

Dr. Chet Breaux, M.A. English, 2011

By Melissa J. Rush

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“I know people with degrees in English that work in a diverse range of fields. An undergraduate degree gets your foot in the door. You get to choose that door. Go to career services, talk to you professors, and read about careers. Take courses across English studies like technical/professional writing and linguistics.”

Dr. Chet Breaux completed his undergraduate work at the University of Louisiana Lafayette, but when it came time to continue his education, he had friends involved in Western Kentucky University’s forensics program and came for a visit. He easily fell in love with the atmosphere. Breaux found the faculty, staff and fellow students to be kind and intelligent, and everyone he met made WKU seem a perfect fit to pursue his MA in English.

“One afternoon, I was walking through the basement of Cherry Hall, and I heard roaring laughter coming out of a classroom. I investigated, and found Dr. LeNoir sitting in a circle with his students. They were discussing writing. It was a huge moment of cognitive dissonance for me. I sat outside of that room for the rest of the class meeting because I wanted to understand what was happening – why were these students having fun? That experience showed me that teaching writing doesn’t have to be painful. It can be fun and engaging. That’s something that I bring to all my courses.”

Breaux currently teaches English at Florida International University and is the Director of [The Digital Writing Studio](#). He models his own instructional style on influences from his time as a teaching assistant for Dr. Jane Fife and Dr. David LeNoir; both are professors with whom he credits his current success. Breaux reflected on how class discussion did not always seem to be as important as some other abilities required in his rigorous coursework at WKU, but now in his own classroom he notes the value of students being able to discuss and debate a wide variety of topics, not just learn how to write about them.

When asked how he felt on graduation day, Breaux felt it was the last time he was “done.” His work at FIU is ever evolving, and never-ending. Learning should never stop, even at the highest level.

Although Breaux himself chose to teach at the post-secondary level, he observed that it is a limited field to become a full-time, tenured professor. Keeping options open and finding what a student actually is passionate about is far more important than trying to choose a career based on what he or she feels is expected. For those who do have the goal to achieve the title “professor”, he recommended reading *The Professor is In* by Karen Kelsky for a better perspective.

When asked about professors who made a lasting impact on him, Breaux first mentioned Dr. Wes Berry as one who helped him use the strength of his own ideas to go further than he thought he could. Breaux is a first-generation college graduate and had to become accustomed to being surrounded by multi-generational academics without intimidation. He also remarked a literary theory class with Dr. Lloyd Davies as being one of the hardest he’s ever taken. “I scored a B on one of those papers (not a B+, just a B), and it’s one of my greatest achievements as a writer. I still hear his voice in my head when I’m tempted to start a sentence with a gerund.”

He feels moving from a writing center tutor to a teacher as one of his greatest lessons at WKU, and learned about writing in the English language from the bottom up. Breaux strongly suggested all English majors read James Berlin’s “[Rhetoric and Ideology in the Rhetoric Class](#).” He lists it, and James Berlin, among his biggest influencers.

