

By Our WTS

The Indiana University Writing Tutorial Services Alumni Newsletter

Writing Tutorial Services
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405

Teaching Lessons

WTS Alumnus Sam Ross shares how he's learned that not all writing-tutor tactics transfer to a classroom of teenagers

Brandon Haffner

Sam Ross, a WTS alum now living in Brooklyn, spends a majority of his time instructing teenagers at a nearby public school as part of his work with for Teach for America. He's a rather busy guy, given that he is also taking graduate courses at Pace University toward his teaching certification.

His primary focus, though, is on the students he felt compelled to help even before he graduated from IU.

"I had read a lot about the achievement gap between high- and low-income students and thought that it was a frustrating manifestation of inequality in our society," Ross said. "I wanted to join a movement that was fighting against educational disparities."

However, his motivation to work for a good cause is often tested by the high demands of his work.

"Teaching itself is pretty intense inside the room, and there are usually a thousand things happening at once," he said. "Whether it's classroom management or working with low-level readers or trying to come up with a reading or assignment that will engage

students' interests while still hitting state standards, it's like educational whack-a-mole. When you nail something on the head, another issue pops right up."

The grueling nature of Ross's teaching work is a humbling experience, he said. It's much different from his WTS background, helping IU students with their college papers, and perhaps more difficult.

"With WTS, I mostly dealt with students who had one or two specific issues that could be adequately addressed in a tutorial," he said. "With the work I do now, it's more about trying to get students to the stage of actually completing a written piece."

Most current WTS tutors become concerned when students visit us too close to their paper deadlines or when they've forgotten to ask their professors important questions. For Ross, now, his job is a bit more focused on the fundamentals.

"Most of the time, it's about getting them to turn in their homework," he said.

His work for Teach for America isn't all grueling, though, and he has

continued on pg. 5

In this issue:

- 1: Teaching Lessons
- 2: Career Change?
No Objection.
- 3-5: At WTS End

- 6-7: At Home on
Lake Michigan
- 7-8: WTS Alumni
Directory

Career change? No objection.

Tutoring skills prove practical for two alums who have chosen the legal field

Brandon Haffner

Some of our WTS alumni have moved on to explore the world of law.

Jon Zarich and his wife, Katie, both WTS alums, currently attend IUPUI's law school evening program.

And as many recent graduates do, Jon and Katie waited a while before jumping into the rigors of professional school.

"I worked in the Indiana House of Representatives for two years as a legislative assistant after graduating from IU," Jon said.

It was only after those two years that he enrolled in IUPUI's evening program. Then, he switched his day job to work for the Insurance Institute of Indiana, a state trade association representing insurers before the Indiana government. There, he works as a lobbyist five days a week.

"The great thing about lobbying is you meet a lot of great people and get to work with them on interesting issues," Jon said.

Working has its downsides, of course. With work every day and school each night, Jon is a busy man.

"I'd like to say I study when I get

home from class every night, but that just doesn't happen all the time," Jon said. "Gotta make time for the 'The Office.'"

Katie Zarich seems to be just as busy.

During the day, she works as the director of public affairs at the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

"I manage our public relations, marketing and government affairs programs," she said. "No day is ever the same. I attend a lot of meetings, and think a lot about strategy."

Beyond her aspirations in the legal realm, she's motivated to make positive changes in her current job, too.

"It's my goal for the IMA to be as visible as possible in Indianapolis, central Indiana and beyond," she said.

Her high level of motivation and strong work ethic come with a price, however.

"Now that I'm in law school and working full time, I sacrifice quite a bit of sleep and free time," she said.

So, what's so great about law that it makes Jon and Katie willing to give up time for fun and sleep, anyway?

Each of them has distinct reasons.

"I have always found the law interesting," Jon said. "It forms the basis of how people are required to treat each other. I like to know that if someone mugs me while I am walking down the street, there is a legal remedy I can pursue."

Katie feels passionate about the law because it fulfills what she's always wanted to do as an adult.

"I always thought I'd go to law school one day," she said. "In some ways, law is a great foundation for public service, and I've always considered a career in public service."

Neither of them, of course, has forgotten their WTS heritage. Jon said he believes that working for WTS was great experience for his law career.

"WTS taught me to read critically, listen carefully, and communicate effectively," he said. "No matter what job you will do, you need those skills, especially in a legal environment."

Katie's WTS past has helped her not only with her legal writing, but with her art museum position.

"WTS helped me give tactful and constructive criticism," she said. "This skill has been very helpful with my employees."

Jon and Katie seem to have found paths to bright futures together. Though they're working hard every day of the week, they seem to have found a way to keep things in order.

Jon said the two of them only have about one year of school left; then it's off into another phase of life.

By Our WTS is produced by and for the peer tutor alumni of Writing Tutorial Services, Indiana University's writing center.

