

Craig Dezern, M.S.L. B.A. English, 1986

By Lyndsey Pender, Collin Massie, & Madelyn Chambers

Vice President of Global Brand Communications, Hilton Hotels and Resorts

“In the end, we’ll all become stories,’ as Margaret Atwood writes. And whether a journalist or a PR executive, storytelling is at the core of all I do.”



Craig Dezern graduated from Western Kentucky University in 1986 with bachelor’s degrees in English and Journalism. Dezern later earned a Master of Studies in Law degree from [Yale Law School](#). Currently, Dezern is the Vice President of Global Brand Communications for [Hilton Hotels and Resorts](#), the parent company of 17 international hotel and resort chains that welcome more than 160 million guests annually.

Dezern chose WKU for the School of Media’s award-winning Journalism program. As an aspiring journalist, he knew that studying English would provide a different skill set to advance his journalism career. “While good news writing is fact-based, objective and tight, I believed studying literature would expand my communications tool kit, exposing me to new styles of storytelling that could translate into my journalism career,” said Dezern.

Dezern’s English courses at WKU left a lasting impression on his writing “My favorite class was *English Grammar*, taught by Brenda Martin,” said Dezern. “That class truly strengthened my writing and editing skills.” Dr. Frank Steele challenged Dezern to expand his creative writing and literary criticism skills, and the late Professor Pat Taylor impacted Dezern with her enthusiasm for English. Dezern also vividly remembers Joe Boggs’ film and *American Studies* classes. “[They] brought fresh perspectives and pushed me to think more analytically,” said Dezern.

After graduating from WKU, Dezern pursued a journalism career. He enrolled at Yale Law School in 1991, where he received his Master of Studies in Law degree. Dezern wrote as a reporter and eventual editor at the [Orlando Sentinel](#), where he was an award-

winning journalist. Reporting provided the opportunity to write daily and to hone his craft. After nearly a decade at the *Sentinel*, Dezern began his 21-year career working for Disney Parks and Resorts, rising in rank from Managing Editor to Director of Media Relations to Vice President of Global Public Relations to Vice President of Public Relations and Partnership Marketing. His executive experience with Disney prepared him to join Hilton Hotels and Resorts' executive team in 2017.

As the Vice President of Global Brand Communications, Dezern leads all public relations campaigns for Hilton. "Each day I lead a team of top public relations professionals who tell the story of Hilton and its brands, [which are] as diverse as Waldorf-Astoria and Hampton Inn," said Dezern. "We create campaigns, break news, develop content and pitch media – helping guests see the benefit of choosing Hilton as the home base for all their travel destinations." As part of Hilton's 100th anniversary in 2019, Dezern and his team explored the [Hilton Effect](#), which Dezern describes as "the ongoing positive impact that Hilton has had on travelers, communities and team members around the world." Dezern also led Hilton's mission to make its famous DoubleTree chocolate chip cookie the [first food ever baked in space](#). Dezern credits his English degree with giving him the story-telling abilities he uses to capture his audience's attention and promote the Hilton brand.

In his free time, Dezern enjoys reading, walking his dogs, and traveling with his family. He also enjoys reading a "wide swathe of fiction." One of his favorite books is *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles, which happens to be set in a hotel.

Dezern believes that even careers that are not writing-focused require good storytelling, so he recommends that students practice writing outside the classroom. "In an age that prizes storytelling and content, fewer and fewer can string together a cogent, cohesive and compelling narrative," said Dezern. "If you want to stand out from other job applicants, and if you want to stand out from peers at work, hone your writing craft."

