

# Alumni Spotlight: Rachel Rodriguez

## Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition (2021)



### **Why did you choose UofL English?**

When weighing doctoral programs in Rhetoric and Composition, I ultimately chose UofL because of its people. I remember a phone conversation I had with Dr. Stephen Schneider, who was the Director of Graduate Studies at the time. Hearing him speak about the unique professionalization and teaching opportunities really made UofL one of my top choices. What ultimately clinched my decision was meeting current graduate students (like Megan Boyett, my mentor) and hearing them talk about the close collegiality of their cohorts.

### **Share your best memory of being an English student.**

Strangely, my best memory of my PhD was also a moment when I was filled with anxiety - my general exam. It was my first time ever taking an oral exam and I was sure I'd do terribly, despite all my preparation and study. But during the exam itself, it felt like the first real time that the professors in the room were talking to me as if I was a colleague. They weren't exactly quizzing me, but probing me for my perceptions of the field and my impressions of scholarship. It felt really rewarding, despite my nerves. Also, I was 5 months pregnant at the time, and I remember thinking how wild and amazing it was that I was sharing this important milestone with my son.

**What is one of the most fascinating aspects of your job?**

One of my favorite parts of my current job as Director of the Writing Center at Washington College is mentoring undergraduate students. I have a staff of about 15 tutors, and I think it's really important to help develop them as individuals and challenge them to embark on new adventures. I take so much satisfaction from mentoring, whether it's bringing students to their first conference, co-writing with them, leading their IRB studies, helping them apply for grants, or just having a heart-to-heart about graduate school and all the possible careers in English. The mentorship I received at UofL was so rich and varied, and that's the chief reason I feel like I can give back as a mentor now.

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

I'd advise students to develop close bonds with their classmates outside of the classroom (especially finding a writing accountability buddy), but also to branch out and meet students in other departments. Sometimes as a graduate student it's hard to emerge from your rabbit hole of intense studying, and I'm really glad I made an effort to join the Graduate Student Council and attend the Graduate Student Support Group, because both gave me the chance to meet graduate students in different programs and compare our experiences.

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

When I imagine myself back on the UofL campus, I imagine myself in this tiny little carrel on the third floor of Ekstrom library where I wrote much of my dissertation. It was the size of a closet, and I filled it with little objects that brought me joy, like cotton candy chapstick and fuzzy socks. I'd lose all sense of time and place in there and emerge dazed, with a few pages written. If I could thank an inanimate object for helping me up the giant hill that is a dissertation, I'd thank that carrel. So, that's a long way of saying, find your secret spot on campus and use it well. You'll be grateful for it later!