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At WTS End

In May, eight graduating seniors will add their names to the WTS alumni roster. To celebrate this milestone in their lives and their contributions to Writing Tutorial Services, we asked them to reflect on their time as peer tutors and tell us a bit about their goals for the future.

Sarah-Anne Lanman

Hometown:
Cleveland,
Ohio

Majors:
English,
Germanic
studies

**Years
tutoring:**
one

**Favorite
WTS
memory:**
The look on

students' faces when a light bulb turns on in their heads because they have major breakthroughs with their papers.

Most memorable tutorial: A student working on an art history paper came in to the ASC because her teacher offered extra credit to students who brought their papers in, and she seemed a little skeptical about the tutorial being useful. However, at the end of the tutorial, she said it had been very helpful and ended up coming in again a few weeks later for a different paper.

Words of wisdom: As much as you may want to, you cannot make a student's paper perfect!

Future plans: I definitely plan on continuing to write, and I may give law school a spin. I'm interested in working with environmental and/or human rights issues and would eventually love to publish a book of poetry.



Caitlin Zittkowski

Hometown: Munster, Indiana

Majors: English, French, art history

Years tutoring: one

**Favorite
WTS
memory:**

I've loved the time spent talking with other tutors. I've met so many wonderful people here!

**Most
memorable
tutorial:**

One time at the Teter ASC, a student had plagiarized her professor's example essay almost word for word. When I gently pointed that out to her and suggested we try some re-wording, she told me to shut up and do my job correctly. Excuse me?!

Words of wisdom: If students feel good about themselves, they write better papers! I've always found words of encouragement do wonders for getting the creative juices flowing.

Future Plans: I have a job in Bloomington for the summer, and then I am moving to France for a year-long teaching assistantship. Beyond that, I plan to go to grad school sometime in my 20s and make enough money to keep me from moving back in with my parents.



Sarah-Anne Lanman

Hometown: Goshen, Indiana

Major: biology

Years tutoring: three

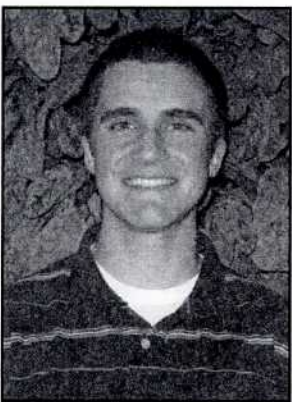
Favorite WTS memory: Interacting with the other tutors has been great. I remember spending spring 2007 working with Andrew to figure out how we could most efficiently watch college basketball on Thursday nights at Teter. I think we came up with a decent system.

**Most
memorable
tutorial:**

There have been really good and really bad ones, but a specific one doesn't come to mind.

Words of wisdom: Don't doubt your own tutoring skills. You went through extensive training and are obviously fit for the position, so just do what you know how to do.

Future plans: I'll spend the next four years at the Illinois College of Optometry in Chicago. Beyond that, check back with me in four years.



Josh Robinson

Hometown: Wilmington, Delaware

Majors: English, liberal arts and management program

Years tutoring: one

Favorite WTS memory: I'll miss Jo Ann's original yet strangely fitting sayings for just about everything.



Callie Taylor

Most

memorable tutorial: There's not one specific tutorial that stands out, but when I was tutoring in Briscoe on Thursday nights, I'd end up with a lot of girls who didn't understand me when I talked in a normal voice. I had to, like, you know, totally talk with the, like, valley-girl swoop, so, um, like, every sentence totally ended as if it was a question? Those tutorials were pretty amusing.

Words of wisdom: WTS is awesome. But everyone who has worked here or is working here already knows that.

Future plans: I'm looking for jobs in editing and publishing. I have one offer for an editorial internship with Norton Books in New York City already, but it's unpaid, so I'm waiting to see if I can find a paid job before accepting that offer.

Hometown: Fort Wayne, Indiana

Majors: English, creative writing

Years tutoring: three

Favorite WTS memory: I suppose I'll remember working at the ASCs the most because of all the memorable conversations I've had there with my fellow

writing tutors. Meeting and befriending my brilliant peers has been one of my favorite parts of the job.

Most memorable tutorial:

I had a tutorial in which the guy had written a paper that argued against the credibility of the assignment and his class in general. It was a little awkward at first, but after making sure he understood he was probably going to fail the assignment, we discussed his thesis statement and the organization of his paragraphs, and he went on his way.

Words of wisdom: I once had a tutorial, in my first semester of tutoring, when a female ESL student asked me to tutor her outside of WTS. I told her it was a conflict of interest if I got paid, so I tutored her for free for several weeks, often putting aside my own homework, to help her pass an English class that she needed to pass in order to graduate (She'd failed it twice before.). Eventually, she passed, and she and I are now good friends. However, I never did that for any students again. In a way, it was a gratifying experience after it was over, but I realized it was simply not my place. And my grades weren't so hot that semester, either.

