

Alumni Spotlight: Jeremy Schraffenberger

M.A. English (2004); B.A. English (2002)



Please share a little bit about a favorite class or project you developed in English about which you are particularly proud.

It's hard to narrow down the many projects I enjoyed in my time at UofL, from writing a short story inspired by Charles Chesnutt in Karen Chandler's class, to researching the obscure epic poem *The Conquest of Coomasie* for David Anderson, to a project on comic books for Bronwyn Williams, to translating Beowulf for Karen Mullen. Some of my most memorable experiences were the many exciting conversations during creative writing workshops with brilliant writers like Paul Griner, Sena Naslund, and Jeff Skinner.

Share your best memory of being an English student.

I absolutely loved when the annual 20th Century Literature Conference (now the Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900) would take over the Humanities Building. It was a formative experience--and a rare privilege for an undergraduate--meeting and learning from writers and scholars from all over the country. In fact, later I would present my own work at this conference numerous times as a graduate student and professor.

What is the most important thing learned while you were an English student?

As a UofL MA and BA English student, I was encouraged to find and make connections between and among the diverse range of courses I was taking. It was in those classrooms that I developed critical habits of mind that helped me to understand more clearly that I needed to bring my own intellectual agenda to everything I was learning.

Describe your career path. How did your English education prepare you for what you are doing today?

From Louisville, I went on to Binghamton University (at the urging of UofL Professor Emeritus Suzette Henke, for whom I was working as a graduate assistant), where I received my PhD in English in 2008, after which I accepted at position at the University of Northern Iowa, where I'm now a full professor and editor of the *North American Review*.

What is one of your favorite professional accomplishments and/or most fascinating aspects of your job?

Founded in 1815 in Boston, the *North American Review* is the oldest literary magazine in the United States, and I now have the honor of editing it. This work is the most fulfilling aspect of my job as I contribute not only to the contemporary literary world, publishing some of our finest writers working today, but I am also contributing to the larger, ongoing historical project of the *NAR*. Working for the magazine has opened up so many creative and scholarly avenues. In addition to the magazine, I've edited two critical collections by frequent *NAR* contributors, one on the work of Walt Whitman, the other on the naturalist John Burroughs. I've recently been working on a project called "Slavery, Abolition, and Colonization in the Antebellum *North American Review*," for which I've received a visiting fellowship from the Houghton Library.

What advice would you give current students or recent graduates interested in pursuing a career in your professional field?

I would recommend learning to say yes to everything, even if it's somewhat outside of your narrowly defined field of study. Cast a broad net, scour CFPs, make everything you do connect to something you care about deeply. Give yourself homework and deadlines. Here's another little tip that I think is helpful. It was at UofL that I first began creating my "future CV." That is, I knew I wanted to become a professor, so I envisioned future publications, conference presentations, classes I would teach, crafting a CV that was robust enough to get the kind of job I envisioned. Then I worked toward achieving as many of those things as possible. Even though it was only an exercise, imagining what might be was very clarifying. It allowed me to focus on those things that would help me to achieve my goals.