

Shawna Felkins, B.A. English, Literature, 2013

By Collin Massie

Primary Instructor, University of Kentucky

"The opportunity to think with another mind is my preferred mode of travel."

- Eula Biss



Shawna Felkins graduated from the WKU English department in 2013 with a focus in literature. She is currently teaching at the University of Kentucky as a primary instructor for introductory to gender and women's studies (GWS). She is also currently a PhD student in GWS at UK. Her current job and studies are, as she describes, "Inextricably linked to [her] degree in English from WKU." She goes on to say, "The courses I took in the department equipped me not only with the analytical tools and critical thinking necessary for graduate school, but with the empathy and compassion needed to connect with my students and explore the sometimes difficult and personal topics we discuss in GWS."

When taking that leap from an undergraduate student at WKU to graduate school at the University of Mississippi, she, like so many, was excited for that next chapter. Though, she admits as well that she was saddened at the same time to be leaving such friendly people (both professors and fellow students) and the place she had called home for four years. Yet those experiences launched her to where she is now, and they stay with her in her current teaching methods.

Shawna mentions, "Literature is often a great way to give students an opportunity to discuss difficult subjects." While the works often used in academic literary studies and discussion are great to focus on, Shawna has found that it is sometimes the works found behind the veil of traditional literature that most aid in out-of-the-box thinking. "I try to keep with reading for pleasure," she says, "which can be difficult in graduate school, but I've found that the reading I do for myself is often where I find great texts for my classes. I recently read Eula Biss' *Notes from No Man's Land* and was able to assign a piece for my class to help them discuss the seemingly innocuous ways that racism is woven throughout the American landscape."

Shawna hopes to receive her PhD and to continue having a position teaching courses in GWS. While teaching GWS is something very close to her heart, she wants current undergraduates to know “you don’t need it all figured out right away!” She continues to say, “Each of my friends and I have taken very different paths since our time at WKU and we were all English majors. Academia may be for you and it may not. Trust yourself and know that there really are a plethora of options for an English major after college...”

Furthermore, as a parting bit of advice, she advises, “If possible, stay connected with your professors. As a teacher now, I have a better appreciation for the work, the guidance, the time, and the care that the faculty at WKU put into their students, myself included. So after you’ve left Cherry Hall for the last time as an undergraduate, remember to visit those that made your time there matter and never stop thanking them.”

