

Alumni Spotlight: Kevin Bailey

M.A. English (2018)

B.A. English (2014)



Why did you choose UofL English?

I started my undergraduate career at UofL as an Anthropology major, but my heart wasn't in it. I was unmotivated, directionless, unsure of what sorts of classes I should be taking, and even less certain of what I wanted to do for a living. Thankfully, in my second semester I took an Intro to Creative Writing class, and it changed everything for me. I enjoyed reading prose, and poetry, and drama, and criticism; I liked analyzing texts; I liked writing. So I switched. And thanks to the UofL English faculty, many of whom are still teaching here today, I didn't regret it.

A couple years after graduating with my B.A., I was yet again searching for purpose (perhaps there's a theme here?). I had been working at a local record store which, admittedly, was a lot of fun - but I knew I needed to do something more fulfilling. I thought back on my undergraduate experience and how much creative and intellectual stimulation I got in that environment, and I decided I wanted to pursue a graduate degree in English. After coming to this decision, I learned about the Graduate Teaching Assistantship, which allows for Master's and PhD candidates to work as Writing Center consultants and lecturers to pay for their tuition. I took a shot and applied. The resulting experience prepared me for the work I have done since, and I count my time as an English GTA as among the most exciting and fun periods of my life.

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

Though it might sound a bit hokey, I think the most important double lesson I learned from my time as an English student is to believe in the value of my own ideas and to be receptive to the ideas of others. Whether I was crafting a thesis for a research paper or languishing over my word choice in a line of poetry, I always felt others took an interest in the work I was doing. Without exception, every one of the English courses I took was constructed in such a way that I was able to share my ideas with - and be privy to the ideas of - my peers. My instructors and classmates let me know that my writing was worth their time, which not only helped me overcome feelings of inadequacy I had about my own work but also compelled me to care about and learn from the work of my peers. I can't stress enough how much I benefited from this environment. We were all interested in learning from one another, and that kind of mutual interest and validation is a rare and precious thing.

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

While studying English at UofL, I became intimately familiar with research methods and practices. Whether I was taking courses and constructing papers related to literature, creative writing, or rhetoric and composition, I was always immersed in the process of looking for and studying primary and secondary materials and entering scholarly conversations. My understanding of scholarly research only broadened in graduate school when I began teaching introductory English classes designed to pass these same skills on to my students.

Knowing how to write and commit to research, and knowing how to help others with their own projects, helped land me a job as a Library Assistant at the Western Branch of the Louisville Free Public Library. In my three years there, I had the privilege of working in Western's African American History Archives, where I got to help researchers with their archival requests.

In my current role as Archives Assistant at the University of Louisville Archives and Special Collections, I still use those skills acquired during my time as a student and instructor of English at UofL. I help folks develop research questions, narrow their research focus, and connect with materials in our archives relevant to their projects. I get to go to work each day knowing I'll play some role in assisting others with their personal and professional investigations, and I think I'm awfully lucky for that.

What advice would you give students pursuing an English degree?

The English Department regularly hosts loads of wonderful events right on UofL's campus that are open to all. Take advantage of these opportunities! Catch a reading by an award-winning author when they come to campus as part of the Axton Reading Series. See English scholars give presentations on their research at The Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900. Get involved as an editor or submit your own work to one of UofL's literary journals, the Miracle Monocle and The White Squirrel. There's no shortage of enriching experiences for you to attend just outside the classroom.