

Eileen Ryan, B.A. English For Secondary Teaching, 2010

By Sarah K. Miller

English Teacher, Collins High School

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Eileen Ryan graduated from WKU in 2010.

She was granted a position as a [Fulbright English Teaching Assistant](#) in Korea from July 2010 until July 2011. “I knew I wanted to live abroad when I graduated,” said Ryan, “and I was interested in teaching, but unsure if I wanted to pursue a full master's degree or a teaching certification. The Office of Scholar Development reached out and told me a bit about the Fulbright ETA program, and it sounded like a perfect fit. The application process was intense, so I was very glad to have guidance from Jeanne Sokolowski while preparing my application.” Ryan explained that the Korean American Educational Commission started grantees off in a six-week orientation in which they learn teaching strategies and Korean language. “I loved learning Korean and having a chance to acclimate to a totally new culture. Then I moved in with my host family and began teaching. It was difficult to teach EFL with limited experience and background knowledge—I learned quickly that teaching English through games, competitions, and pop music was the best way to keep students engaged, and we could all share a laugh and friendly competition even when we couldn't communicate well with language.”

Ryan also said that the best part of teaching for her was getting to know the students and colleagues in Korea. “Schools in Korea have a strong camaraderie— teachers are almost second parents to their students, and there is a strong bond among the staff,” she continued. “We had staff dinners and weekend trips often, and I had a chance to explore the cuisine and cultural highlights of the country. One of my favorite trips was to the coast—the other teachers in my *gyomushil* (teacher's office) took me on a long hike to the top of a mountain and afterward we ate boiled shellfish fresh out of the sea in a little shack restaurant on the shore. Koreans love hiking and the country is easy to travel by train, so I traveled and hiked a lot during my year there.”

After returning to America, she worked as the admissions counselor in the Honors College here at WKU from August 2011 until December 2012. “I enjoyed being back at WKU and working in the Honors College,” said Ryan. “The Honors College helped me study abroad at Harlaxton and funded several of my trips to English conferences and literary pilgrimage sites during my undergrad years, so I felt like I was letting high school seniors in on the best secret ever when I met with them to talk about applying. I will say it was bittersweet to work with Honors students who were engaged in all these amazing research projects and study abroad trips and classes and to be past that point in my life—it did make me nostalgic quite often.”

Ryan continued her education at the University of Louisville College of Education, where she received her Master of Arts in teaching with a certification in 5-12 English. “At U of L, I got to learn from some incredible professors and former classroom teachers. I loved that the program was so structured around diversity in the classroom and reaching all learners, and I learned a lot about how people learn and how our brains work with our social/emotional selves in that process.” Currently, she is in her second year teaching 9th grade at Collins High School in Shelbyville, Kentucky. She loves being able to teach English: “teaching English is conceptually challenging, emotionally taxing, and time consuming, but the relationships I have built with my students and colleagues make all the hard work worth it. There is no feeling better than reading my students' writing or listening to their discussions and knowing that they are figuring out nuances of literary writing or universal truths of the human experience. I try to give my students tools to empower their learning, and when I can see that has worked and they are engaged and learning on their own, it's incredible.”

Her time obtaining an English degree helped her to become the teacher she is today. “My English degree gave me the strong content knowledge that I will bring to the classroom,” Ryan said. “I have tested at high levels in teaching preparatory exams on English content knowledge. I focused in literature during my undergraduate degree, and I was then able to focus on pedagogy during my master's degree.”

Her advice to students is to explore career options early. “Shadow professionals in as many English-related career fields as often and as early in your college career as you can. Pay attention to the opportunities for internships and application help that you hear about from your professors, university emails, flyers, and from the Office of Scholar Development. Take advantage of your summer and winter breaks for career development and academic travel opportunities.”

