

Academic History

My pathway through college and graduate school has been exceptional in breadth and scope, which sets me off from many of my colleagues in English studies. I studied literature in translation, rhetoric, composition, English as a second language, speech, communication, and applied linguistics, all disciplines that originally were housed in English departments. What's more, I explored discourse analysis and writing studies, ways of analyzing texts and writing practices. I also took courses in curriculum and program assessment. In this way, I was investigating many aspects of English, with a concentration in teaching and research. I integrated these areas in an education program, earning an MA and PhD in Secondary and Continuing Education. This interdisciplinary training has informed my teaching of Freshman Composition and other courses. My learning journey began twenty years ago, in 1993.

After my first year in college, I served a religious mission in the Czech Republic, during which I found the calling to teach, along with a passion for inquiry. When I returned home, I majored in linguistics and minored in communication, which helped me to hone my editing skills and focus on performance. During my senior year, I coordinated these interests under English, studying British, European, and classical authors, double majoring in English and Linguistics.

That fall, I entered the Master's program in English at Brigham Young University, completing the composition practicum. However, there was no major in Rhetoric/ Composition, and I did not declare a major author because I was interested in teaching. I was lured by the promise of foreign language teaching, so I took applied linguistics classes instead. I transferred to the University of Illinois and studied Russian language and literature until I realized that, as a non-native speaker, I was essentially unhireable in the Post-Cold War Era. I fell back on literature, completing the equivalent of an MA in English with a specialization in Russian literature. I did not take the exams because my friends in Russian studies were not getting jobs.

I did find an academic home, but not so much at the university. At the critical point, I found a position teaching Freshman Composition in the English department of Parkland College. This special place gave me colleagues with similar dispositions and enabled me to test my ideas in real classes. For about seven years, I taught 12 hours per semester, worked in TESOL research, and took MA/PhD courses in Curriculum and Instruction. I taught Freshman Composition in the mornings, worked in the lab until evening, and took night classes in Education. I explored curricular innovations and modified my teaching practices with students, while learning how to design and undertake qualitative research in pedagogy. I saw how to use video recordings and Conversation Analysis to prove curriculum efficacy in language classrooms. I also studied quantitative and qualitative methodologies, focusing on Essentialist Portraiture. What emerged from these experiences in the classroom, the lab, and seminars was a focus on composition curriculum and rhetorical instruction. I had the certainty that particular ways of teaching and discussion were effective beyond mere teacher-student compatibility or catering to learning styles. I designed a project intended to make English composition teaching better for everyone.

I was then hired at BYU-Hawaii, where I completed my research and wrote my dissertation. I taught Freshman Composition with a focus on second-language learners, blending cultures, world literature, and a sense of personal mission. Now that my PhD is completed and I am teaching full-time, I am continually developing my curriculum and learning more each day.