

Melissa Messer, B.A. English, Literature, 2007

By Eryn Karmiller

Freelance Art Director

Melissa Messer (2007) graduated from Western Kentucky University's Department of English with a BA in literature; she later earned an MA from the University of Texas at Austin. She currently lives in Seattle, Washington. Working as a freelance art director, she comes up with, visually renders, and pitches ideas for advertisements. Her English degree aids her in this job because although she sometimes works with a writing partner, she often doesn't: "When creative teams, account teams, and clients find out I'm not only a decent art director, but I'm also literate, they treat me like a unicorn. I used to be a little offended, but now I can take the compliment."



Having graduated during the recession, Messer started out working at Starbucks and teaching English to high school students in Japan. She also interned at a literary agency in New York. Eventually, she began her career with a copywriting internship at a marketing agency in Austin, Texas, where she wrote video scripts and ad copy for tech companies. She completed graduate school there and then was laid off from the marketing agency. However, she considered the layoff a blessing in disguise, as she was ready for a change. She relocated to Seattle and worked for two different advertising agencies before more recently setting out as a freelance art director. She is finding freelancing both liberating and terrifying but is enjoying it overall.

Messer advised current English students, "Just because you're an English major and you can (hopefully) write well doesn't mean you need to look for jobs where you're pushing words." She suggested that students major in English and double major or minor in something completely different: "Because you can write, create, and come up with conceptual ideas about anything under the sun, make that thing something you love. Recently, an interviewer asked me: 'So you can write, design, art direct, and present. How do you usually define your role?' I answered: 'I just do what



feels right until somebody tells me to stop.' I did get that job. And, so far, I'm rarely told to stop."