



SPOTLIGHT

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2019

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FOREWORD

“Our alumni are amazing! As Dean of Arts & Humanities, it has been my privilege to meet hundreds of our former students. Their stories are compelling, inspiring, and incredibly diverse. Yes — you really can do anything with an Arts degree: bank president to performing artist, teacher to fund manager, politician to communications specialist, and everything in between and beyond! What connects us is a common commitment to crucial elements of our humanity — the importance of art, language, literature, and ideas as the foundation for meaningful reflection on who we are and what is important for us individually and collectively. No one knows this better than you — our alumni — because you are living this commitment every day.”

- MICHAEL *MILDE*

Dean of Arts & Humanities



LETTERS FROM THE SPOTLIGHT TEAM



The Dean said it best: our alumni are amazing! Getting to meet, interview, and collaborate with our Faculty's very own alumni has been an absolute privilege. *Spotlight* is the annual Arts & Humanities Students' Council project that highlights the journeys and success of these awesome graduates, with interviews written by our very own undergrads. From publishing novels to building their own start-ups, our alumni really have done it all. You'll see that along with their own unique stories, they also have incredible advice to offer. So go ahead and get that Arts degree, and feel proud doing it! You're participating in an amazing phenomenon that will link you to the human experience like no other, and that's not something you can put a price on.

- Francesca DeNoble, Editor



I was incredibly excited when Francesca asked me to act as designer for this year's *Spotlight*, and it has been a wild (but awesome!) journey. Western Arts and Humanities truly has a wide selection of incredible alumni, and a wonderful and enthusiastic undergraduate student body. For me, *Spotlight* is about finding inspiration in a tumultuous time and being receptive to the wisdom of amazing and successful individuals who have been in your shoes before and come out the other side thriving. This year, *Spotlight's* brand new logo is accompanied by a brand new design direction, with a palette of colours as bright and varied as the alumni we feature. So use these interviews to go forth, do amazing things, and thrive!

- Sophia Belyk, Designer

CHRISTOPHER COMPTON

BA '13

English Language &
Literature

BY BRITNEY FORGET



Pursuing a career in creative writing may be an uncertain and daunting task, but it's a goal that Western graduate Christopher Compton has been working towards ever since he can remember. Since he was a child, he has been writing stories. And when it came time to decide to turn his passion into a career, he chose Western University as the natural next step. Compton received his Bachelor of Arts at Western University in 2012 with a major in English Language and Literature alongside a minor in Creative Writing. He later returned to complete a Bachelor of Education in 2015.

Compton always knew that it would be a challenge to turn his creative writing into a career. He remains grateful to Western for offering Creative Writing modules that not only supported his passion but helped him develop it as well. While he knew that a simple degree would not guarantee a career in writing, Compton still recognized the value in being surrounded by inspiring writers who would all come to influence his path.

"Meeting so many like-minded people in my classes and being taught by so many professors that had multiple things published steeped me in a world where everyone had similar aspirations, which was very refreshing considering every time I answered the question of 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' with 'I want to be a writer' the responses ranged from subtle scoffs to concerned frowns," says Compton.

Throughout his education, Compton always made time to write creatively on the side in order to have works completed when he graduated and entered the market, something that he stresses the importance of. "I wanted to hit the ground running the moment I left those halls and start pounding the pavement with my freshest manuscripts or short stories," notes Compton.

Compton's work paid off as he published his *Eternal Dreams* trilogy from 2013 to 2015. The fantasy series follows six friends who escape their lives by entering a dream world, packed full with themes that reflect experiences Compton himself was going through as he pursued his dreams to establish a writing career.

"All of the characters' hopes and dreams and fears come from different anxieties that are sometimes universal ('What do you want to be when you grow up?') and sometimes more specific ('Is it better to have no dreams at all because then you don't have to worry about being disappointed?')," explains Compton. "I'd like to think there are some truths in the series that younger (or older) readers might latch onto, some insights to life that might help make sense of their own journey in life."

Now, Compton continues to work on new manuscripts for more mature audiences. "I'm still trying to find the right balance, a way to utilize my voice as a writer into something unique, but accessible; to harness what works and to excise the things that don't. Who knows if I will ever get it right, but I'll never stop trying, and — hopefully — it will never stop being fun," he laughs.

In spite of the success of his trilogy, Compton remains unsatisfied with his work and is open about the challenges he faces as a writer. "A career in creative writing to me is a lot like being on a roller-coaster — you're never quite sure it's over or if it's even started in the first place." He explains that he has gone through times where it seems as though nothing is happening, and then other instances in which everything seems to happen at once. He emphasizes that the key to success is as simple as sticking with it and not

giving up.

This dedication required a lot of self-motivation, something that is necessary when taking on the career of a freelancer. Compton says that his career is unconventional in that he makes his own schedule and deadlines and has no one setting these requirements for him. "That is both the most exciting and scariest part of this whole journey," Compton says. "It's all on you."

A career in writing affords significant independence, something that can be both liberating and stressful. Compton advises aspiring writers to "Start researching the market, entering into contests, reading lots of blogs of what's going on in the literary world so that you're not stuck constantly playing catch-up."

When asked what advice he would give to students pursuing creative writing, Compton responded: "Be brave. And persistent. 'No' is going to become a word you hate even more than you used to. A lot of e-mails you get will start with 'Unfortunately,' and it's going to hurt every time. But never be afraid of the 'no.' Never stop yourself from trying something because of 'Unfortunately.'"

"There are people that get what they want from writing: The thrill of an audience, no matter how small. The critical acclaim, or that first big book deal. And then there are people that don't get anything. I think the difference between those people lies in giving up too soon. Hang in there a little longer. Push a little further. Believe that your story is worth telling."



Compton's story resounded with me as an Arts student who has been asked a few too many times what I am going to do with my degree. It takes a lot of bravery to pursue a career in the arts. The path ahead is uncertain and navigating it will require self-direction and perseverance. Compton took these challenges and turned them into a successful career and the achievement of a life-long dream. Stories like Compton's make it clear that the hard work, leaps of faith, and incessant questioning from myself and others are leading somewhere that will, with any luck, make it all worthwhile.

