

# In Their Own Words: On Being an English Major

(The second installment in a series of profiles of our English graduates)

**Brandi Williams** earned her MA in English in 2009. Coming to MSU from Ole Miss, Brandi brought with her a passion for language and literature that she was able to explore more fully in our graduate program. As a graduate student in our program, Brandi was part of a research team that studied lexical proficiency in language learners using computational devices. An article based on her work as a research assistant will appear in the journal *Language Testing*. Brandi is currently teaching literature and composition in Alabama. As she works to complete her first semester of teaching English at her new college, I asked Brandi to reflect on the importance of her graduate studies in English at MSU.



Although I have taken on some freelance editing jobs and analyzed writing samples for linguistic research since I have completed my degree, I am primarily working as an adjunct composition instructor at Calhoun Community College, the largest community college in the nation. I am spending the rest of my time watching, teaching, and learning with my one-year-old son.

Majoring in English has been vital to my success as a composition instructor. No other discipline would have offered me so many opportunities to improve my own composition and research skills. Additionally, my English major presented me with the opportunity to explore the evolution of my own language, giving me the ability to offer my students a unique perspective on grammar.

My time as a graduate student in MSU's English department transformed me into a disciplined student, capable writer, and thorough researcher. Upon entering MSU's graduate program, I had never had to manage my time well in order to accomplish my tasks. The rigorous courses soon taught me to schedule time for reading, writing, and research. My courses also taught me how to analyze arguments and, in doing so, how to frame my own ideas into a coherent and strongly supported whole. As a composition instructor, I see many grammatical errors every day, but my time as an English major trained me to avoid those and become a more credible writer as a result. Finally, I am grateful for the research skills that I acquired during my time in the English department. I began as a student with vague ideas of how to arrive at important research questions and how to find sources to support those and became a capable researcher. All of these skills are essential as I instruct writers of varying skill levels. (continued)

## In Their Own Words: Brandi Williams (continued)

Although I had many formative moments during my time at MSU, some of the most profound instances occurred during my linguistics courses because they shaped my understanding of language evolution, an understanding that is crucial for my success as a composition teacher. My students often wonder why some of English's grammar rules exist, and now I have answers to those questions. I can also understand why my students adopt some nonstandard grammar rules in their writing, and because I understand how they arrive at those forms, I can get them to adopt standard rules more readily. Thus, my linguistic education has shaped me into a more

open-minded, understanding teacher.

I am uncertain where I might be in the next five years, but I am currently contemplating getting my Master's degree in Education along with completing some of my foreign language minors. With this combination, I will be a competitive candidate for a variety of teaching positions from junior high English or high school German teacher to freshman composition instructor.

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