

In Their Own Words: On Being an English Major at MSU

(Dr. Thomas Anderson's fifth installment in a series of profiles of our English graduates.)

After switching to the English major from aerospace engineering, Myles Cryer never looked back. He graduated with a BA in English in 2010 and was accepted into Auburn University's Master of Technical and Professional Communication (MTPC) Program. In the program, he teaches writing to undergraduates; he conducts research and publishes his work in academic journals, and he writes professionally for different organizations. In the fall of 2012, Myles was invited to return to Mississippi State as a guest speaker in the department's "Introduction to English Studies" course, which is designed to introduce students to what it means to be an English major at MSU and in the professional world after they graduate. Myles is one of two recent graduates

to be accepted into Auburn's MTPC program, and we hope that many English majors follow Myles' path to professional writing programs like Auburn's.

During my freshman year at MSU, I was an Aerospace Engineering major. Although the work and topics in the program were extremely interesting, I found that I only liked the *idea* of aerospace, not the actual work that one did as an engineer. The math and physics of aerospace flight were simply not interesting to me, and I knew that I didn't want to do this for the rest of my life. So, I decided to switch majors at the start of my sophomore year and picked the only thing that I had truly enjoyed my entire life—reading and analyzing literature. This passion brought me to MSU's English Department. Despite a questioning family and my own doubtful mind, I plunged into the only field that I knew I would enjoy and love. Only after graduation would I realize how valuable my

work as an English major at Mississippi State would be.

I am currently a second-year graduate student in the Master of Technical and Professional Communication (MTPC) Program at Auburn University. I do an extensive amount of writing in our program, and I think back to the lessons I learned at State almost every day. In the MTPC program, we write and design technical documents, perform usability tests on websites and products, build websites, write grants and proposals, and much more. The skills I learned in Advanced Composition (renamed *Critical Writing and Research in Literary Studies* in 2010) provided the essential foundation for proper textual analysis that I have built upon as a graduate student. I was able to extend the important skills of close reading, academic writing, various types of research methods, and ways to organize information to fit my current needs as a graduate student. Of course, my other literature classes at State allowed me to constantly refine and perfect these methods, but Advanced Composition acted as that important springboard, pushing me further, challenging me in new and interesting ways, and providing me with the skills I needed to succeed as an English major and as a graduate student.

As an MTPC student at Auburn, I am constantly working on interesting and exciting projects. In my first semester, I designed (as part of a group) three brochures for the Lee County Human Society—all of which were placed in their lobby and read by visitors. In my second semester, my team and I designed a website for the nonprofit organization I Am My Brother's Keeper in Lee County, AL, and it is currently in use. Also during my first year, I performed a usability test on the United States Postal Service website, and I performed another test on the Alabama Cooperative Extension System website. We tested each site for functionality, focusing on user experience, tendencies, and expectations. The skills in writing an analysis that I gained at MSU were invaluable during these projects.

In order to communicate information successfully, you have to write clearly and for a particular audience. As one of only three people in the program who has an English degree, I saw my other classmates struggle to grasp the fine art of the writing process, while at the same time having to learn many of the things I already knew. English majors have a leg up in my

graduate program, and I can't speak highly enough of MSU's English Department for teaching me the skills that are so necessary for the type of work that I do.



Although I do a great deal of interesting work, I am also a teacher. In our program, GTA's are required to teach English Composition I and II. Oddly, I am the only GTA who teaches in our program that graduated with an English degree, and I am able to use the teaching styles, projects, and lessons from my English professors at State to guide and inform how and what I teach my students. I can see bits and pieces of my former professors in myself when I stand in front of my students. Thank you, all my former English professors, for unknowingly teaching me how to teach.

When I chose to major in English after my freshman year, I wasn't sure what I was going to do with my degree. I knew I wanted to write, but I didn't know where the study of writing and literature would take me. Although I'm still not exactly certain what I want to do with my graduate degree, I have many options available (technical writer, editor, document designer, usability tester, grant writer, teacher, and many more). I must admit, I do not believe that I could have experienced the same success and experience in the MTPC Program without the important and useful skills I learned from the English program at MSU. I constantly refer to the writing strategies I learned in Advanced Composition, and I use the analysis techniques I learned in all my literature classes for almost every assignment and project that I do.