The Writing Program at the University of Utah is perhaps unique in its institutional structure. A free-standing program, connected to English by only a cluttered hallway, it offers a minor in Literacy Studies and a series of specific rhetoric and composition courses designed to teach students not only writing as a practice, but also the theory and dialogue that guides the practice as well. The office doors are always open for students and faculty of all levels, creating a welcoming climate. It is a place where everyone feels important, supported, and equal.

I first came through the writing program’s door by way of another unique program at the University of Utah: the Bachelor of University Studies (BUS). In that program, students can design their own majors to fit their educational goals. My introduction to the BUS, and my invitation into the writing program came from a perceptive instructor in my first writing course, “Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences.” When he learned of my desire to major in writing, Professor Sheldon Walcher introduced me to Dr. Maureen Mathison, the director of the Writing Program, who agreed to be my faculty advisor. Over the course of the next semester, we designed my major: a balanced program of writing practice and theoretical discussions, made up of classes from the Writing Program, and the departments of English and Communication.

At that point, my understanding of a large research institution shifted in at least two ways. First, I wasn’t just a number; I was a real person whose educational goals and needs were taken seriously by faculty who took a personal interest in me. And second, I realized that I would graduate with my intended degree in Rhetoric and Writing Studies. This, in addition to my appointment as a tutor in the writing center, leaves me poised for future admission to graduate school, and I have the potential to realize my goal of becoming a writing professor.

Being the first undergraduate to major in Rhetoric and Writing Studies at the University of Utah has given me graduate-level access to a program that is changing and growing to meet the needs of producing well-trained, effec-
tive, ethical writers. I have taken several graduate courses, including Classical Rhetoric and Literacy Studies; participated in new teacher colloquia; and even sat in on the proposal selection process for a conference that we hosted last fall, the 10th Annual Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference.

My inclusion in activities such as these makes me feel like a cook in the kitchen adding spice to the stew, actively contributing to the success of the writing program while also picking up valuable experience and training for my own future success. I heard recently that my major is being considered as a minor; perhaps someday I’ll have the privilege of mentoring students in a program that started with me and my desire to create my own major in writing.
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