of your element, remember that podcast production requires the same essential skill of any good novelist, poet, or English major: storytelling.

# From Skeptic to Strategist: An English Major's Approach to AI in Writing

*Megan Riaz | BA English 2009 & MA English 2011*

**A**s an English major, and a millennial, I approached ChatGPT with hesitation. Years of writing everything from essays to press releases to web content made me feel I had control of language. How could an AI tool rival a trained writer in its ability to move an audience to feel emotion and connection?

For me, AI has become something akin to an energetic, unpaid intern: capable, fast, and always available, but in need of supervision and direction. The key question is not whether AI can write. It clearly can. The question is how we, as trained writers, guide it so that it strengthens our communication rather than dilutes it.

## **Teach Before You Expect Excellence**

AI does not intuit audience, context, or intention. It responds to input. When I first began using ChatGPT for professional writing, I quickly realized that vague prompts produced generic results. Specificity, however, produced depth.

When requesting a draft, I now provide:

- Clear information about the audience
- Background on the subject matter
- The specific goal of the piece (as well as the length and word count if necessary)
- Examples of previous work to establish tone and structure

Uploading prior articles and patient stories has proved especially effective. By modeling my own voice and approach, I trained the tool to approximate my style. Over time, the prompts required less detail because the patterns had been established. The investment on the front end pays dividends later. Precision in instruction produces precision in output.

## **Revise Without Apology**

I frequently shorten drafts, reduce sentimentality, eliminate unnecessary punctuation, and remove superfluous embellishments. What remains is a sharpened version of the original idea, which is structured, but distinctly mine.

## **Maintain Ownership**

AI has significantly increased my productivity. It assists with first drafts, headline variations, email subject lines, and structural organization. Tasks that once consumed hours can now begin with direction rather than hesitation.

For someone managing multiple projects, this efficiency is transformative.



# Cont: From Skeptic to Strategist: An English Major's Approach to AI in Writing

To use AI effectively, I follow five principles:

- Be clear about the intended outcome before requesting a draft.
- Provide detailed context at the outset.
- Edit rigorously for tone and clarity.
- Fact-check every assertion.
- Retain full responsibility for the final voice.

When used thoughtfully, AI does not replace the writer; it expands the writer's capacity. For those trained in language, rhetoric, and revision, this tool becomes less a threat and more an instrument that, under skilled direction, allows us to produce more, refine faster, and communicate with greater reach.

And yes, I still reserve the right to debate its enthusiastic devotion to the Oxford comma.

## Stand Out from Over 4 million Job Candidates by Taking English or a Foreign Language

You will gain the **Top Ten Skills** sought by employers:

- Ability to work in a team
- Ability to make decisions and solve problems
- Ability to plan, organize and prioritize work
- Ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organization
- Ability to obtain and process information
- Ability to analyze quantitative data
- Technical knowledge related to the job
- Proficiency with computer software programs
- Ability to create and/or edit written reports
- Ability to sell and influence others

Talk to Dr. Ann Beebe ([abeebe@uttyler.edu](mailto:abeebe@uttyler.edu)), or Dr. Greg Utley ([gutley@uttyler.edu](mailto:gutley@uttyler.edu)) to find out how you can gain specific marketable skills:

- data analysis,
- time management,
- presentation skills,
- an understanding of human psychology and cultures,
- persuasion skills, and
- strong writing skills.

# An English Major in HR

*Deirdre Lowell-Caldera, SPHR | BA English*



I remember spending hours in my dad's lab when I was young. He shared space with fellow Biologists from all around the world and a particularly adorable African Lung fish named Green Bean. One of his colleagues was a Hungarian Professor who, from time to time, was willing to teach me words from quite a few languages. I think it was at this young age, that without realizing it, I became enamored with language and language structures.

In elementary school, I discovered the awe and wonder of the thesaurus. Happiness was some uninterrupted time with both my thesaurus and dictionary. Voilà, instant superpowers. Words went from being interesting to alluring, refreshing, stimulating, and intoxicating even.

It's no wonder that, when it came time to declare my major, I chose a degree in English with an emphasis on writing. Every day was a day spent wielding the written word as a paint brush, as a sword, or as a fine intoxicating wine. It quickly became clear that writing exercised my brain in a way that other activity did not.

As adulthood crept into my world, my need to launch into a career became ever present. Bills and expenses wait for no man. Before I graduated, I accepted a position in a Human Resources office at a university system governed jointly with eleven employee labor unions. The collective bargaining agreement (union contract) was an odd thing to me, full of contradictions and odd language cobbled together over decades as the parties negotiated. Never before had I seen labor relations and law hinge upon a single powerful word ("shall").

After graduation, I stayed in Human Resources, but in addition to the collective bargaining agreement work, I handled contracts, policy, procedure manuals, official letters and campus wide communications. I've been called upon to be wordsmith, moral support, and a second pair of eyes for both colleagues and leadership. Being able to read, analyze, interpret, and then write, is an invaluable skill and a solid basis for so many areas of study. In my opinion, a most solid base, to expand into further study. As an English major, you are a qualified individual with a voice.