Britney Forget is a second year Arts & Humanities student pursuing a double major in English and SASAH and a Philosophy minor.

JENNIFER HALE

BA '08

English Language &
Literature

BY SIERRA JOSEPH



Graduating in 2008, Jennifer Hale attended Western University for four years before leaving with an Honours Bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Dramatic Literature. For her, Western offered a new journey in which she could explore her interest in the Arts & Humanities after leaving her small town of Prescott, Ontario. While she did not know where exactly this interest would lead, what Jennifer did know was that Western was the university that would provide her with an open landscape to explore all sorts of possibilities for the path that she was about to embark on. With multiple programs and a vast combination of modules, the Arts & Humanities faculty offered Jennifer the perfect setting for her to find her place.

After discovering her strengths in English and Dramatic Literature, Jennifer then committed herself to a wide array of extra-curriculars. She was the Head Soph for the Arts & Humanities team, held several positions on her faculty's Students' Council including VP of Communications and Speaker, and was also on the Festival of the Arts Committee. In addition, she often wrote, directed, and performed with Theatre Western. Being involved in these clubs and holding these positions of responsibility encouraged Jennifer to learn the valuable lessons and skills of "team building, time management, problem solving, and mentorship." Furthermore, they taught her that learning is not limited to the four walls of a classroom, and that the lessons one learns in extra-curriculars have their own unique value. When speaking on this significance, Jennifer stated that, "If you are open to new experiences and come to them with a willingness to learn and grow and the courage to be vulnerable, then you will gain so much."

After completing her undergraduate degree in

2008, Jennifer was then faced with the predicament that many Arts students seem to find themselves in: the inevitable “now what?” However, this question did not arise because of a lack of options available to Jennifer, but rather, because of the abundance of options. There were many choices for growth that immediately presented themselves, but the one that stuck was one that had appeared right here at Western University in their Continuing Studies program. With this program, Jennifer went on to earn a Post-Degree Diploma in Arts Management.

While Jennifer may have originally entered this program with the intention of buying herself more time, she ended up falling in love with it. The program was something she describes as incredibly beneficial because it offered her direct applications for the undergraduate degree that she had just completed. More importantly, it also allowed for networking with industry professionals that would go on to offer her valuable experience and the opportunity to cultivate relationships. Jennifer now works in the Non-Profit Management field, a place that sparked an interest in her because it is one that “brings together passionate individuals who seek to make positive differences in their communities.” While in her post-degree program, Jennifer was able to discover her love for Non-Profit, learn what she liked to do and what she did not, and further shape what she wanted to be the future of her career.

While interviewing Jennifer, one recurring theme that she says has helped her define both her life and her career is the idea that your passion does not need to be your job. For Jennifer, dramatic arts were always a passion of hers

and it is because of this that she chose to complete a minor in Dramatic Literature and stayed involved in extra-curriculars that allowed her to explore performing and directing. However, despite this undeniable passion, when it came time to enter the job market Jennifer knew that she did not wish to pursue a career in theatre. After having had a placement in a theatre setting, she learned that she did not want to take the risk of changing how strongly she felt about the creative side of theatre by turning it into work. “It’s like a magician showing you how he does his trick,” she offers, “Can you really appreciate the wonder of the trick ever again once you’ve seen how it’s done?” Theatre, she says, is something that she has kept for herself, a decision that she has not come to regret. “It is something that I love,” she states, “and so I find the time and space for it in my life. It’s not always easy, but it’s absolutely worthwhile.”

Jennifer advises that there are places for passion outside of the professional sphere, stressing that it is important to find these opportunities. She herself is an active member of the theatre community here in London and has been since 2008. She has made an effort to work with multiple theatre companies with both acting and directing, and has even starred as Viola in a production of *Twelfth Night* at the Palace Theatre. Furthermore, she is also set to direct *Painting Churches* at the Palace Theatre in Spring 2019. In addition to partaking in what is already there, she says, you can also make your own opportunities. To continue her involvement in theatre, Jennifer and several of her friends and colleagues founded Fly by Night Productions, a theatre company that allows them to produce the shows that they

” **If you don’t**
LIKE IT
you can
CHANGE IT ”

actively want to create and participate in.

And yet, Jennifer points out, starting a new company is never a simple endeavour. Their first show, *Closer* by Patrick Marber, did not go to production when they first intended. In order to offer their best work, the group decided to take a step back and even put the production on pause completely. While working hard on something that later does not come to fruition is always disappointing, Jennifer stayed focused on not giving up on the company. Rather than give in, she advises, “You can start to focus on what you have learned from it and then decide how to move forward. You can only control so much — you can only change the changeable. Beyond that, you just have to work hard and regroup.”

It is undeniable that our Arts degrees don’t offer us as clear a career path as other fields may. However, what we are granted with is the freedom and the possibility of having a plethora of options. Jennifer argues that, fundamentally, having an Arts degree is a benefit in today’s job market. “All employers are looking for people who can think critically, analyze, be creative, collaborate with others, and communicate effectively... Arts & Humanities graduates have those skills after honing them over 4 years of study.” While at Western, she says, we gain perspective. The skills that we possess are all actively developed in our classes, assignments, and even our social endeavours.

In terms of last advice for current students who might not know exactly what the future holds for them, Jennifer encourages you to take a step back and not be too hard on yourself. Instead, “Be open to — as well as actively seek out — new experiences: join a club, volunteer, take a job, and go into it with a spirit of curiosity. If you don’t like it, you can change it.” Speaking from real experience, having worn the shoes that we are all in, Jennifer’s story exemplifies how the Arts do not limit us, but rather, make us stronger, more experienced, and adaptable. We have to be open to where this path may take us. It may not look exactly how we think it should, but it will still be fulfilling and amazing.



