

February 2021

The English Aggie



Career Feature Edition: What Can You Do With An English Degree?
Editor | Manager | Author | Marketer | Freelancer | Entrepreneur | Etc.



Sitting with her three 15-pound furry “coworkers,” Floki, Odin and Juniper, Marissa Madsen prepares for her work day and pulls up her latest project. As a Senior Medical Editor at Syneos Health in Houston, Texas, Madsen is used to fast-paced, high energy days where she edits and reviews multiple documents. As a Class of ‘13 Aggie, the former English major and Professional Writing Certificate recipient regularly uses the skills she learned during her time at Texas A&M in her job today.

At the beginning of her career, Madsen started working as an unpaid editorial intern for a nonprofit organization with two academic journals. She soon became Editorial Coordinator of those two journals after being promoted to a full-time position. She eventually moved to a different academic publication in Texas A&M’s Political Science Department. After a few years, she made the jump to medical editing for Syneos Health, a contract research organization (also known as a clinical research organization).

“I realized that in academic publishing, I was pigeon-holed in this situation where, with just a bachelor’s degree, I could only go so far in my career. So, I had been trying to get into medical editing,” Madsen said.

At her current position, Madsen works on the regulatory side of pharmaceuticals. Working with her team of writers, Madsen will review the documents they send her, essentially fact checking and reviewing them for consistency

Career Feature: Editor

Not Every Editor Lives in New York City

Former student Marissa Madsen, Class of ‘13, talks about her career as a Senior Medical Editor in Houston, Texas, and how the Professional Writing Certificate got her to where she is today.

and accuracy. This kind of work is considered “quality review” in the industry.

“A lot of people in academic publishing will move to the regulatory side of pharmaceuticals. It’s more of a technical position, which was very fitting for me, because I was never much for fluff,” Madsen said. “There’s a lot more technical skill involved with making things neat and concise.”

According to Madsen, being an editor requires a meticulous attention to detail, a rule-oriented mindset, and a love for fixing things.

“My joke has always been that I want to fix the clock, not build it,” Madsen said. “Also, with my job, it’s important to be able to do things that I can do, but because we’re a contract company, I have to be fast. This is definitely a quick-paced job.”

“I personally have always really enjoyed ripping other papers to shreds, so if you’re like that, I recommend my job.”

To prepare for her future career while at Texas A&M, Madsen worked as an undergraduate research scholar in the Department of English and in the Glasscock Center, which she says provided her with valuable insight into the academic publishing world. Madsen also credits the Professional Writing Certificate

with teaching her many of the skills necessary to succeed as an editor.

“I strongly recommend it,” Madsen said, speaking about her experience with the Professional Writing Certificate. “I think my technical editing class, and my technical writing class have been 2 of the top 3 most important classes I took at Texas A&M.”

Madsen encourages graduating English majors to look into medical editing as a career. Many times, medical editing opportunities do not require a medical background or moving to a large city like New York City. Medical editors also earn more than you might expect; according to GlassDoor, medical editors in Houston with a couple years of experience can make an average of \$69,000 a year. In addition, the career has mobility and long-term career opportunities. Madsen’s current job has also afforded her the flexibility of working from home, even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This is the kind of job that I can have a wonderful career in over the next few decades,” Madsen said.

While there are numerous perks in Madsen’s current career, she also genuinely enjoys the work she does.

“I enjoy trying to make a document neat, and making sure that an element of a document, like a phrase used periodically, is consistent,” Madsen said. “And then there are sometimes style or formatting issues in these 200-page documents that require troubleshooting or a phone call to a coworker to see what went wrong. It’s fast and I’m always learning something new. And I personally have always really enjoyed ripping other papers to shreds, so if you’re like that, I recommend my job.”

5 Myths of Being an Editor

1. You have to live in New York



Editing job are everywhere, even Houston, TX.

2. You don’t get paid enough

\$69,000

Average salary for medical editors in Houston (GlassDoor)

3. It requires years of experience

You don’t have to have medical experience to be a medical editor



4. Editing is boring

“This is definitely a quick-paced job.”

