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<div align="center">Leaving the Classroom</div>

When I switched to being an English major, I assumed that I would have to be a teacher. What else was there? Sure, I could intensely study literary texts for a living, but I could barely focus on a book for more than five minutes. I've been passionate about some books before. However I had never heard of a scholar who studied *Harry Potter* for a living. Therefore, I signed up for a bunch of education courses, and got started.

The few education courses I took were fine. Not great, but I passed them easily. I went to my classes each day, monotonously completing the homework beforehand. The other students seemed passionate about the topics discussed. They would raise their hands and seemed to be *so* interested in child development. I didn't see what was so intriguing about it. Of course the topics were important to my future education minor, but I wasn't really invested in what my professor was describing. I would just sit there staring at the clock, wishing it would move just a bit faster.

At the end of my second fall semester at UMass, as I walked to my class, a poster in South College caught my eye. It read *English Specialties and Certificates.* I was intrigued, and I took a photo of the information. I ended up researching all of the different options on my laptop, instead of paying attention in my class. I saw that I could go into publishing or creative writing, but I had a feeling that I wouldn't have the motivation for those. I tend to only want to write when I feel like writing, so a creative writing specialization would be potential torture for me.

I considered my options, and then I saw PWTC. I had glanced over it at first, since it honestly sounded a little boring. I searched it online, and browsed through the website to see that this certification had much more to offer than I had originally thought. I saw that we would be working with photoshop, illustrator, and indesign. When I was younger, I would spend hours on digital design applications. I would draw characters and design posters for the online communities I was involved in. I also recalled that I used to take as many digital design classes as I could in middle school, despite the limited options. I was excited by the potential opportunity to bring back these skills and use them in college, and maybe even my future career.

After I reflected on my college experience so far, I realized that I did not have to be a teacher. I thought it was the default career path for any English major. There is something comforting about studying to be a teacher. I had been in classrooms my whole life, and the "real world" seemed frightening. I was baffled by the business women who would just go about their day, going to meetings and being in charge of important tasks. Not that teaching is not an important task - it is one of the most impacting jobs I can think of. I just felt like I knew how teaching worked, since I had spent the past 15 plus years in a classroom myself. It was familiar to me, and working as a technical writer was not.

After contemplating for a long while, I signed up for my first PWTC class. This decision did not come lightly. I was a sophomore in college, with a bunch of education courses already under my belt. I could have just stuck with teaching, but something told me that I needed to make a change, and I needed to make it now. Before it was too late, and I was stuck doing

something that I did not enjoy for the rest of my life. I was so tempted to take the easy way, and stick with what I had been doing for the past few semesters. But after reading through my options as an English major once more, I realized that I needed to change my career path. While the change was scary, I also knew that I could go back to teaching if all else fails. I needed to go out of my comfort zone, but education would always be there if PWTC was not for me.

When I walked into the classroom for ENG 391C, every other student seemed much more prepared than me. Most had already taken a PWTC class before, and I had not. The assignments seemed daunting. My professor would often talk about the internships and full time jobs that PWTC students had earned. The same question as before kept repeating in my mind. How would I be able to achieve the feats that these other students had?

It was rough at first. My professor was very professional and expected all of us to be as well. At one point, I had an assignment due at 2:30 pm. I missed the deadline only slightly, and by 2:45 pm my professor reached out to ask why it wasn't submitted. Her reminder was not aggressive in any way, but the experience made me realize that she meant business. Ever since then, I have made sure to promptly submit each assignment, and if for some reason I needed more time, I would let her know in advance.

The overall goal of the class was to make an online portfolio website that showcased our work. My professor recommended using our projects done in previous PWTC classes. However, I did not have anything to showcase. I did use older essays from other classes, which was another option, but I still felt behind compared to the rest of my classmates who had professional PWTC works to show off. I did know in the back of my mind that I would eventually be in the senior PWTC students' shoes. If I stuck with this certificate program, I would have my own technical writing portfolio items to be proud of.

My first few projects in PWTC slowly came together. I understood what my professor was explaining, and used that feedback in order to improve my work. When I did work for my technical writing class, it didn't feel like a chore. While I would inevitably fidget in my seat every class, it was out of excitement, not boredom.

By the time I had finished three out of the five PWTC classes, I still felt a little out of place. I had not found an internship for the summer yet, and I didn't know if I could. I didn't think that companies would want to actually hire me. I was doing well in my PWTC classes, but I still felt like I maybe should be sitting in an education class instead. My classmates kept mentioning their past internships and future job offers. I had previously applied for an on campus internship, but another one of my peers got hired instead of me. I felt like I wasn't good enough.

During my last semester as a PWTC student, I scoured the internet for possible internship opportunities. I decided to apply for them in early February. When I mentioned to one of my professors that I had already started looking for a position, he mentioned that "it's a little early, but go for it." In a way, this should have deterred me. He did not say to *not* find an internship now, but my past self would have interpreted it that way. I felt like I needed to keep going. If I applied early, I could get lucky.

I once again found myself in South College, only a few feet from where I originally saw the *English Specialties and Certificates* poster. I opened up my laptop, navigated to Linkedin, and started looking for technical writing internships. I didn't have a ton of time that day, so I was only able to apply for three positions. After I hit submit on all three internship opportunities, I closed my computer and went to band rehearsal, not expecting much.

During a break in rehearsal, I took a second to peek at my phone. To my surprise, I saw an email from a recruiter, asking me to set up a phone interview with him. A company was interested in hiring me? I was excited but I also was dreading the phone call. What was I supposed to say? I did not want to ruin this opportunity.

I researched the company more, and reviewed my resume to make sure that I felt ready. The phone interview went well, which led to another interview, and then one more. A week later, I found myself looking at an email titled *Technical Writing Internship Summer 2023 Offer.* After I accepted the offer, I sat back and reflected on how I got there. I had never thought that I would have an internship position like my peers in PWTC. I had come a long way from believing that I could only ever be a teacher. I shaped the English major into something that I wanted to do, rather than something that I felt like I had to do.