The experience of being a part of this year’s Spotlight team was incredibly valuable and beneficial to me. Jennifer gave me wonderful insight into how what we are all doing at Western can be so useful to everything else that we will do in the future. I know that participating in this publication has allowed me to practice and hone the necessary skills that Jennifer herself attributes to having an Arts education. As a student in programs that do not offer clear, defined path for employment post-graduation, it is both motivating and reassuring to hear from alumni like Jennifer that we need to trust both our education and ourselves so that they can lead us to where we are meant to be.

Sierra Joseph is a second-year student in SASAH and Women’s Studies. She continues to follow whatever opportunities that presents themselves despite the financial consequences.

“ The discipline that allowed me to finish University was very useful in not only helping

START MY OWN BUSINESS,

but also

THROUGHOUT MY ENTIRE LIFE ”

TOM WEIHMAYR

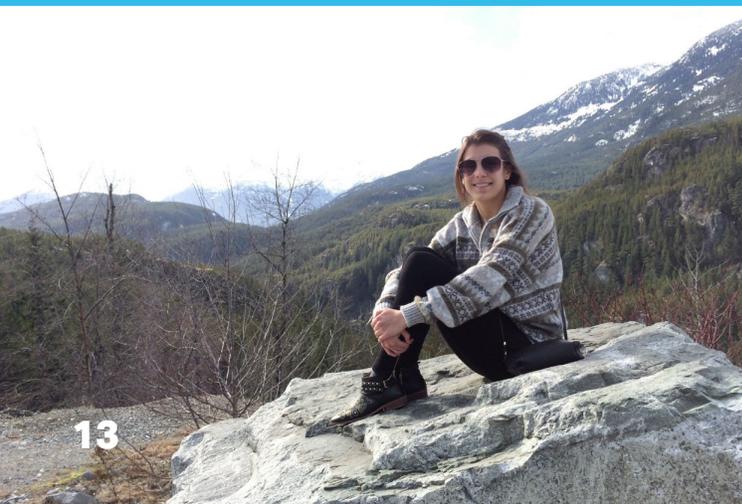
JENNIFER

KIDSON

BA '12

English Language &
Literature

BY FRANCESCA DENOBLE



In the fourth year of her Bachelor of Arts at Western University, English and Film Studies student Jennifer Kidson was in the middle of interning at a company when she was offered a full-time position. Forced to think twice about her intentions to attend a Masters program, Jennifer turned to a beloved professor who offered her a piece of advice: “You go to school to be an academic. Why be an academic if you want to be a film editor? They are two different things.” And so, having had her applications to be both a Film and English professor accepted, Jennifer went against the grain and, rather than continue her education, entered the workforce.

In the fall of 2008 Jennifer arrived at Western University eager to learn and prepared to work hard. When asked what drew her to the dynamic campus, Jennifer admitted that it was largely due to its undeniable beauty and the unique modules the Arts & Humanities faculty had to offer. However, she adds, it also simply “felt like home”, and if there’s one thing that she’s learned, it’s to, “Trust your gut. You know, when you’re hungry, you eat. If your gut says go here, go there.” For Jennifer, the next four years would be jam-packed with a demanding program, an array of extracurriculars, and a lot of great memories. While keeping yourself busy with extracurriculars is not for everybody, she says, it was for her. She looks back fondly at being a part of Western’s Dance Force team and the Coterie, as well as attributes much of her success to learning how to balance these commitments alongside her academics. “The skills I learned are still applicable,” she explains. “I have deadlines at work, and those extracurriculars taught me time management.” Not only does partaking in extracurriculars help you develop valuable skills, but it also “acts as a test-run for you to discover what you enjoy outside of the classroom.”

This love for balancing responsibilities is something Jennifer gives credit to for helping her develop into a freelancer. Following graduation, Jennifer began exploring web design and worked to pursue her dream of becoming a film editor in addition to her full-time job. A sole proprietor, Jennifer provides editing services for a variety of clients, but prefers working with documentary directors, in addition to designing websites for businesses across Canada. Making use of her film degree, Jennifer also exercises her English degree by handling the communications sector at Cota, an accredited not-for-profit community organization that supports adults who live with mental health issues and cognitive challenges. Cota, she explains, “was my first place of employment that hired me because of my English background.” This position opened up her eyes to the possibility of working in a profession that valued strong communication skills. Now, Jennifer handles coordinating key messages both internally and externally at Cota, doing everything from updating websites, to managing social media channels, to utilizing her skills in photography and video by capture inspiring stories. Jennifer stands firm in her belief that grad school is not a mandatory prerequisite for finding a career. While a post-grad degree can certainly enhance your abilities and make you more qualified for what you wish to do, entering the work force and kickstarting your career is just as valuable. For Jennifer, something that proved to be really important in the job hunt is fostering relationships with other people in the industry. Funnily enough, she adds, the manager she met as a student working

in a box-office at the Hot Docs Film Festival led to every job she’s had since. “Freelancing is a small industry,” she explains, “and how you spread yourself out and the relationships you build really makes a difference.”

Filled with great mentors and amazing memories, Jennifer looks back at her time at Western distantly, but also happily. She gives thanks to both her English and Film professors for not only inspiring her, but for supporting her. “Your parents are telling you that they believe in you,” she says, “and so are your friends. But when your professor says it to you, when it’s somebody who really sees the work that you are doing... you never forget that.” When asked if there was any last advice she could give to a current undergrad, Jennifer answered honestly. For women, it is especially common to not apply for a position should we not meet all of the required skills. One thing Jennifer has to say to combat this is, “Open up your mind and go beyond your degree. Think of where you can take your job and your skills.” It does not have to be a traditional place, and it’s important to take a look around and discover where someone with your skillset is needed. Even more crucial, she adds, is to stop worrying about your grades – they are, in actuality, a really small part of all of the great things you will be bringing to your future career. Having a positive university experience is far more significant than numbers on a page, and at the end of the day, “If you have the determination, the gumption, and the work ethic, you’ll go places. And that will always be more important than a mark.”