Future plans: On May 8, I move into an apartment with my girlfriend here in Bloomington. In a year or two, I'll probably be getting ready to go to grad school to get my MFA in fiction writing, and in ten years, I'd like to be a creative writing professor somewhere. Big fun up ahead.



Brandon Haffner

Hometown: Granger, Indiana

Majors: journalism, political science

Years tutoring: two

Favorite WTS memory: I will remember how great it feels to make a difference in someone's work and to have a tutee be really excited about the changes you made together during a tutorial. I also love having the same student come back several times over the course of a semester and getting the chance to see how his or her writing improved. Mostly, though, I will miss discussing movies with Brandon in the Forest ASC; for the past year, he has schooled me with his impressive arsenal of film facts.

Most memorable tutorial: My first solo tutorial during training. I was absolutely terrified to help a freshman with a typical W131 paper, something that is second nature to me now. I'm pretty sure I made his paper even worse than it was when he walked in.

Words of wisdom: I have learned that people can (and will) surprise you, so try not to assume things about a tutee from the first few minutes of your tutorial. Every now and then, you get a difficult tutee, but more often than not, students are willing to work with you to improve their writing, even in required tutorials.

Future plans: Not sure. I am thinking law school in a couple of years but am concerned about putting myself in a ridiculous amount of debt. I'm also considering going into some type of



Kelsey Nash

teaching. In short, look for me at your local Taco Bell!

Hometown: Indianapolis, Indiana

Majors: psychology, religious studies

Years tutoring: two

Favorite WTS memory: Fun random conversations at the ASCs about life, *People* magazine, Christmas presents and relationships.

Most memorable tutorial: Perhaps an unhappy memory, but a tutee once asked me at the beginning of the tutorial, "Uh, do you want me to get my paper out or what? Is that how this works?" And it just went downhill from there. . .

Words of wisdom: WTS is awesome. Don't stress about the scary grammar tutorials, the neurotic folks or the ones needing stamps; you'll get a refreshing mixture of interesting, boring and scary to keep you on your toes.

Future plans: I will be applying to Ph.D. programs in clinical psychology this fall and will hopefully be a practicing psychologist 10 years from now.

Hometown: Anderson, Indiana

Major: public health education

Minor: human sexuality

Years tutoring: one

Favorite WTS memory: The last couple of training sessions with Jo Ann were really great. We were all nervous through the whole process, and she may have been too because I think we were the first trainee class she taught for WTS at IU. She started to loosen up around us by the end of it, and we all would laugh so much during those sessions. It was a really fun time.



Chelsea Sipes

Most memorable tutorial: During one of the first tutorials I had at WTS at the beginning of the year, a student came in who asked me about my personal life and the meaning of the ring on my finger, and a couple days after he came in, I got a Facebook message from a familiar face who said he had gotten an "A" on his assignment and was wondering if he could repay me for my writing help by taking me out to lunch sometime. I didn't respond because I didn't know what to say. That was memorable because it was so crazy and unexpected. This guy had guts.

Words of Wisdom: Regarding tutorials, don't stress about how slow or fast you think you should or shouldn't be reading because as long as you completely comprehend what is written on the paper, you are better off no matter how long it takes you to read the piece.

Regarding life, don't wait for happiness because happiness is a choice and a journey. If you continue to stress through life and say, "Once I finish this semester . . . after I lose five pounds . . . or when I fall in love . . . I'll be happy," you'll always be waiting for it to arrive. We all have

the power to choose how we perceive situations.

Future plans: I'm going back to my hometown this summer to complete an internship in the learning and development department of St. John's Hospital in Anderson, Indiana, under their health educators, which I am very excited about. Hopefully, if they like me, and if they have the funds, they will keep me around and pay me after the internship is over. I am also very happily in love with a wonderful man who works teaching music in a local music store/venue and instrument repair center, and I am looking forward to having a fun-filled summer of new experiences and memories with him and our families.

Teaching Lessons, *cont. from pg. 1:*

no trouble seeing the bright side of his everyday endeavors.

"My favorite thing about being in Teach for America is getting to know my students," he said. "I work with young teenagers, and it's fascinating to see their identities really start to crystallize."

All in all, Ross seems to be optimistic about his teaching future. After he receives his teaching certificate, he plans to get his masters in teaching as well. So, despite the rough edges of his current job, it appears he has found enough enjoyment to continue teaching.

He added that part of his enjoyment as a teacher comes from working with a bunch of entertaining characters.

"Something hilarious happens literally every day I teach," he said. "We just finished our poetry unit and one of my students asked me, 'Mr. Ross, do you know love poems?'"

"Yes," Ross replied.

