

Sarah McDaniel, B.A.

Communications, B.A. Spanish, Class of 1997

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Dental Hygienist, Highlands Ranch, CO



“If you really want to be proficient, GO study abroad. Learn to buy toilet paper, where to get stamps, how to negotiate in a market, etc.”

Sarah McDaniel is a WKU alumni who graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish in 1997. She then went on to get a Master of Arts in Spanish from Middlebury Language School in 2000. She says that one of her most memorable experiences in the Department of Modern Languages was Dr. Stewart encouraging her to apply for the master’s program at Middlebury.

Since graduating from WKU, she has held many positions, all utilizing her Spanish skills. She has worked as a Spanish professor in the United States and as an English professor in Spain. She was also a medical interpreter in the hospitals for 15 years. She also worked as a freelance Spanish translator and editor for Kaiser Permanente in Colorado for 5 years.

Now, McDaniel works as a dental hygienist. She says, “It may seem strange, but my language skills are the reason I’m a hygienist. Working as an interpreter in hospitals, I was seeing small children come in to have all of their teeth pulled. They were rotted. Families didn’t understand the importance of baby teeth in children’s overall health and wellbeing. As an interpreter, my ability to educate was limited to repeating what the provider chose to say. As a hygienist, I can educate families and really have an impact in my Spanish-speaking patients’ lives.” Additionally, she currently does freelance translation work for Human Resources for the State of Illinois. She has been certified by the American Translators Association (ATA) for the past 5 years.

Her advice for any students currently studying a language is to speak with people who are currently doing what they think they want to do, or something similar. She

encourages students to, “Review salary expectations for those roles and career trajectories for those positions. Keep your eyes open for what is next, and don’t move laterally.” She also encourages students to study abroad and take advantage of immersive language learning opportunities.