Sweet, funny, and successful, Jennifer was a pleasure to meet and an honour to interview. Hearing the trials and errors of a student who has come out on top is always a good time, and listening to the advice that she had to offer was especially rewarding. As an English major, I have received a lot of encouragement to begin drafting my plans for grad school. Now having heard from an alumna who has been through the process, I feel inspired to know that my future career does not rest entirely on the shoulders of my academics. As important as they are, my future is ultimately what I choose to make it and how I choose to exercise the skills that I have gained in my undergrad. Along with the academic reassurance, it’s always nice to hear someone reinforce the importance of a night out of dancing with your friends!

Francesca DeNoble is a second-year student pursuing a dual degree in SASAH and English Language & Literature with a minor in Italian. She continues to work very hard at figuring out what she is doing with her life.

ANDREA

MARTENS

BA '04

Visual Arts

BY SOPHIA BELYK



Andrea Martens graduated from Western University in 2004 with a B.A. in Visual Arts. Fresh out of undergrad – and confident in her pursuit of a career in design – she dove into Fanshawe College’s Advanced Diploma Graphic Design program, kicking off at the same time her own freelance design business. Since completing her education, Andrea has held a variety of design positions, currently working at Architects Tillman Ruth Robinson as Lead Graphic Designer, alongside teaching at Fanshawe College’s School of Design. In short, she’s awesome.

It can be easy to look at someone who appears to have their whole life sorted out with envy from the perspective of someone still struggling to find direction in their undergrad. This can be especially true for those seeking careers in art, design, or other fields that perhaps find more representation in the curriculum of college degrees. Yet Andrea would not dream of changing her educational path.

“I wouldn’t change my career [to one requiring a university degree],” she explains, “but what I love about university education is that... you’re knowledgeable about so many things. Maybe I would have studied these things in college, but I am grateful for my [university] education. It’s a great investment. I lost track of the amount of times something comes up and I can speak to it in a knowledgeable and credible way.”

Although her career has certainly sorted itself out to be a success, the path to this point has not been a straight line. In high school, Andrea thought she would pursue music in university. “...My first year at Western, I had no idea what I wanted to do...” she explains, “I thought that in four years I would be leaving undergrad and going into a career, into something that I would be

doing for the rest of my life — which is kind of crazy.” It was not until third year that she was fully confident in her choice to pursue a career in graphic design. Having grown up in an environment with two creative parents, it seemed natural that she also demonstrated an eye for detail and a penchant for creativity.

Andrea’s path to her current dream position has included a variety of both corporate and community-oriented jobs. She highlights the importance of getting your name out into the world, explaining that she began making strong client connections through her volunteering at Museum London. “If you keep making great work,” she says, “more great work will come to you.”

Andrea has gone completely freelance twice throughout her career. The first time she stopped because of fear, a decision that she says she regrets. The second time was when her current job opportunity came up, and “...if I’d turned it down, I’d be nuts!”

As a design student myself, I was drawn towards her successful freelancing. When asked about how she established herself in a freelance environment, she said it came down to two things: establishing strong client relations, and managing your guiding morals. “I love the subconscious level that we can communicate on with people as graphic designers,” she explains, “[but] it can be easy to take advantage of that... Who’s seeing it, what it could mean to people, the background, all of this is important. You have to be conscientious of who’s seeing your work and what it might mean.”

If Andrea was told in undergrad that she would be teaching in the future, she would have been surprised.

“I thought I never wanted to teach,” she explains. But throughout her time at Western, Andrea demonstrated her love of mentoring others, something that drives her current love of teaching. “[In undergrad] I did work-study in the photography lab. I loved helping people... when people had questions, I could stop doing my sociology homework and help with photography,” she says, laughing. This love of helping others and her understanding of how critical a strong mentor has been in her own development both played parts in her decision to step in for a retiring professor at Fanshawe, just to give teaching a try. Suffice to say, now in her third year of teaching, she loves it.

When asked what advice she would have given her past self, Andrea says after a moment of thought that “I would go back in time and tell myself to stop worrying all the damn time. Things work out. It feels like everything is going to cave in, but things always work out. It’s crazy.”

And it certainly does seem that things have worked out for Andrea. A creative, organized, and hard-working individual, she has navigated the process of determining her career into a position where she is very happy, trusting the process even when it took her in unexpected directions. She has worked with many amazing people, and I’m sure she in turn has left an impression on them. Her only problem, according to her? “I’m doing so many things,” she says, “and I just love them all!”



Interviewing Andrea was an incredibly rewarding experience. Not only is she a lovely person, she also provided great insight into navigating the tumultuous process of determining a path in undergraduate Arts and Humanities. As someone who has already shifted around their major a number of times, I find it comforting to remember that yes, things do work out, and yes, it is okay for you to pursue what you love and let it guide you to a career. I think it’s important to pursue the things you’re interested in outside of a strict plan towards a career as well. Undergrad is a time of both academic and character enrichment. You have the rest of your life to figure things out, why put all the pressure on now?

Sophia Belyk is a second year student double majoring in SASAH and MIT. She likes designing things, and hopes in the future to accumulate even more mysterious degree acronyms.

PETE

MORRA

BA '00

English Language &
Literature

BY LEAH KUIACK



Pete Morra is a glowing example of how traits and skills acquired as an undergraduate English student can transfer to the workforce. Pete currently resides in Toronto where he enjoys playing in his semi-professional band. Along with a handful of other companies, he has worked for the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation, Starbucks Canada, and Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment. Throughout his interview, he offers his advice on university learning, pursuing one's interests, and life after post-secondary.

Q: How did you go about choosing Western University to be the place where you completed your undergraduate studies?

A: I actually didn't go to Western my first year of university — I went to U of T. It wasn't until I went to visit a friend of mine who was going to Western that I decided to transfer to Western for second year. Going to Western felt like what you always imagined university life to be — a beautiful campus and a community of like-minded, young people. It blew me away. It was gorgeous.

