

Interview with Courtney Taylor ('19)

Can you talk a bit about your time post-graduation, what you've been doing, and what you plan to do?

After graduation, I was a bit unsure about what my next step should be. I worked a few different short-term and freelance positions, including serving as an Expert English Literature Content Creator for Slader.com, before starting a career in speechwriting.

In January of 2020, I started a speechwriting internship at West Wing Writers' San Francisco office, and stayed on as a Speechwriting Fellow before becoming an Account Executive for the firm's West Wing Communications division.

After an incredible year and a half with West Wing, I'm excited to begin my Master's degree in English at Lehigh University this fall, on a full scholarship and with a Teaching Assistantship.

How did you find out about West Wing Writers? What specifically does it entail and what projects have you been working on?

After graduation, I thought deeply about the kind of work I would enjoy doing. As an undergrad, I developed a real love for research and playwriting; I had also always been interested in politics as well. I realized that speechwriting would be the perfect combination of those interests, and after doing some research, I found the fantastic internship program offered by West Wing Writers.

As an intern, Speechwriting Fellow, and Account Executive, I've written remarks, op-eds, talking points, and more for Fortune 500 CEOs, national political figures, Congressional candidates, non-profit leaders, and more.

Currently, I work on a team scripting events in the world of tech. Our team synthesizes different information to be announced with overall event themes, and then develops full-length scripts that make an impact. On a daily basis, my work often entails revising scripts based on feedback from different stakeholders, all while working to meet the client's overall goals.

How have you located other opportunities – internships, schools, jobs?

I've found opportunities through a number of different channels: Handshake, LinkedIn, Indeed, Facebook groups, and more. I first heard about the graduate program I'll be attending this fall



after seeing it mentioned in a conversation on Twitter, so there's really no wrong place to look for opportunities.

You're applying to grad school. Can you say a bit about why, why now, and how you've chosen the specific programs/schools that you have?

Since graduation, I've had it in the back of my mind that, at some point, I'd like to return to academia. I've always loved that environment, and was so excited to present my senior thesis at the end of my time in Stony Brook's English Honors program. After completing that project, I knew I wanted to take my studies further; it was just a matter of when.

In the summer of 2020, I enrolled in screenwriting workshops through UT Austin, which piqued my interest in returning to school. Then, in the fall of 2020, I was on a temporary contract with West Wing Writers, and began searching for more permanent roles. The speechwriting and communications job market was then, and still is, extremely competitive, and I realized I would need further credentials in order to stand out. After those summer courses, and navigating a tough job market in the fall, I decided that this year would be the right time to apply to grad school.

I searched for English Master's programs that aligned with my personal and academic interests, so that I could bring together the things I loved most about my undergraduate experience, and my communications career.

I was especially interested in Lehigh University's M.A. English program due to its emphasis on Social Justice and Literature. I was also excited to read about graduate students' research, and the digital and public humanities projects they'd spearheaded. I could see myself enjoying being part of that community, and taking part in and leading similar projects.

Georgetown University's M.A. English program interested me due to its outreach and research opportunities. I was also specifically interested in the work of a Victorianist at the university, and was intrigued by the opportunity to continue my research on gender and sexuality in Victorian literature.

I was accepted to both programs, and ultimately decided to attend Lehigh this fall!

What in particular from your time at SBU – coursework, projects, fellowships – has impacted your path post-graduation?

The skills I developed through the English Honors program -- especially while developing and writing my thesis -- have helped me at every step of the way. Speechwriting requires the ability to research effectively, often on a short deadline. Especially when starting out as a speechwriting intern, I was so grateful for the research experience I had coming into that role. Finding the perfect anecdote or statistic for a speech was in a lot of ways similar to finding an obscure source on Victorian sexology for my thesis!

Likewise, the playwriting courses I took with Professor Ken Weitzman had a huge impact on my path post-graduation. I approach the speeches I write in much the same way I approach the plays I wrote for his courses. It's also been exciting in job interviews to explain that a play I wrote for one of those courses has gone on to be performed across the U.S., and Off-Off-Broadway.

The other element that's impacted my path post-graduation is my Edward Guiliano Global Travel Fellowship experience. In the summer of 2019, I researched and developed a new play at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, and The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza. In every single job interview I've had since graduation, I've been asked about this fellowship, and am so glad that I went for that opportunity as an undergrad. It was an incredible experience that opened doors for me (in addition to helping me write a new play!).

Anything you did during undergrad that directly or indirectly led to any of the post-grad jobs or projects you're doing?

My work for the Faculty Student Association and as a member of Pocket Theatre also helped put me on my post-grad path.

I worked for three years as a PR Writer and Social Media Archivist for FSA, and learned how to write in the professional tone I now write in for clients in the tech sphere.

Likewise, my experience with Pocket Theatre, in roles onstage and off (including president, director, and playwright) helped prepare me for the leadership and teamwork components of my speechwriting work. Directing my play *Ask Not: The True Story of the Kennedy Assassination* during my senior year also directly led to the scripts and projects I'm currently writing and developing!

Looking back to the not so distant past, from your perspective now, anything you wish you knew or did or took advantage of during your time as an undergrad?

I wish I had taken advantage of the study abroad opportunities available to me as an undergrad. Especially over the last year, I've wished I had traveled more as a student. But more broadly, I wish I had known that it would take some time to find the right path after graduation. During that uncertain period immediately after graduating, continuing to pursue the things that interest me most -- from Victorian literature to writing historical farces -- helped me discover exciting professional, academic, and artistic opportunities, leading to my speechwriting work, and my upcoming studies at Lehigh!