

## Jennifer Howard, B.A. English For Secondary Teachers, 2014

By Melissa J. Rush

### English Teacher, Russellville High School

*"It is my job to get to the heart of academic and behavioral trends I see in my students. This may be identifying how something outside of school may be affecting my students, acknowledging their successes, supporting their failures, sharing a snack when they see me sneaking chocolate, or working with other teachers to create a team of support for each student."*



Jennifer Howard (née Dyson) didn't take the traditional path through college that so many students do. Howard freely admits her first several years at Western Kentucky University were unsuccessful because she wasn't ready to put in the time and effort needed. She had chosen WKU because it was close enough to her home in Indiana, but just far enough her parents would have to call before dropping by. She left WKU for six years, but then made the decision to come back and finish what she had started. She was even able to complete her student teaching in Germany. "Graduating from the same university where it had all started 10 years before was one of the most exciting and gratifying moments of my life."

Howard said learning to trust herself was her greatest learning experience. Fear of being the oldest in class, her ability to keep up, and nervousness about how she would be received were all concerns that she quickly found fading away, and she was welcomed warmly back into the WKU home. Howard feels the English department in particular is an incredible place to belong.

When asked what her current professional responsibilities as a teacher are, her answer was "what doesn't my job entail!" Howard described the usual workload any teacher understands: lesson plans, homework, and teaching. However, there are so many more components involved most people would never realize. Researching new teaching strategies, analyzing [Lexile](#) data, evaluating student progress and "adjusting (blowing up) those pretty lesson plans."

Howard genuinely feels her students are so much more than numbers on a page. In addition to the time actually spent in the classroom, she notes all of the other responsibilities that fall to teachers. Committees, coaching, home and hospital visits, ARC meetings ([Authentic, Restricted, and Clarification](#)), PLC meetings ([Professional Learning Community](#)), and collaborative discussions with co-teachers.

Howard feels “blessed” to be doing exactly what she went to school for, which allows her degree in English to be used every single day. The most surprising element of her degree she didn’t realize would be so important is her ability to research; she feels English majors as a whole do incredible amounts of research in general, but in the teaching profession it is a continual process. Whether it is finding new approaches to literacy, teaching strategies, or finding the best texts to support standards in education, she is always learning.

Howard also noted there are many opportunities to use professional writing when applying for grants, or presenting at conferences and workshops. She felt lucky this year to have been a participant in a writing project at WKU where she was able to join other equally passionate educators to collaborate on teaching methods and even work on creative writing.

She feels that often students majoring in English are told if another profession doesn’t work out, at least there is always teaching. Howard posed the question of what’s wrong with that? She challenges current undergraduate students to bring their knowledge of literacy, writing, and analysis to the public schools. She recognizes that education is not the highest paying field, and free time may be limited, but with today’s current state of affairs, passionate educators are needed to join the team.

Howard credits Dr. Logan for challenging her to put forth her best work and instilling a love of Victorian literature in her. Both are skills she uses to teach her own sophomore World Literature class. She also felt strong support from Dr. LeNoir as her advisor in navigating a full-time work and school schedule. Howard also shared how Dr. Langdon helped simplify the chaotic writing mind of a writing teacher and in making challenging literature accessible. “My students still find my Chaucer recitations hilarious and I talk about it more than anyone should.” Howard wanted to express gratitude to Dr. Jones as well, for being a long-time, supportive friend. She feels filled with pride in being a student of not only these professors, but of the many others that helped shape her experience at WKU and beyond.

“Being an English teacher has allowed me to use every aspect of my degree in a variety of interesting ways. My goal is to get my MA and focus on curriculum design so I can take my love of research and find practical applications for the classroom.”

