

Melanie Graham Interview:

How would you describe your area of study to a novice?

Today, trauma studies have grown in interest since being used to study the Holocaust. Various scholars have helped to broaden the definition of trauma to include the more hidden, private experiences that are not really “outside the range of normal” (as genocide and war are) but instead are part of daily experiences because of oppressive social constructions. I am working to expand the conversation surrounding trauma theory to include homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormativity.

What makes you passionate about your area of study?

I am passionate about my area of study because nothing is black and white. The concept of love and marriage does not translate to man and woman and owning your identity is a hard, scary task in the world in which we live. Individuality and sexuality should be worshipped, never condemned, and certainly never forbidden.

Why did you choose to attend Radford?

I chose to attend RU because I developed a strong working relationship with the members of the English department as an undergraduate student and was excited to continue working with such passionate and brilliant minds. I was also thrilled to be offered the opportunity to work as a graduate teaching assistant and fellow while simultaneously working towards my Master of Arts.

What is your primary motivation for persevering through graduate school?

I will not lie, graduate school is hard. I’ve experienced a lot in my young life, both failures and successes and I must admit the latter is much more fun. So, I suppose my primary motivation for persevering through graduate school is that I want to be happy. I want to enjoy my future career and knowledge is power, so as long as I maintain the power to make myself happy, graduate school will have been worth it.

What is your greatest accomplishment at Radford?

On a personal level, my greatest accomplishment, while still a work in progress, is writing my thesis. On a professional level, my greatest accomplishment is conveying a sense of excitement and transforming my students into believers that written and oral communication actually does matter.

What surprised you the most about graduate school?

How quickly it goes by! Honestly, the past two years have been filled with laughter and late nights and lots of writing and even more thinking, and I cannot believe I am about to graduate.

Do you have any advice for people starting your program?

My advice for people starting the Masters English program, soak it all up. If your professor assigns a reading, it is because you can learn something from it. Don’t take short-cuts, don’t wait until the last minute to write seminar papers, and ask lots of questions. This could be the very last time you’re surrounded by peers who genuinely care about literature, who care enough to be engaged, so do yourself a favor and be really present at all times. And for goodness sake, be your own advocate.

Please describe your most meaningful academic relationship.

Dr. Moira P. Baker is my thesis advisor and she also doubles as my next door neighbor. Both personally and professionally, Moira makes me better. She inspires me to be more aware, to think deeper, to write without adverbs, but truly, is always three steps ahead of the crowd. Moira has allowed me access to her literary—and life—brilliance and balances the workload with wine and comic

relief. I could continue on with flattering attributes but no words can adequately account for my gratefulness. She is my person.

Do you think there is any value in social networking with other graduate students in non-related fields?

I believe there is something of value to be taken away from every encounter with another human being. So yes, after all it's all about who you know, right?

What is your favorite stress-reduction technique?

I wish I could say running or reading for pleasure, but that just isn't so. My favorite stress-reduction technique requires a few steps; first I pour a nice glass of Malbec, and then I light a few candles and turn off all other lights, and proceed to have a dance party with David Bowie.

What is the last book you read strictly for pleasure and how long ago was it?

The last book I read for pleasure was *We Were the Mulvaney's* by Joyce Carol Oates this past summer.

What is your favorite comfort food and why?

My favorite comfort food is my mother's meatballs. My mother's meatballs are the best, I can feel the love when I eat them and they take me back to 18 Westwood when it was filled with my most favorite people.

What is your favorite thing to do around Radford?

Float the New River, of course!

When do you expect to complete your degree?

May 6, 2016!

What will you miss about being a student?

I'll miss being surrounded by passion and great minds 24/7. The academic world is the most accepting sphere, learning never stops, and people are constantly working to better themselves—I have a feeling much more settling happens in the "real world."

What are your plans after graduation?

After graduation I will enjoy a fun-filled summer and then in September I will be off to serve with the Peace Corps as a University English Teacher in Ukraine!