

# Ingram Scholar Alumni Spotlight



**HUNTER GILPIN OSWALT**, Class of 2007

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## **DEGREES**

B.A. Art History, Vanderbilt University

M.A. Reading Specialist Program, The University of Alabama

## **CURRENT LOCATION**

Mobile, Alabama

## **CURRENT EMPLOYER**

Self Employed

## **CURRENT OCCUPATION**

Business Owner & Reading Specialist

## **DESCRIBE YOUR CAREER PATH**

When senior year started, I did not really know what I wanted to do, but I knew I wanted to do something to make positive social change for children and families. Drawn to teaching from an early age, I decided to apply to Teach for America. So, a few short weeks after walking across the stage at Vanderbilt, I stood in front of a homeroom of 30 6th graders at YES Prep Public Schools, a high achieving charter school

founded by Vanderbilt grad Chris Barbic, in Houston, TX. Most of my students did not speak English as their first language and stared at me blankly when I gave directions or asked questions. I failed often and hard, but I learned fast because there was no plan B! I loved teaching, and to my surprise, I felt led to a long term career in education.

Soon after getting married in 2010, my husband and I moved to Mobile, Alabama to be closer to family. At that time, Alabama did not have laws allowing charter schools, so I needed to change my career focus a bit. I decided to pursue a graduate degree in reading from the University of Alabama. While working on my masters, I started working part time at a clinic for students with learning disabilities called Read-Write: The Learning Center. This ultimately led to me opening my own office in 2013. Now, I oversee intervention for our approximately 80 students, do testing and consultations for new clients, manage our staff of 10 instructors, and take care of all the nuts and bolts of running a small business.

I am fascinated by the science of reading and language acquisition. I have earned additional certifications in my field including Certified Academic Language Therapist (CALT). I recently started serving on the Dyslexia Advisory Council, a statewide committee appointed by the Alabama State Board of Education.

I am also quite busy on the homefront with my kids ages 5, 3, and 1, but I hope to focus my work more broadly in the future. I would love to be involved in teacher preparation and education policy as it relates to reading, literacy, and language based learning disabilities. I definitely agree with Sheryl Sandberg's advice to women to think of their career as a jungle gym - not a ladder!

### **HOW DID THE INGRAM SCHOLARS PROGRAM PREPARE YOU FOR WHAT YOU ARE DOING TODAY?**

Many things! Ingram gave me increased confidence with public speaking, comfort entering new situations, experience with hard work, and an appreciation for the perspectives and experiences of other people who do not look like or act like me.

### **IF YOU COULD DESCRIBE THE INGRAM SCHOLARS PROGRAM IN THREE WORDS WHAT WOULD THEY BE?**

Life changing opportunity!

### **WHAT DOES THE INGRAM SCHOLAR COMMUNITY MEAN TO YOU?**

I am inspired (and more than a little intimidated!) by all the alums, current students, and Vanderbilt staff that make up the Ingram community. I miss my friends from my Ingram days very much! I feel like I could reach out to any fellow Ingram Scholar at any time for help or support, and I hope that others feel the same way about me.

### **BEST INGRAM SCHOLAR MEMORY**

Hard to choose just one! A special memory was going to church one Sunday with fellow Ingram Scholar Wyatt Smith and some of the students we tutored and mentored in Northwest Nashville. By that time, I had spent years working with kids multiple days per week in this church, but I had never been to a Sunday service. To me that memory encapsulates the best things about the Ingram program: embracing community, seeking to serve, willingness to step out of my comfort zone, and friendship.

### **WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR CURRENT SCHOLARS WHO WANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF THEIR INGRAM SCHOLAR EXPERIENCE?**

Go to events and lectures even if none of your friends are going. Seek to form relationships with people who are different from you. Even though the Ingram seminars (or whatever programming is required these days) can be time consuming, recognize and appreciate the amazing opportunity you have to learn from

accomplished authors, upper level administrators, community leaders, etc.. Never again will you have all of these resources at your fingertips!