Q: Why did you choose English as your area of study? Did you struggle with this decision or was it always clear to you?

A: When I transferred to Western, I transferred into the three year B.A. program. I took courses in literature, business, and history. I just wasn't sure where I fit. In second year, I still had that same survey mentality, but it was in the English department where I found the conversation most stimulating and felt like I was learning the most. I really loved the vibe of the department. By third

year, I was sold.

Q: You aimed to delve into the workforce directly after receiving your B.A. What was this experience like?

A: I applied for a ton of jobs and I got some interviews, but there was one thing that I realized: everybody had a B.A. In high school, you see a university degree as something that makes you unique. Coming out of university with a degree that pretty much everyone else had and seeing that the job market wasn't as exciting as I thought it would be, I decided I wanted to do a Masters degree in English. I went back to Western for a fourth year and took all the courses I was going to need to get into an M.A. program with no guarantees that I would actually get accepted.

Q: Did your brief experience in the “real” world change how you approached your education at Western?

A: I approached that fourth year so differently than I had before. It wasn't just the continuation of education anymore — I had made a conscious decision to return. I was able to appreciate the experience a lot more. I worked harder than I ever had before because I had this goal to meet. I applied to Masters programs all around Ontario, but I just loved the connections I was making at Western. I was really happy to stay.

Q: Did you ever have a clear idea as far as your career path after school?

A: No — of course not! I wanted to be in a position where I felt like I could really explore what I had learned and apply it in a way that still allowed me to follow my passion. I wanted to do something that would be as creative as possible. I didn't have a particular career in mind, but I had a way of working, thinking, and collaborating with others that I wanted to continue to develop.

Q: Were a lot of the skills that you obtained as an Arts and Humanities student at Western transferable? Do you think your English background allows you to perform in ways that others cannot?

A: Absolutely. I think writing is the obvious one. Lots of people can write well, but it's different if you need to make an argument, evoke emotion, or persuade someone with your writing. Critical thinking might be even more important than writing skills. The deeper you explore English, the more critical thinking skills you acquire. The subject matter doesn't necessarily translate — you know, Shakespeare and modern renaissance literature. However, there's that ridiculous attention to detail you acquire from exploring English. Those are the skills that I think I really possess because of my time at Western.

” I love the idea that what I'm doing every day is *MAKING A DIFFERENCE* ”

Q: What are your main responsibilities in your present job?

A: The job I do now deals with community events. I'm essentially in corporate philanthropy. I am a subject matter expert in building volunteer programs, community investment programs, charity partnerships, non-profits, and social enterprises in order to create a communal benefit in the world. I love the idea that what I'm doing everyday is making a difference.

Q: Is there anything that you miss about university that the "real" world seems to lack?

A: That youthful, optimistic, 'I want to change the world' mentality was really galvanized when you put all those young people together in the same place. It's that feeling when you're in an English classroom and everyone is fired

up about this one line in this play. It's the thrill of investigation for the sake of investigation — without any real need to justify it. That's the kind of thing I look back at.

Q: What is a piece of advice that you would give current undergraduate students that you wish someone had given you?

A: Soak up the experience of going to Western — that amazing campus, the energy, your peers. If you've got an inclination of what you want to do down the road, find a way to start your journey now. Connect right now. Start building your pitch. Don't wait until you graduate. Start working now.



Speaking with Pete was a very valuable experience. While we spoke over the phone with a near 200 kilometres between us, his expertise in communication resulted in a sense of familiarity. As an undergraduate student, I think that it's incredibly important to connect with those who have made it to the other side and are flourishing because of the education they received at Western University. I would like to thank Pete for giving me the time to speak with him — your outward passion for the school has only added to my own.

Leah Kuiack is a London native. She is currently working towards her Honours Specialization in Creative Writing and English Language and Literature at Western University.

” If you keep making
GREAT WORK
more great work
WILL COME TO YOU ”



ANDREA MARTENS

MEGAN

PRESS

BA '08

Fine and Studio Arts

BY VICTORIA BURNETT



Looking back on her elementary school years, Megan Press found that she was spending more time on art projects and less time on homework. She shares how she would spend nearly five hours on the title page of a book report, but only an hour on the report itself. Her mother, Press explains, was a hobbyist, and so she grew up in a creative environment. Growing up, Press assumed she would focus more on art history in post-secondary because of her thoughts of going into teaching, but was surprised when she later developed more of an interest in making the work itself.

When applying to universities, Press was looking into concurrent education and studio arts programs to become a high school teacher. She chose Western for its visual arts program — which complemented both art history and studio arts — with plans to attend teacher's college post-graduation. Many arts students must face the question of what they intend to do with their degree. For Press, her response was always teaching, until one day her supervisor gave her the confidence to apply to a graduate program and encouraged her to see what a Master's degree might bring. Press felt as though she just needed someone to say that there were other opportunities available to those with an arts degree, and that she possessed the potential to branch out and do it if she wished.

During her time at Western, Press began to work as a soph in her second year, becoming the Head Arts Soph by the time fourth year rolled around. She did administrative work, took on TA positions, and helped to coordinate her final course exhibition.

Press explains that with a Visual Arts Degree, you need to understand what you and other people are making in the context of what has come before and what is current. Professors and teachers at Western, she says,

are able to guide students to understand how your practice and the work you create falls in relation to other artists. This prepared Press for graduate school where, “It’s just you in a studio creating. It’s a product of everything that you learned in your undergrad”. At the University of Victoria, Press was enrolled in a seminar course with no written thesis component, but rather, an oral thesis defense, as most of her time was spent in the studio or with a supervisor discussing her work. Press describes it as being “driven by the pieces that you are making.”

Looking back on the decision to pursue a Masters degree, Press describes it as, “a brave thing to do as a creative person... [I just] needed someone to say to me, ‘you can do it’.” Teaching is not the only valuable thing you can do with an arts degree, she says. You need to look around and be open to other possibilities and accept the challenge of new things. While teaching would always remain a possibility to her further down the road, a Master’s degree opened up a lot of opportunities to her now.