- Marissa Madsen ‘13

5. Editing jobs are hard to find

There are a lot of opportunities for technical writers and editors in various industries



Career Feature: Manager

A Strong Foundation

For Fernando Rodriguez ‘16, an English degree prepared him for a wide range of career paths since graduating. He spoke with us about how current students can leverage their own English skills to transition into any industry and not be limited to a single path.

Fernando Rodriguez ‘16 knows a thing or two about thinking quick on your feet and making the best of your situation. Since graduating with a bachelor’s degree in English, Rodriguez has experienced multiple different career fields, including education, freelance editing, and web design. Currently, he works as a Program Manager at Amazon where he uses his writing skills on a regular basis in a seemingly unconventional industry.

Originally from Laredo, Texas, Rodriguez was a member of the Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M, and played baritone and tuba for the Fightin’ Texas Aggie Band. He majored in English with a focus in rhetoric and creative writing, and worked at the University Writing Center.

Speaking about his experiences at A&M, Rodriguez said, “I think I’m ahead because of the leadership opportunities that were afforded to me through the Corps, through my experience working at the University Writing Center, and studying what I wanted to study.”

The start of Rodriguez’s many career paths began when he met his wife at Texas A&M, also a member of the Corps of Cadets, who planned to join the Army after graduating. As a military-husband, Rodriguez had to be ready to move where his wife was stationed. To him, few careers were more portable than working

in education. He returned to Laredo, Texas where he taught at a high school for one year as an English teacher. Then, his wife was stationed in South Korea where they both lived for two years.

While abroad, Rodriguez worked as a freelance editor while working towards another degree in web design. Even in an industry that seems far away from his English degree, Rodriguez continued to find similarities between what he learned at Texas A&M and the work he was doing in web design.

“Coding is similar in a sense because when you’re learning a language, you understand the basics of picking up language, and how to write and that fundamental understanding of how to organize yourself to get something done,” Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez and his wife eventually moved back to the United States where they now live in Washington. Rodriguez started to work for Amazon, first as a temporary Recruiting Coordinator, and later as a full-time Program Manager. In his current role, Rodriguez works with members of the military community to prepare them for new roles at Amazon.

“I currently manage a job placement program that helps service members transition to the private sector after leaving the military,” Rodriguez said. With this position, Rodriguez continues to use his English degree to fit in with Amazon and its “Writing Culture.”

According to Rodriguez, the “Writing Culture” started when Jeff Bezos asked for the notes to a top business leader’s presentation in lieu of a PowerPoint. The idea behind this request is that the notes contain a more comprehensive review of all the important information needed to make a decision.

“Pretty much, it’s compiling what’s important for the audience that you’re speaking to,” Rodriguez said. “When you put everything on paper, when everything’s organized, it’s quicker to get

through a decision and understand all the context, and then people can question things that you might not be thinking of.”

To get to his current position, Rodriguez had to learn how to leverage his English education along with the skills, knowledge, and career experience he picked up along the way. In all of his positions, the ability to communicate clearly and influence others through writing has been a constant.

“I think what’s cool about the English major is that it crosses into so many areas. The best thing that you learn is writing, and how to communicate with people. Being able to write in different styles about different things is an underrated skill. In the tech industry, I guess what I’ve learned is that there’s a lot of people that just don’t know how to write effectively,” Rodriguez said.

For many graduating students, life after college feels daunting and uncontrollable, especially if they don’t have a job offer in hand when they walk across the graduation stage. According to Rodriguez, students have more control than they think.

“You make your own value and your own skills. Put your ego aside, cut out the noise, do what you want to do and make sure that you’re secure doing it,” Rodriguez said. “There’s a strong foundation, now you go build the house.”



“There’s a strong foundation, now you go build the house.”

Fernando Rodriguez ‘16 has entered many different career fields with his English degree, and currently works at Amazon as a Program Manager.

