

Sara Volpi, M.A. Rhetoric & Composition, 2014

By Melissa J. Rush & Max Chambers

Kentucky Book Festival Director and Special Projects Coordinator, Kentucky Humanities

“There was no way I’d have been able to do [my job] had I not gone through my MA program at WKU. I became a better researcher and a better reader, two skills that significantly alleviate pressure in my day job now.”



Sara Volpi graduated from WKU with a master’s degree in Rhetoric and Composition in 2014. After graduating, Volpi worked for WKU Libraries as the Literary Outreach Coordinator and [Southern Kentucky \(SOKY\) Book Fest](#) Coordinator. In 2019, she became the [Kentucky Book Festival](#) Director and Special Projects Coordinator for [Kentucky Humanities](#), a nonprofit dedicated to promoting civic engagement and literacy through celebrating Kentucky culture and heritage.

As an MA student, Volpi felt that her professors at WKU gave her the skills and guidance to succeed. “[Dr. Dale Rigby] changed the way I thought of myself as someone who could educate as well as argue,” said Volpi. “Seeing those hand-written notes in the margins of essays was astounding—how he has time to do that for every single student he teaches still confounds me.” Dr. Wes Berry helped Volpi further appreciate Southern literature, and Dr. Judith Szerdahelyi showed her that “answering the question ‘who cares?’ is the most important thing an essayist can do.” Dr. Jane Fife and Dr. Kelly Reames also encouraged Volpi to pursue the Rhetoric and Composition concentration, which she finds “an incredibly fascinating, flexible field to work in and research.”

During her time at WKU, Volpi tutored students in WKU’s Writing Center and taught English 100 courses as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, one of her greatest learning experiences while at WKU. She also enjoyed the challenge of writing her master’s thesis. “It’s still something I look back on and think, ‘did I really write that?’” said Volpi. “It’s also a body of work that I feel confident I’ll never really finish—I left myself plenty of room to revisit the material.” Volpi was also a co-winner of the Gender and Women’s

Studies Contest and the recipient of the Erma & Willson E. Wood Graduate Student Award.

As the Kentucky Book Festival Director and Special Projects Coordinator, Volpi now coordinates events on a larger scale than the SOKY Book Fest. “[The Kentucky Book Festival] is an expansive week-long literary celebration,” said Volpi. “With the Kentucky Book Festival, I’ve got to place a bunch of authors and book-fans in a venue built for rodeos; I need to whittle a list of 180 authors out of a 300-author applicant pool; and events leading up to the Fair itself are spread out at various venues over a week — each entailing their own organizing/marketing/special speakers.” Volpi uses her background in rhetoric daily as she brokers deals with authors and publicists.

In her free time, Volpi enjoys writing, attending events at local bookstores, and “buying books I might read this year or next or never.” Volpi also enjoys sketching whenever she can, since she minored in Studio Art during her undergraduate years. “The art community in Bowling Green is very much missed by me — there are so many talented artists working there,” said Volpi.

Volpi suggests that students find ways to improve their work habits before graduating, since she still finds procrastination a challenge in the workplace. “Get your work done,” said Volpi. “At least force people to impose deadlines on you so you can put off the work until two days before it’s due and, in a white-noise fit of inspiration, you accomplish it with minutes to spare.”