Press has been in her current position with the company Artscape for nearly two years now. She describes every day as being different and unpredictable, explaining just how their cultural hub works and her job in relation to all of it. Situated in an old school house in downtown Toronto, Artscape is the property manager to about thirty-five tenants and organizations made up of individual artists’ studios and not-for-profit organizations. Press oversees the programming and operational sides of things, all while making sure that the artists themselves continue to thrive.

When asked if she employs her degree in Visual Arts on the job, Press explains that she uses it every time she works with an artist, be it reviewing submissions or visiting

a studio. Part of being an artist is being flexible enough to work with and understand the creative processes of other artists. This kind of artistic thinking enables Press to “roll with the punches” and relate to other artists.

In terms of guidance for current Arts undergraduates, Press had a lot of advice to offer. First, she says, find what you naturally excel at. Determine your strengths, and always use them to your advantage. Take into consideration the opinions of others; both your peers and professors typically tell what you are skilled in. “As a creative person,” she explains, “it has more to do with how you think and how you problem solve. You will always see things through a creative lens — use that to your advantage.” Additionally, she encourages students to take advantage of the opportunities being presented to them. Be it more time in the studio, a position as a TA, or working as someone’s assistant, Press believes firmly that “you will learn valuable skills just through experiencing new things.”



In getting the opportunity to talk to Megan Press, I learned not only about what jobs exist for graduates of the Faculty of Arts & Humanities faculty, but that, ultimately, the future can be what you make it. A lot of it is based on what you want to do and finding what you naturally gravitate towards. While the future may not follow the exact plan that you have laid out for yourself, and that you may have to conform to things you may not be excited about, there are always ways to apply your creativity and make space for what makes you happy.

Victoria Burnett is a third-year Art & Humanities student pursuing an Honours Specialization in Classics with a major in SASAH.

R. FLEX

ROBINSON

BA '16

English Language &
Literature

BY EVA ALIE



There are times when you meet someone who is so effortlessly vibrant and cool with such a distinct vision of themselves and what they want from life that you feel like the greatest walking disaster in modern history in comparison. For me, that was interviewing Flex. He is an impossibly talented (and extremely humble) musician making his way in Toronto, forging a formidable reputation and body of work for himself. From the first time that I listened to his music, I knew that I had been introduced to a complete force of nature. Like most students, I was intimidated as I have no concept of what life will look like in three days, never mind after graduation. This uncertainty is prevalent among Arts & Humanities students in particular, who are constantly told that their degree is a financial gamble not worth the investment. We are fed the narrative that we are dreamers with no follow through, with no plan to turn our ambitious visions into a profitable or even negotiable future. And so, I assumed that Flex must have merely had incredibly great luck or slid into success with the same smoothness as his voice. To say I was wrong would be an understatement.

Flex graduated from Western in 2016 with an Arts degree in English Literature before moving to Toronto to focus on his music. The journey to where he is now though is far less linear than one would expect. He grew up in Brampton, singing with the praise worship team at church and attending mainly arts-based schools until post secondary, both of which helped foster his deep connection to music and opened the possibility to look at the arts as a legitimate career path rather than a mere hobby. Flex chose Western because “the campus is gorgeous, and I wanted to get away from home,” a sentiment echoed by the vast majority of students in the Faculty. He began song writing in his first year, creating a body



of work that speaks to the pain and complexity of human sexuality and identity, as he noted that “because it’s about sex, it becomes about other things.” This focus on sex and sensuality, especially from a queer perspective, is both a form of expression and discovery that is currently missing in “mainstream” music. He left university and attended Fanshawe College for a year before returning to Western, disrupting the neat four-year graduation plan that we are fed; this time away allowed him to explore his passions and interact with alternate perspectives on the arts. Although his degree and subsequent career in music might seem incongruous, Flex views his song writing process and lyrics as crafting a complete narrative that shares deeply personal yet universal themes and events from his own life. The passion for creating and sharing unique art was furthered through his time as a host at Radio Western, where Flex organized a variety of intersectional programs, “never playing [his] own stuff”, which I certainly would have if I were as talented as him.

As much love as I have for the Arts & Humanities faculty and the opportunities that I have been given here, the Faculty is not without its flaws. A quick look at the faculty directories will highlight a relative lack of diversity regarding sex and ethnicity, which is greatly alienating to those who are exploring their identities and do not see this variety of the human experience mirrored in their professors or administration. Flex navigated this obstacle by

“taking courses with professors that [he] saw [himself] in,” and focusing on creating music and work that is by and for communities that are typically ignored in popular culture. His first single “Hologram” gave him substantial exposure before his release of his debut EP *In & Out* in March 2018, featuring tracks “Thursday,” “Babylonia,” and (my personal favourite) “Lean,” among many others. When asked about how his music has evolved since starting at Western, Flex noted that his very first tracks were more the creation of his producers rather than his own vision, and that he has since learned to take ownership over his sound and create the art that feels both organic and true to himself.

I have often felt lost about my purpose at Western and the value of my degree; are the skills I am developing worth the cost? Near the end of our time together, Flex said something that I have been unable to get out of my head since: “Nothing will connect you to the human experience like the Arts.” As arts students, we invest far too much energy fixating on what jobs we will be able to secure upon graduation, rather than the reality that we have the privilege to explore the diversity, complexity, and beauty of humanity. Flex struggled and experienced failure during his time at Western, yet has come out the other side a fiercely ambitious and unique artist. There is so much strength in the Arts & Humanities at Western — you just have to get out of your own way.