"Do you know the way they make you feel, like how you get really touched inside?" the student said.

"Yeah, I do."

"I hate that."



Swathi Hemachandra

At Home on Lake Michigan

Since graduating, several former tutors have chosen to spend their time living and working in the Windy City. By Our WTS found out how some are faring there.

Sri Chatterjee

Chicago is famous for a long list of things: the Sears Tower, deep dish pizza, the Magnificent Mile, David Schwimmer, Frank Lloyd Wright, President Obama and – most importantly – several WTS alums.

Here's an update on a few of those familiar faces (those whose e-mail addresses we have access to, at least).

Cecelia Myers

Since graduating in 2007 with a degree in English, Cecelia (Wolford) Myers has seemingly been on the go.

She got married in September 2008 and now has a little puppy dubbed "Oscar Myers".

As far as her career is concerned, she currently works as the senior personal archivist for Morgan Street Document Systems, a company that provides documenting services to individuals and

families by creating web-based "vaults" for its clients.

She said she loves her job, which she accepted right after graduation.

"(I've) created vaults for everyone from influential investors to government officials who are writing memoirs," Myers said. "I've gotten to work with a lot of cool stuff!"

Furthermore, her former life as a tutor has come in handy while navigating the everyday trials of the working world.

"The patience and tact that (tutoring) helps you develop is essential when you work with clients," Myers said. "It helps you make sometimes frustrating situations into successes."

Alison Lefkowitz

After leaving Bloomington, Lefkowitz found a bit of IU in Chicago.

"There's a joke (first passed on to me by WTS alum and former Chicago resident Allison Mikkalo) that the neighborhoods in Chicago correspond to IU dorms," she said. "It's funny because it's a little bit true."

Since graduating in 2002, Lefkowitz has begun the Ph.D. program in history at the University of Chicago.

"I study 20th-century U.S. history with a focus on gender and sexuality,"

she said. "My dissertation examines the politics of marriage from 1963 to 1982. I have taught in the U of C history and gender studies departments the last few years, and this year, I am a Hormel Fellow."

Lefkowitz said she fondly recalls "tutoring at the main office, the regulars at Ashton, chatting with Anita and watching IU beat Duke at a very empty Briscoe."

Despite some fine times spent at the tutoring table, she said many of her favorite memories of WTS are from her semester-long training with Laura Plummer and the cohort of spring 2000.

It also seems that her work at WTS has been serving her well beyond the classroom.

As she puts it: "The biggest lessons I learned at WTS were to tackle one problem at a time and that I couldn't solve everything in an hour."



Cecelia Myers



Alison Lefkowitz, far right, with friends in Chicago's Grant Park (photo donated).

Tracy May

Another one of our alums, Tracy (Jensen) May, has been getting back to her WTS roots by doing some ESL tutoring for Literacy DuPage, a non-profit organization that provides tutoring services to adults living in DuPage County, Ill.

Since moving to Chicago in 1999, May has gone from being an editorial assistant at McGraw-Hill/Irwin Publishing to becoming the manager of corporate and foundation relations at the Chicago Lighthouse, a position she took in January '08.

Aside from her career, she has been working on building her family. She got hitched to Bill May in 2004 and gave birth to their first daughter, Abigail, on Oct. 10, 2008.

"For now, I'm home with her and doing some volunteer work for the American Cancer Society," May said.

Theresa Yaecker

Although Yaecker is a Chicago native, she said she learns new things about her home city every day.

"Being on the road most of the time, I find the city still has much that surprises me," she said.



Theresa Yaecker (photo donated).

And she wasn't kidding about being out of town often. Yaecker's work as a technology consultant for Deloitte has taken her to as many as seven different states in just four years.

Despite her constant travel, she said feels right at home in Chi-town and loves living there – with one glaring exception: the harsh Windy City winters.

Still, the bone-chilling cold, blustery winds and copious amounts of snow make the arrival of summer much more exciting than it would be elsewhere, she said.

"There's nothing better than that first truly warm day when everyone suddenly emerges from their winter burrows . . . just so happy to be out without a coat on," Yaecker said.

Despite working with technology, which is far removed from discussions of syntax, parallel sentences and thesis statements, she said the tutoring skills

she gained at WTS have helped her succeed in her current work.

"The ability to dive into a document, assess its current state and collaborate with its creator to make it better has been invaluable in my work with clients," she said. "It is a rare day when I don't have at least one 'tutoring session' with a client or a teammate."

She also attributes her tendency to volunteer for night shifts to having the best of times during evening work at the ASCs.

And for those of us who live elsewhere and, perhaps, those graduating in May with hopes of a big-city job come next year, Yaecker offers some sound advice for anyone considering a move to Chicago.

"Buy a space heater," she said. "It will be the best investment you ever make!"

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