

Alumni Spotlight: Kylee Auten

B.A. in English, Minors in History and Linguistics



Why did you choose UofL English?

I came into college undecided because I really wanted to avoid changing my major several times, so I decided to not declare one until I was certain. In part, I chose English because I genuinely enjoyed my English 101 and 102 classes. I just really liked writing and figuring out how to write. However, I didn't declare my major until I had taken a few literature classes. I discovered that being an English major meant I could keep developing my writing skills, pursue my already existing love of literature, and do these two things while learning from engaging professors.

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

I really enjoyed Dr. Ryan's Civil War Literature class, and I'm quite fond of my essay from that course. She gave us a lot of time and liberty to develop a project that we cared about, so I was able to tailor my research to something I was interested in. I wrote a paper about drummer boys and their depictions in newspapers and poetry versus a personal journal written by a drummer boy himself. This was a Culminating Undergraduate Experience course, and I really feel this project let me use the research and writing skills I had gained through my first three years of course work.

I also thoroughly enjoyed being a part of the Honors English program. The English honors seminars I took were unique and challenging, and they really helped me grow my analytical skills. The honors thesis was also a rewarding, yet difficult, process. The Honors program is definitely not for the faint of heart, but it is a great opportunity for anyone looking to take one-of-a-kind classes and develop a significant writing project.

Share your best memory of being an English student.

During several of my classes I had these "aha!" moments where I felt like I had crossed a threshold of understanding with a text. I found these moments to be quite thrilling--there is something so rewarding about recognizing your own progress in a discipline. This kind of moment happened in almost every class I took, but I remember them fondly and use those moments as inspiration to keep pushing forward in my studies now.

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

While being an English major I learned that you should never force a text to say what you want it to say. There are always going to be multiple readings of a text, and we're taught to argue for our reading of it, but we shouldn't manipulate it to say something it doesn't say. This has not only enriched my writing process, but it has become somewhat of a life skill that I covet because you can use this approach in so many situations outside of analyzing a book.

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

My education in the English department at UofL is the main reason I am where I am today. I'm currently enrolled in the master's program in English at UofL, and I work as a graduate teaching assistant for the department. I worked one year in the campus writing center and I'm now teaching first-year writing. My undergraduate courses at UofL gave me the skills to demonstrate to admissions committees that I could succeed in their programs. I also regularly rely on the skills I learned and will even sometimes revisit course materials that I read in my undergraduate courses. In addition to my degree at UofL, I'm pursuing a master's degree in Children's Literature from Hollins University, which is something I could have never done without the guidance and opportunities I received while learning from the amazing faculty in UofL's English department.

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

I have had the privilege to present at two academic conferences. It's really quite fulfilling to read a paper you wrote for an audience, and it is even more fulfilling to know that the audience is engaged and interested in what you have to say. I think one of the most rewarding aspects of continuing to study English is that you get to keep finding new puzzles to solve, generating new ideas about how to solve

those puzzles, and then working to write something that effectively conveys your argument. Presenting at conferences is just one of the ways you get to share that process with others.

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

You have to find the thing that you enjoy about continuing to study English in an academic setting. This isn't easy, but it is rewarding when you find what makes you happy about it. I think this field is most enjoyable when you're writing about something you love, so take every opportunity to write about something that piques your interests.

What advice do you have for current students who want to make the most out of their experience in the Department of English?

Be prepared for class and use that preparation to engage in the class discussions. I am of the opinion that you get out of your English major what you put into it, meaning it takes some effort to really engage in class conversations, but it is so worth it. Even if you don't think you have anything in particular to say about a specific reading, come ready to listen and learn from your professor and your classmates. I think an English classroom is a pretty magical place when people are open and willing to share and hear ideas.

Is there anything else you would like to share about your time with UofL's English program?

I think I had a pretty normal college experience by UofL standards, but I don't think I experienced college the way people think you should. I was a working student and a commuter, so I was not too involved in on-campus organizations. I don't feel like I was cheated out of a college experience, though, because I so value the time I spent in my English classes. At times it felt overwhelming to get everything done, but most of that pressure would melt away when I sat down for class every day. I'm really grateful that the English department provided the spaces and the opportunities to explore something that I feel passionate about.