

Jarred Johnson, B.A. English Language and Literature, 2016

By Max Chambers

Communications Officer, German Center for Research and Innovation

“My entire degree taught me to refine my skills in analysis and critical thinking, which I do every day at my job and even in the world outside of work, digesting the news or understanding the complexities of culture in Appalachia or Germany.”



Jarred Johnson graduated from Western Kentucky University in 2016 with bachelor’s degrees in English Language and Literature and German. He is currently the Communications Officer at the [German Center for Research and Innovation](#), which promotes German-American partnership in science, research, and technology.

Johnson attended Governor’s School for the Arts during high school, which fostered his passion for creative writing. “I grew up in Appalachia as a closeted gay man, so I was attracted to stories because they created empathy and embodied the fullness and complexity of people and regions, even when culture at large suggests certain types of people don’t exist within specific communities,” said Johnson. WKU’s partnership with GSA made it the perfect choice for his undergraduate career.

Johnson’s English professors furthered his growth in writing and creative thinking. “Dr. Elizabeth Alsop and Dr. Ted Hovet encouraged me to think outside the box for what a text was and how other objects could be analyzed,” said Johnson. “I did my Honors thesis analyzing fashion shows—from Alexander McQueen, for instance—just like I would a literary text. This was a blast for me. Dr. Wes Berry is a friend who, through his courses, taught me to love my southern and Appalachian identities and reflect critically on them.” Dr. Laura McGee in the Modern Languages department also encouraged Johnson to study abroad and to pursue his current position with the German Center.

Johnson studied abroad in Germany during his undergraduate career. In 2016, Johnson was awarded an English teaching assistant position in Saarbrücken, Germany, through the [Fulbright Program](#). When he returned to the United States, Johnson began working

as a Communications Assistant at the German Consulate General before finding his current position as Communications Officer. “It was a fairly natural trajectory and the perfect storm of WKU mentors encouraging me to apply for the Fulbright Scholarship, indeed.com helping me find the first job, and Dr. Laura McGee sending me the opening for the job I have now,” said Johnson.

Johnson heads the German Center’s marketing and public relations. “It’s the German government’s initiative to internationalize research and technology, so we host a lot of public events that bring together Germans and Americans working in similar science, tech, and academic fields,” said Johnson. “My task is to get the word out about German tech and research, and I do this through our website, social media, a newsletter, and through my skills in storytelling, marketing and design.” Johnson also recently designed a website for the German Center’s [Future Forum 2019](#), “Demystify A.I.”

According to Johnson, the skills he learned as an English major have equipped him to excel in his current position. “I think the most valuable skill I use is storytelling,” said Johnson. “People are sick of being sold products, so the only way to get through to them is to tell them a story. You connect with the humanity of people then instead of just pushing your own agenda.” Johnson also exercises critical thinking and analysis daily. “The same way I analyzed poetry, I analyze an effective message for a conference on Artificial Intelligence,” said Johnson.

When he isn’t working, Johnson enjoys playing volleyball, traveling, cultivating “authentic friendships,” and listening to audiobooks. “I commute two hours daily, so I’m reading more than ever,” said Johnson.

Johnson encourages current English students to be flexible with their career path, since their degree is flexible too. “You’re going to find a job, and it probably won’t be a company or position you’ve heard of before or thought you would be in,” said Johnson. “That’s fine! Go with it. Cultivate some basic skills and refine those. You can’t plan out the next ten years, so just ride the waves, have some fun and try some stuff. When you need to re-evaluate, you’ll know, and it’ll be just fine.”

