

JP Whatford (BA History, 2008 CSUSB; MA English, 2015)

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With his eyes on a career in education at the community college and university level, Joseph Philip "JP" Whatford is taking advantage of every teaching opportunity that comes his way.

Now in his final year of graduate school, his experience is already extensive. He has jumped at tutoring opportunities since his undergraduate years, when he tutored Avid students at Palm Desert High School, worked with English language learners at the Yasuda Center, and assisted a deaf student in one of his classes. He also held a position as a teaching assistant in the Department of History.

When the Office of Student Research began a new Peer Lab tutoring program last fall, JP found another opportunity to develop his teaching skills. As a facilitator for Dr. Holly Henry's *Literary Theory and Criticism* course, JP lead supplemental instruction sessions to help undergraduates master the complex material. Because the lab was held before the lecture, JP's role was to introduce the material and prepare the students for the professor's course.

"Students liked the sessions because they had the opportunity to throw out questions," JP said, noting that the small class size and discussion-group format may have made them more comfortable speaking up. "We built a strong cohort and there was a great feeling of camaraderie." Although not part of his duties as a peer lab facilitator, JP took it upon himself to schedule additional study sessions before midterms and finals, and many students commented that they appreciated the extra assistance. JP's methods proved successful: in a course reputed to be difficult, his students earned A's.

Clearly a gifted educator, JP's success may lie in his humility: he shows a willingness to learn from his students and a desire to continually improve his skills to better reach all learners. As a peer lab facilitator, JP says he discovered "the importance of listening to and acknowledging students, learning names, and making eye contact. But most importantly, don't correct them. Listen to their ideas, help them understand the material and guide them in the right direction."

As a graduate student, JP said he initially had trouble developing his thesis topic, and had to learn to be more flexible and adaptable. His advice to other graduate students: "Don't be afraid to seek advice, help and friendship from faculty. They are happy to oblige and help graduate students."

JP now works in the English Department as a graduate student assistant, and will be working with Dr. Jacqueline Rhodes this summer as her research assistant. Come fall and winter quarters, JP will embark on his first teaching position at the university as a Teaching Associate, where he will be leading a course in freshman composition. With his extensive experience and passion for teaching, both he and his students are bound to succeed.