As an Arts student, I am warned constantly about the futility of my degree and the ways in which I will struggle to establish a stable and meaningful future on account of my academic choices. I am consistently a hot mess and feel as if I should have my life “more together” or have a clearer idea of what career path I want to pursue in the future. Speaking with Flex assured me that I am in the right faculty and that virtually no one my age has an unwavering life plan (or at least one that they will follow.) Although Western has given me so much creative freedom, it can be disheartening to have said inspiration judged and assigned a numerical value. Flex reinforced the importance of art for what it truly is: “A reflection of oneself in a broader cultural context, an appreciation of the beauty and pain of a particular moment in time.” I left the conversation confident that my work and my degree has value beyond the grades and opinions imposed by others, ready to fall more in love with the Arts and enjoy the journey.

Eva Alie is a second-year Anthropology and SASAH student who is very behind on her readings for both modules. In her spare time, she enjoys junior chickens and overdressing for class.

TOM

WEIHMAYR

BA '96

Modern Languages &
Literature

BY ANGELA SAWYER



From the moment that he had his first campus tour at 17 years-old, Tom Weihmayr fell in love with the beauty of Western University and knew instantly that it was the school for him. “My three choices on my high school university application were King’s College, Main Campus, and Huron,” he says. “I did not even look anywhere else. I knew what I wanted.”

Weihmayr began his study at King’s College in 1990 in order to obtain a BA in Modern Languages and Literature in both German and Spanish, a major that he chose so that he could learn to read the texts of Latin American and German authors in their original languages with a goal of getting a better sense of his heritage.

Over the next six years, Weihmayr says that he gained plenty of valuable, real-life experiences. “The discipline that allowed me to finish University was very useful in not only helping me start my own business, but also throughout my entire life,” he says. “If I had not studied at Western, I probably would not have the same discipline that I do today.”

The discipline that Weihmayr developed proved especially necessary when his graduation happened to coincide with the recession. “It was a little bit of a darker period,” he remembers, “Finding work was extremely difficult.” Quick on his feet, Weihmayr determined that one of the ways he could overcome this challenge would be to take his last two years of study as a part-time student in order to begin his career early. Rather than have a linear, four-year path like many of his friends, Weihmayr invested in the risk of balancing work and an up-and-coming career and was well rewarded for it by the head start it offered him. Weihmayr also admits that simply “being a Western University graduate” helped him when looking for work. “Having a school with the reputation of

Western when you apply for jobs and when you meet people... It counts for something," he boast proudly. "If I didn't have that experience, things would be different."

Today, Weihmayr has taken the skills learned from the challenges he has faced both during and since his time at Western and is using them to create his own business that he feels truly passionate about. The business, called X-Dine, is going to be a division of the Toronto Drink Factory and will offer people who are passionate about food and drink a truly one-of-a-kind experience.

Beyond his education itself, Western also introduced Weihmayr to many long-lasting relationships. Before he moved away from London, Weihmayr recalls seeing past professors in the street and often stopping to talk to them. It was also here at Western that he met the Spoke's highly-acclaimed regular, Rick McGhie. Once during his first year at the school, Weihmayr says, a friend of his came to his dorm room and demanded that he go to McGhie's show with him. "My first reaction," he recalls, "was 'Who is Rick McGhie, and why are we going to see him in the middle of the week?' And so we went... and the rest is history."

Recently, the friendship between Weihmayr and McGhie has extended into a work-relationship as Weihmayr writes McGhie's biography. The book is set to be put to print by the end of December 2019, and will highlight the 50 years of memories that McGhie has of playing at Western.

More than 23 years after graduation, Weihmayr states that he still feels deeply connected to the Western

community. When he still lived in London, Weihmayr says that he would always get season tickets to the Mustangs' games and dress both himself and his children head-to-toe in purple. He was also big on attending homecoming, remembering an older tradition the school had in which there was a parade that "used to feature the cheerleaders and floats made by the students... I would always take my kids, and they would love it. It would go right up Richmond Street and the cheerleaders would lift up my kids and let us take pictures." In spite of currently living in Toronto, Weihmayr still makes the attempt to attend every Mustangs football game that he can. And nearly three decades after stepping onto Western's campus for the first time, Weihmayr says that he still feels the same love and pride for the university that he did back then, ensuring that, despite his time and distance away from the campus, he "still bleeds purple."



This project posed an interesting challenge for me as, up to this point, I have mainly worked on fictional projects. Writing about a real person added a layer of anxiety to the writing process that I had not anticipated; I found myself constantly worrying about whether the piece will properly reflect Mr. Weihmayr as a person and his time at Western. My self-imposed schedule helped prevent me from procrastinating. Overall, it was a very useful experience that I feel will help shape my career decisions in the future.

Angela Sawyer is a third-year student studying Creative Writing and English Literature at Western.

ON THE

SPOT

AHSC ALUMNI MIXER 2019

CATHERINE CORENO
BA '13 – ENGLISH LANG.
& LIT.



What did you do immediately after graduation?

Immediately after — literally the week after — I moved to Toronto and did a post-grad in publishing at Humber.

Did you always know you wanted to do a post-grad?

No, but I always thought I had to do a post-grad because of the pressure. I thought, What am I going to do with this [English BA]? But the publishing certificate was really good for me. It was only four months, it was really intensive, and it did not include a mandatory internship.

Any advice that you could give to a current Arts undergrad?

I would suggest that they keep their options open, to not go into school thinking “this is what I am going to do.” I had no idea that I would get into events at all but it turns out that I really love it. I think volunteering is huge. I volunteered for so many organizations just to get my feet wet, or just to get an idea of what my interests were before I applied to jobs.

ANTONY HARE
BA '98 – PHILOSOPHY
PHOTO CREDIT: PHONG



How has your degree prepared you for your current line of work?

Philosophy, at least at Western during my time, was mostly concerned with conferring a basic understanding of complicated concepts. We were taught to read and think. This training helps me every day.

Why do you believe that the Arts & Humanities is a relevant field to be studying in?

The arts will always be valuable and relevant. This area of study involves the very things that make us human: culture, communication, and creation.

What advice would you give to a current Arts undergrad?

Avoid thinking of your university degree as job training. Think of it as brain training. Time-management training. Responsibility training.

