

Laura Long, B.A. English Language & Literature, 2013

By Melissa J. Rush

Digital Marketing Manager, Nashville Rescue Mission

“You are the only person that can determine your future. No one will do it for you.”



In the years leading up to high school graduation, Laura Long did not want to go to college. Her mother was insistent that she be the first generation in her family to become a college graduate. Not knowing what she really wanted to do in life, Long applied and was accepted to Western Kentucky University; she believes it was one of the best decisions in her life.

Long flourished in her time at WKU. While pursuing her English degree, she had numerous accomplishments, including President’s Scholar, Honors College participant, an Ashen Egg publication, Study Abroad Ambassador, and the Thomas G. Jones Scholarship. In May 2013, Long graduated *cum laude* with a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature.

Without being quite certain of the direction Long wanted to take upon graduation, she applied for a summer internship with Nordstrom in the Pacific Northwest; she felt she would either return home to Nashville once it ended or take a position at the company: “At the time, I was excited to graduate, despite not truly having a long-term plan. Looking back, it seemed like a solid plan, but I can’t believe my mom let me do it.”

After several years in the corporate arena, Long returned to Nashville to take the position of Digital Marketing Manager for the [Nashville Rescue Mission](#). In operation since 1954, the Mission opened its doors to provide food, clothing and shelter to homeless men in Nashville. In 1968, the Mission expanded to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of homeless women and children in the community.

Long is responsible for developing and executing all online communications. She explained how her role is to manage search engine optimization (SEO), web design, digital content, social media content, email marketing, analytics and reporting, digital

campaigns, digital media buy execution, crowd-funding campaigns, digital marketing trend research, and all promotional materials.

Long credits her degree in English from WKU as key to her success. She believes the ability to research, self-teach, and communicate well led to her entry-level positions. Writing content, preparing strategies, and researching industry trends took her to the position she now holds.

Long especially feels learning how to identify with characters in literature has led to a higher level of interpersonal communication, a skill she uses daily to empathize with different personalities and situations of the men and women seeking services from the Mission. Long feels fortunate to have had several professors make a significant impact on her time at WKU, including Professor Walker Rutledge, Dr. Wes Berry, Dr. Niko Endres, and Dr. Ted Hovet.

Long shared that her greatest learning experience was in getting out of her comfort zone and participating in Study Abroad, spending one semester at Harlaxton College in Grantham, U.K. She also spent a Semester at Sea and between the two programs visited sixteen countries and a dozen more cities.

When asked what advice she would offer current students, Long had some excellent observations. She recommended creating word document study guides and keeping course notes; she keeps hers in a binder in her office even today as a reference guide. "You must work hard to get where you want to be. Unfortunately, some of you will have to work harder than others. But I will share this: don't be fearful. As long as you work hard, set goals, and take care of yourself, you will be successful in whatever path you choose."

Long shared a favorite quote from Cheryl Strayed as parting words of wisdom: "You have to pay your own electric bill. You have to be kind. You have to give it all you got. You have to find people who love you truly and love them back with the same truth. But that's all."