A Story-Filled Career: Not So Fiction After All

Savanna Polasek '18 discusses her journey to becoming a Marketing and Communications Specialist, Freelance Writer, and Entrepreneur after graduating with an English degree from Texas A&M.

One statewide non-profit, 81 program locations, 9 different social media accounts, and a memoir-writing business on the side—all components that make up the daily life of Savanna Polasek, a former English student who graduated from Texas A&M in 2018. In her current role as a Marketing and Communications Specialist at Upbring, a nonprofit dedicated to breaking the cycle of child abuse in Texas, Polasek gets to do what she's always wanted to do: write.

“I knew that there were stories as a very little kid, and I loved them. Then, I found out that somebody was writing the stories, and then, I wanted to be a writer.”

“I knew that there were stories as a very little kid, and I loved them. Then, I found out that somebody was writing the stories, and then, I wanted to be a writer,” Polasek said.

To pursue her dream, Polasek completed the creative writing track during her time as an English major at Texas A&M. She said the coursework she took trained her in valuable skills that she still uses today.

“In the creative writing track, I learned how to read like a writer and so many writing tricks, like how to engage the audience and keep them interested. Also, all liberal arts classes usually involve defending a point or articulating an idea and expressing yourself,

which is something I think you have to do anywhere, not just in marketing.”

She also pursued multiple extracurricular experiences that gave her various perspectives on writing about diverse topics for different audiences. According to Polasek, one of her most valuable experiences was interning for the Texas A&M Foundation as a writer for *Spirit Magazine*.

“The experience just opened a whole new world of nonprofits and philanthropy to me. Before, I was mostly writing essays and creative things, so learning about writing for the web and for print and infusing my creativity into those pieces while still making sense was a great learning experience,” Polasek said.

Along with her internship, Polasek also joined *The Eckleburg Project*, an undergraduate literary journal at Texas A&M University, as a Screener to review submissions for publication, and eventually served as Prose Editor for the organization.

“I think it really helped being a Screener for The Eckleburg Project to see other students' work. I was already kind of seeing other students' work in creative writing classes, but just to see even a greater diversity and all those perspectives was good for me creatively. It was also good to see what we wanted to publish and to know that sometimes a work isn't selected because of other reasons,” Polasek said. “Now that I'm submitting my own work, I don't take the rejections very personally because they might have a theme in mind, or they're not accepting my specific kind of work yet.”

Polasek's extracurricular activities

enhanced her already rigorous and impactful writing course load. One of the classes she took at Texas A&M inspired her to start her own business called Memoir Ink, in which Polasek transforms interviews with clients into memoirs.

“[Memoir Ink] was inspired by my creative nonfiction class that I took with Dr. Susan Stabile, which was one of my greatest classes at A&M. That's when I first learned about creative nonfiction. I became really interested in memoirs and people telling their stories,” Polasek said.

As a Marketing and Communications Specialist with Upbring, Polasek continues to bring stories to life for the nonprofit and its multiple programs that empower children, families, and communities. She specializes in external communications for the nonprofit, overseeing the content posted to Upbring's 9 social media accounts, monitoring the news, creating press releases, supporting media and public relations, writing articles, and running the organization's blog.



◀ Savanna Polasek '18 currently runs her own writing business and manages the marketing communications for Upbring, a state-wide non-profit



▲ Polasek's work-from-home desk features artwork from co-workers, letters from former classmates, and other inspiration for her writing.

“I create a content calendar each month, and I decide what's going to go across all those channels,” Polasek said, describing one of her main responsibilities. “A big part is thinking about messaging and how different content would relate to our audiences.”

In addition to content management, Polasek also incorporates the passion she has for discovering and telling peoples' stories in her work.

“My favorite part of the job is interviewing the people that our programs are helping or the people working in those programs,” Polasek said. “Being able to interview, for example, foster moms and ask why they foster, and ask people aging out of foster care about their journey and how they're progressing is really impactful.”

