



New Composition Professor Studies How Young Adult Literature Reimagines the Victorian Past

Once upon a time, Dr. Brett Young dreamed of writing novels. Today, she brings that same creative spirit into her classrooms at Missouri University of Science and Technology, where she teaches students to express themselves effectively in writing and opens the world of literature to them. Young joined the Department of English and Technical Communication in August 2025 as an assistant teaching professor specializing in composition.

In 2014, Young earned her PhD in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, focusing on

nineteenth-century British literature and children's studies. Her dissertation, "Contemplating 'What If?': Allohistoric Reconstructions of Victorian Restrictions in Young Adult Steampunk," explored how young adult steampunk fiction reimagines the social limits of the Victorian era. Analyzing works such as Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan* trilogy and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, she showed how speculative "what-if" narratives empower characters to resist historical constraints and envision more inclusive futures. Her work helped define steampunk's place within children's and young adult literary studies.

After earning her doctorate, Young built a strong foundation in composition pedagogy. From 2016 to 2018, she taught basic writing part-time at both Missouri State University and Missouri S&T. She later joined the faculty at Valdosta State University in Georgia, where she taught a variety of composition and literature courses from 2018 to 2025 and served as first-year composition coordinator from 2022 to 2025. Through these experiences, she strengthened her commitment to helping students develop proficiency and confidence in their writing.

Since returning to Missouri S&T, she has taught sections of English 1120 Exposition and Argumentation, English 1160 Writing and Research, and English 1231 World Literature I: From Beginnings to the Renaissance.

Young's passion for teaching began while she was earning her master's degree in English at Missouri State in Springfield. As a graduate assistantship, she "fell in love with teaching," and since then she has spent nearly twenty years in the classroom. Her inspiration comes from "really just students — students every day."

Her teaching philosophy is grounded in "transparency and practice." Because many of her students come from STEM fields, she breaks the writing process into clear, manageable steps. "We think of writing as a creative, organic function, and it is once you know how to do it," she explained. "But before you know how to do it, there are rules and guidelines you can follow."

She wants her students to engage with writing in new ways, approaching structure as something to explore rather than endure. Her goal is to help them see writing assignments not as "the worst thing that could possibly happen in a class," but as "a chance to leave the class with the tools to develop an argument and make writing work for them."

Young's research centers on young adult literature, especially how contemporary authors revisit Victorian ideas and anxieties through speculative genres such as steampunk and neo-Victorian fiction. She believes that literature for children and young adults is profoundly influential, shaping who young readers become and helping them understand the world, even when it is dark. "You ask almost anybody what their favorite five or ten books are," she said, "and almost all of them will include something from their childhood."

Beyond the classroom, Young describes her return to Missouri as "almost like coming home," appreciating how close it brings her to family and friends. She enjoys cooking, knitting, and crocheting, and, like many in the field of literature, she is almost always reading.