What did you do immediately following graduation?

I was very lucky and was able to continue working and get a full time job right after graduation. It started as a summer internship the year before and I was able to work part-time during my last year and then right after that they hired me on full time so it was really exciting that I was able to do that. I started at the London Economic Development Corporation as the Communications Coordinator and I am now a Communications Specialist.

So your English degree definitely came in handy then?

Absolutely. I am reading and writing and editing every single day! I get to interview a lot of really cool local companies and share their story, and it is a very awesome way to use your English or Writing degree.

Any advice that you could give to a current Arts undergrad?

Yes! Something that I wish I had done when I was here is get involved. Whether it's going to student events like this [Alumni Mixer] or going to volunteering opportunities and getting involved in the community. I think it's a really great way to promote yourself and the skills that you are gaining, as well as kind of discover what's out there. There is so much beyond the Western walls in terms of companies that are hiring and things like that, and so I would encourage people to not be too sheltered and to just get out there.

What did you do immediately after graduation?

I left school and went in worked in financial services for four years, and then I decided to go back to school and do my masters in Library and Information Science. I also did that here at Western.

Was the financial situation just to get a job?

Yes when I came out of school I was not sure what I wanted to do, so I ended up working at two different financial institutions. And then around when I turned 25 I kind of started to think about what I really wanted to do when I grew up — I had that quarter life crisis thing. And I had always been drawn to Librarian sciences so that is what I decided to go for!

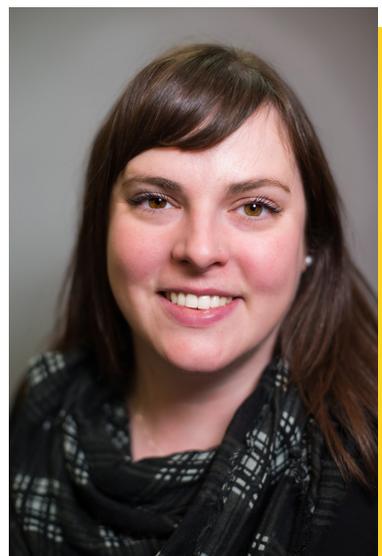
What advice would you give to a current arts undergrad?

I think Arts undergrads get a lot of flack in terms of the whole 'What are you going to do with your Arts degree?' Etc etc. You know what though? It builds so many skills that you won't even realize that you will use until you end up in whatever your profession will be. Being able to write cohesively is a really underrated skill, having an attention to detail, being able to multitask – all the things that you learn in an undergraduate Arts degree. I think it's important to remember that you are learning skills you will inevitably use even if you don't really feel like it at the time.

**RACHAEL LUBY
BA '16 – ENGLISH LANG. &
LIT., CREATIVE WRITING**



**KRISTEN CASCHERA
BA '04 – ENGLISH LANG.
& LIT.**



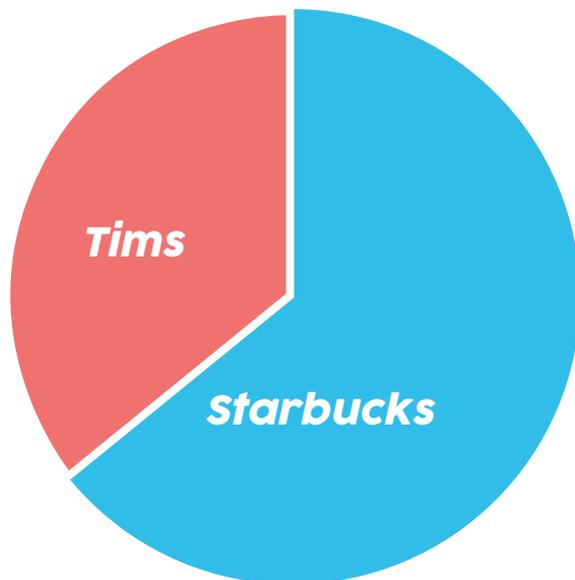
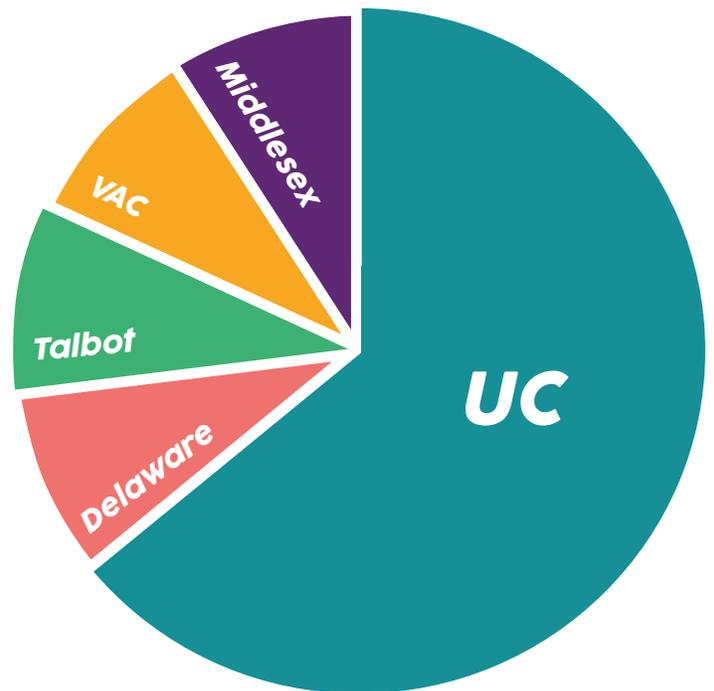
STATISTICS

We asked our alumni...

WELDON OR TAYLOR LIBRARY?



FAVOURITE BUILDING ON CAMPUS?



TIM HORTONS OR STARBUCKS?

JOIN US!

Looking back on your time at Western, what do you remember most? If you could go back and share one thing with your undergraduate self, what would it be?

Contact us to be featured in the 2020 issue of

SPOTLIGHT

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ARTS