# The Eternal Spark: A Visionary Pulse

## *Jalyah Crist interview of Dr. Rowntree | Current English Student*

I appreciate this opportunity to introduce Dr. Miriam Rowntree more than words can express. Prior to working at UT Tyler, Dr. Rowntree was a PhD student at the University of Texas at Arlington. While pursuing the degree, she worked as a graduate student at their Writing Center. The successful position that she upholds today as UT Tyler's Writing Center Director is a credit to her persistence, resilience, and guidance. With the utmost respect, Dr. Rowntree set her heart on becoming an instructor for textual and analytical studies.

Rose City became Dr. Rowntree's landing place for two main reasons: the scenic environment and the academic community. Throughout the UT Tyler campus there are some of the most beautiful venues for sightseeing. She occasionally spends her leisure time touring the school grounds where enchanting scenery and familiar faces greet newcomers and locals. Given UT Tyler's size, Dr. Rowntree finds it easier to collaborate with scholars and staff. She affirms that "Getting to know the students and faculty is sublime."



Pitching into general observations, the issue that literacy is not valued enough must be addressed. Admittedly, the weight of our decisions may not always be considered but the reading and writing process significantly matters because they have the potential to change anyone through compassion. Some of the questions Dr. Rowntree raised in our discussion include the following. When objectives are completed without feeling, how will we know our progress is substantial? What about the short-term and long-term goals? These attributes are often forgotten, but it is important to not abandon, nor dismiss, your expertise. The cognitive skills of contextual analysis, revision, research, and problem solving are all endeavors. They are the basic requirements in every field of study that will encourage students to expand on complex ideas. In a similar vein, knowing where to apply these skills in certain areas will allow for more opportunities in real-world cases.

Reaching the transitional point from planning to advancing shows that appropriate measures were taken in the right direction. Fortunately for UT Tyler, Dr. Rowntree excels at guiding students to reach their own aspirations and to be the best versions of themselves. One piece of advice from her to all students is to read broadly and write frequently as life practice.

# Welcoming Dr. King

## *Ian Martin interview of Dr. King | Current English Student*

**Dr.** Skyler King joined UT Tyler in the fall of 2025 as a first-year writing professor. He has an insatiable curiosity, making him an incredible source of knowledge for his students. When talking with him, I learned about the ways language influences identity and the distinct world he sees in every student.

While he eventually earned a Doctorate in Rhetoric and Writing in 2025, Dr. King's journey began with an interest in language and literature at Southern Virginia University. After that, he knew he wanted to work in education, and so he earned his first MA in Applied Linguistics in 2012. From there he started teaching ESL and directing a language center. He moved from teaching ESL writing in grammar courses to teaching composition courses in 2016. That drew him to his second master's degree at California State University in San Bernard in 2018.



Dr. King doesn't just learn by attaining degrees, but from his students. "They help integrate me with their culture," just as he integrates with the culture of every language he has acquired. This is what Dr. King loves most about his first-year writing students. They are each a distinct world. When they write to him in their annotated playlist, the songs that matter to them, or community literacy narrative, where they explain to him some aspects of their language usage, he gets to see them explain the world that he lives in from a different perspective. He spoke to me with pride about how he "gets to now see the initial written versions of my students' understanding and awareness of who they are, and how their language impacts them. So, what do they teach me? They teach me about the worlds they inhabit. Who they are. I think everybody should envy what I get to do."

His interest in his students is a part of Dr. King's drive to understand as much about the world as he can. For instance, Dr. King speaks French and English, and he's at a beginner level in Arabic, Mandarin, and Welsh. Even so, he says he wants to know more. In every language he has acquired, Dr. King has gained access to a new version of himself and witnessed others open up to him in turn.

Speaking with Dr. King was my privilege, and I envy anyone who has the chance to take his class. Welcome to the Patriot family!

# Finding Your Niche

## *Elizabeth Hillman Interview of Michaela Murphy | Current English Student*



There are times in our lives where we come to question if the path that we originally thought we were going to follow is right for us. In interviewing Professor Michaela Murphy in her first year at UT Tyler, one thing became undeniably certain. Finding the place that brings you joy and fulfillment is completely priceless.

At Tyler Junior College, Professor Murphy matriculated thinking that nursing was the right path for her. She comes from a family of teachers, so she was inherently aware of what that path entailed, but like so many students the desire to branch out and explore different possibilities prevailed.

After discovering that nursing was not for her, Professor Murphy graduated TJC with a general studies degree. It was in UT Tyler's Department of Literature and Languages that she found a sense of belonging. Working towards a certification to secondary English teacher felt like more of the right direction but again, there was this inkling to Professor Murphy that there was something else she was meant to be doing.

She knew that she much preferred being in a college setting since her teaching style is much more focused on projects, and a student-led type of environment. "Public School classrooms don't really accommodate this, and the students are not ready for that level of independence in their work." Realizing that the college setting would be able to accommodate this type of style, she ultimately came to the realization of where she wanted to go.

Following the completion of an MA degree from UT Tyler, there was a professional opportunity to teach English 1301 and 1302 full-time for the department.

This past semester has been filled with changes. Beginning to teach online courses has been a challenge to navigate, but Professor Murphy explains why the option of online classes can be beneficial for students saying "Sometimes this [option] really works for students especially if they are returning to college or if they have been in the job field for a long time" while simultaneously pointing out how it might be difficult for other students who have never been to college before.

In interviewing Professor Murphy about her experience teaching at UT Tyler, I received an important lesson that many college students need to learn. It is okay if the initial path that you thought you would follow does not end up being where you end up. Finding your niche, the place where you know you belong, might take time. But don't give up.



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