For current English students looking to enter the Marketing & Communications field, Polasek recommended pursuing volunteering opportunities and additional certifications to demonstrate valuable competencies to potential employers. For her work, Polasek completed the content strategy certification

on LinkedIn Learning, and she suggested courses on SkillShare for more design-oriented training. Joining associations such as the Public Relations Society of America and the American Marketing Association is another great way to become involved in the field's community.

For aspiring freelance writers, Polasek highly recommended *Writer's Market*, an annual publication that explains what writers should do and how much to expect to be paid for certain pieces in certain publications, like *The New Yorker* or *Time* magazine.

Speaking about the *Writer's Market* publication, Polasek said, “I think that it's the most valuable thing I found after graduating.”

For all writers looking to enter the workforce, Polasek highly recommended networking now with current classmates and student organization members to form friendships that can support you later on in the job search. Making use of the Association of Former Students' resources to network with Aggies in your career field can also provide useful career

information. Finally, saving and keeping (safely) all of your work is essential.

“You need more than a flash drive - put it on your Google Drive, and if it's on your TAMU Google Drive, get it onto your personal account because that's going to expire one day, and your flash drive might get wet - I'm speaking from experience,” Polasek said. “Even if your writing from freshman year was really rough, having an idea to go back to is really helpful.”

According to Polasek, anything that students can use to demonstrate their skills will make them more marketable when the time comes to start the job search.

“All of these things will give you an advantage and just show that you know how to do things. Because even though you know what you can do, it helps make a better case for you to HR if you have those things as well,” Polasek said.

How to Publish A Book

Dr. Christian Bancroft, Class of '09 (they/them), talks about the publishing process and the journey they took to become a published author.

Complex, enigmatic, byzantine—all words used to describe the publication process. From the outside, it is hard to understand, and on the inside, it can be daunting to navigate. Dr. Christian Bancroft, a former Texas A&M English student who graduated in 2009, successfully undertook the challenge and published their first book, *Queering Modernist Translation: The Poetics of Race, Gender, and Queerness*. In the book, Dr. Bancroft explores three translations from Ezra Pound, Langston Hughes, and Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) through the lens of queer theory.

While *Queering Modernist Translation* is a critical book based on research, Dr. Bancroft specialized in the creative writing track within their English major and was specifically interested in poetry during their time at Texas A&M. From the beginning, they always knew that they wanted to be a published author.

“Even back then, I was really determined to be a writer and to publish my work,” Dr. Bancroft said. “I had great mentors at A&M, and it really helped me get a better idea of the publishing world and get a foothold into that.”

“The key is to not lose faith. Really have faith in the book that you have, and faith in yourself as a writer.”

After graduating from Texas A&M University, Dr. Bancroft got their Master’s in creative writing from the University of Texas, with a focus on poetry. Later, Dr. Bancroft earned their doctorate in literature from the University of Houston. They currently live and work in Pennsylvania as an English teacher and as a poet. During their doctorate program, the work they did on their dissertation eventually turned into their first book, published in July 2020.

“I really enjoyed the work that I did on my dissertation, and I really had a lot of fun with it. The people on my committee thought that it was really strong, and so I tried to see what I could do to get it published,” Dr. Bancroft said. While their first book was a critical book, Dr. Bancroft is currently working on three poetry books and hopes to initiate the publishing process for them soon.

While the publication process is complex, it also differs between different genres and styles of writing. For a book to be published, an author must query publishers with a letter that describes the book and why they think it is a good fit for the publisher. If the publisher is interested, they will request a sample. Once the author sends them sample pages, the publisher will decide if they are interested in seeing the whole book. For a critical book, such as the one Dr. Bancroft just published, the book will go through a peer review process by two or three experts in the field. These experts send notes and feedback about the book to the editor, who then decides whether or not it should be sent to a board for review.

For a book of poetry, fiction, or any other more commercial, mainstream book, the process



looks different. For authors of their first, second, or even third poetry book, the manuscripts are usually sent out to contests or open reading submission periods, where it starts off in the slush pile. If the book is chosen after a couple of readers, it will move on to the next stage, and the process will repeat for however many stages that particular publisher has. The book will eventually end up in front of a judge or a series of judges who will narrow down the list. For more commercial fiction or nonfiction books, the author has the option to query an agent to advocate for them and their book on their behalf with publishers.

