

Carla Carlton, B.A. English, 1988

By Sarah K. Miller

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Carla Carlton graduated in 1988 with a double major in English and Journalism. Formerly Carla Harris, the alumna reflects, “It wasn’t always easy majoring in both English and journalism at Western. For every English professor who said, ‘Your paragraphs are too short!’ there was a journalism professor saying, ‘Your paragraphs are too long!’ But thanks to my dual majors, I have been able to make my living from words for my entire professional career.” She has worked in Louisville, Kentucky, at [*The Courier-Journal*](#) for 19 years. “My skill at editing, which I learned from the great Jim Ausenbaugh at WKU, landed me a job on the copy desk of *The Courier-Journal* directly out of school,” said Carlton. “After a few years, I was promoted to assistant regional editor and then assistant metro editor—positions in which I assigned stories and helped writers craft them from the beginning. Following a similar stint on the paper’s Neighborhoods desk, I was promoted to Arts & Entertainment Editor, where I supervised a staff of 12 writers in producing four sections per week, as well as frequent daily stories. I also wrote occasionally.” She held several other roles such as Assistant Suburban Editor, Night Assistant State Editor, and Copy Editor. “For almost 19 years, I drew primarily on my journalism training. But in 2007, eager to try something new, I left the newspaper and took a job in the Office of Communications & Public Affairs at Bellarmine University, a private, independent Catholic college in Louisville. Back ‘at school,’ my English major has become increasingly important.”

One of her main responsibilities at Bellarmine is serving as the editor of the [*Bellarmino Magazine*](#), the university’s quarterly publication for alumni, friends, faculty and staff of the university. “As editor, I write and/or edit all of the stories that appear in each 52-page issue. I also write and/or edit all fundraising pieces for our development staff—where I’m referred to somewhat tongue-in-cheek as ‘the grammar guru.’” Carlton said she has also developed a knack for writing in the voice of the university’s president, Dr.

Joseph J. McGowan. “This has led to my drafting most of his speeches and remarks and taking on other presidential writing assignments as needed. This is where the English major part of my brain gets to cut loose, using all of those adjectives and adverbs that the journalist holds at bay.”

Carlton’s time in the English department prepared her to write in the plethora of mediums she has worked with since graduation. “Going into this job, I knew that I’d be able to handle the university magazine; I wasn’t as sure about the other types of writing that might be required at a university,” Carlton explained. “But what I’ve discovered is that my Western education prepared me well for every writing assignment that’s ever been thrown at me, from commencement speeches to honorary degree citations to t-shirt slogans – even eulogies!”

Her current advice to students is to read, read, read. “Read widely and push yourself to rewrite. Be specific and don’t use adjectives as crutches. Know that if you can clearly communicate complex ideas to a given readership, you are in the minority, and your talent will be marketable in many fields. Seek out great writing, whether it’s in a classic novel or *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, figure out *why* it’s great, and learn from it. And remember, despite what you may think from reading texts and Twitter: grammar is your friend, and one of your most valuable tools.”

