

## **Brittany Ryan, B.A. English, Literature, 2008**

*By Melissa J. Rush & Olivia Alsup*

### **Interim Associate Officer of Strategy Planning and Management; Agricultural Department, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**



Being a native of Bowling Green, Brittany Ryan wanted to stay near home. When asked why she chose Western Kentucky University, her answer was simple: a boy. “I’m with the same boy, so I guess it was a very good choice after all. Plus, after receiving my master’s degree, it’s fair to say I am a WKU lifer now.”

Ryan received her Bachelor of Arts in literature in May 2008 from WKU. Her passion for easy access to healthy, organic food led her to continue her education, and in 2013, Ryan received her Master of Arts in Social Responsibility and Sustainable Community, also from WKU. Since graduation though, she has moved to New York City and ultimately settled in Seattle.

Ryan previously held the position of the executive director at the [Queen Anne Farmers Market](#) in Seattle, Washington, where she oversaw the market, and was charged with fundraising, accounting, budgets, marketing, and attracting new vendors. Ryan then began working at the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) as a Recruiting Coordinator for the Recruiting and Talent Acquisition Team. There, she worked with three Executive Recruiters in her division to coordinate travel and interview schedules of potential employees.

Ryan has since moved positions at the Gates Foundation, and currently works in the Agricultural Development Department as the Associate Officer of Strategy Planning and Management. Ryan supports the Director of the Agricultural Department by drafting emails, providing talking points, and prioritizing deadlines and information to ensure that program grants are funded. She also manages a team of nine program assistants who plan events, work on special projects, and coordinate with Program Officers and Deputy Directors. “The work that the Ag. Team does is what I’m super passionate about,” said Ryan. “The grants that we’re funding in Sub-Saharan Africa and

India, especially those that focus on women farmers, are just really incredible to me. That's why I love to work on this team."

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Gates Foundation is working to fund grants in vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics area through their Global Health Department. Although Ryan has not seen any direct effects of the pandemic on her work in the Agriculture Department, she believes this will still have a long-lasting impact on agriculture as a whole. "None of our work is directly related to that, but a lot of things will happen and have happened because of COVID. Farmers not being able to get out to their fields farmers not having places to sell because of restaurants and other suppliers are closed; it affects all of our work greatly. We're definitely committed to helping do what we can in any way that we can."

Ryan feels her English degree from WKU has led to her success at the Gates Foundation because she is constantly using the skills she developed while in school. Critical thinking, content development, writing, and editing have all helped in the position she holds today. Ryan believes that her concentration in Literature has benefited her because is able to look at situations through multiple perspectives.

While at WKU, Ryan felt Professor Rutledge made a great impact on her; she still thinks of his classes daily. Her favorite experience while studying at WKU was travelling with her Hemingway and Faulkner class to Oxford, Mississippi and Chicago.

Her advice to current undergraduate students looking to major in English is that it is one of the most versatile degrees to get. "You can really shape it however you want," Ryan adds, "You can do a lot with it. It's how you sculpt your resume to reflect the work that you've done and use your degree to enhance your interests going forward. My biggest advice is to not be locked down into a box of what you have to do when you graduate."