“It’s complex,” Dr. Bancroft said, speaking about the publication process. “I feel like, fortunately, because of my editorial experience at Texas A&M and afterwards, I had a glimpse into what it looked like.”

According to Dr. Bancroft, one of their most valuable experiences

▲ Dr. Christian Bancroft, former student from Texas A&M University, is now a published author, poet, and English teacher.



▲ Dr. Bancroft’s book, *Queering Modernist Translation: The Poetics of Race, Gender, and Queerness* was published in July 2020.

at Texas A&M was working at the literary journal, *Callaloo*. The journal was founded and edited by Dr. Charles Henry Rowell, a former professor of English at Texas A&M.

“It had a huge impact on me. I had a much stronger idea of what it was like behind the scenes in the publishing world, and *Callaloo*, being such a respected and renowned journal, you get to see these incredible writers from all over,” Dr. Bancroft said.

The experience at the literary journal introduced Dr. Bancroft to the world of publishing, making it much less intimidating when the time came for them to publish their own book. It also provided insight as to what would be going through an editor’s mind reading through the manuscripts or reading samples during the publication process.

Dr. Bancroft said, “It can make you a better writer because as an editor or from an editorial perspective, you can see what you like or what pops out to you. You need stuff to pop out to you and illuminate you in some regard when you’re reading after several hours. I think that’s something that writers really need to learn and understand when they start out—their piece is very likely not the first piece that [the editor] is reading for the day. They’re probably not looking at it with fresh eyes, and so you have to keep their attention for the whole thing.”

“If you’re determined enough, and if you stick with it, then I think you have a very good chance of getting that work published.”

In addition to working at a literary journal during their time at Texas A&M, Dr. Bancroft also formed valuable connections with Texas A&M faculty, who served as mentors to them throughout their education, and provided them with inspiration and insight.

“Really any resources or networks that A&M or the Department can provide, I would say seek them out. Reach out to your professors, and ask them because they likely know if you don’t,” Dr. Bancroft said. “A&M was such a great place to start out for me. There was always something happening or something to learn about, whether it was a prize for a paper or a collection of poems that they were advertising. The professors themselves and the faculty—they know so much. I would really utilize those resources because there’s so much available.”

Getting a book published also takes a substantial amount of determination. From Dr. Bancroft’s experience, patience and kindness—with yourself and with your work—are key to any aspiring author seeking to be published.

“Be patient. There is not a level of patience that you need to acquire—you just need as much patience as possible,” Dr. Bancroft said. “Have patience with yourself and patience with the process because it takes time. Be kind to yourself throughout the process because you’re going to get a lot of rejections—that’s just the nature of it. The key is to not lose faith. Really have faith in the book that you have, and faith in yourself as a writer. If you’re determined enough, and if you stick with it then, I think you have a very good chance of getting that work published.”

To read this article and more of Dr. Bancroft’s poems, visit our English Aggie blog: <http://englishaggie.blogspot.com>

Excerpt from *A Ghost Has No Fantasies* by Dr. Christian Bancroft

[Note: The poems in this submission are from a longer manuscript, *A Ghost Has No Fantasies*, and are engaged with bringing to light and the reframing of the persecution of gay men and lesbians during the Holocaust. These poems are found texts, taken from memoirs, first-hand accounts, and archival documents that catalogue the persecution of queer men and women during the Holocaust.

Comrade
Pierre Seel

During machine gunning,
a blond
was killed at my side:

I took him
by the shoulders,
I talked to him,
I hugged him:

I loved
for three days
and nights
with that dead man
next to me:

after three days
he was starting
to ice
over:
those three days left
me
with an inexpressible
attachment

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English

This publication is brought to you by:
Texas A&M Department of English

Editor: Sarah Roberts '21

