

News & Notes in English

Dear English majors and minors,

Before Tian Chan completed her Juris Doctor at NYU Law School last year, she was an English major at UofL. In her interview with Professor Megan Poole, Tian talks about how her major prepared her for both law school and work as a lawyer. I hope you will read on, whether or not you're interested in law, because Tian's remarks apply to many fields.



1 - Photo courtesy of Tian Chan

Why English for Law School?

Former English Major Tian Chan Reflects on Time at UofL

Three weeks into landing her first job out of New York Law School, in which she splits time between Padula Bennardo Levine, LLP and Eberle Law, PLLC, Tian Chan, J.D., sat down to talk with us about how majoring in English at UofL helped her pursue a career in and continues to shape her plans for the future.

What made you decide to major in English?

When I was young, I loved to write poems and short stories. Creative writing came naturally to me and seemed effortless. So, English seemed like the obvious choice for a major, and also because I was never super comfortable in math and science.

The general assumption about English degrees is that you can't do much with them, or that they are not as valuable as degrees in other areas, such as engineering or political science. But, I know now that I made the right choice!

How did being an English major affect your journey to law school?

Even when I began applying to law schools, I was nervous about my English degree and whether it would negatively impact my application. But after doing a lot of research—I quickly learned that English majors can have a huge advantage over other majors. I noticed this first-hand when I went to law school and my friends who weren't strong writers really struggled.

When you're a lawyer, all you do is read and write. You have to be able to communicate effectively through your writing. You have to make persuasive arguments. In law school, your professors teach you that every. single. word. matters. When you write a brief or memorandum, every word that is used needs to have a purpose for being on the page and needs to further what you are trying to say.

Are there things you wish you had done differently as an undergraduate?

This sounds cliché, but time honestly flies by. So, I do wish I tuned in more at times because you miss it afterward. Just going to office hours and talking to your professors—you learn so much from them. It's inspiring to speak to people who are so knowledgeable and passionate about what they do.

And I think being in English allowed me to see the overlap between different areas of study. I didn't just learn about literature. I learned about history and women's rights, and I learned about animal studies, two areas that made me even more passionate about a career in law. I learned that it's all intertwined.

So, what's next? What's your vision for the future?

I have big goals for myself. I want to make a big impact on people's lives. I want to give people a voice in situations where they otherwise might feel like they don't have one.

As you go through life, you realize how important the legal system is—we all operate within it, I guess, or our lives are all touched by it at some point. And knowledge of that system really is power.

I've been lucky to have a lot of people in my life who have shown that to me, and I am excited to now be able to do the same for other people.