

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

By Melissa J. Rush

Executive Director, Queen Anne Farmers Market

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.

The day of graduation, Ryan remembers being scared and excited simultaneously. With no idea what the future held, she still felt certain her professors had prepared her for what lay ahead. 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.

Ryan is currently the executive director at the [Queen Anne Farmers Market](#) in Seattle, Washington, the only independent farmer's market in the city. Being the executive director, Ryan oversees the market itself while in season, which are the months of June through October. During the remaining months, she is charged with fundraising, accounting, budgets, marketing, and attracting new vendors located in Washington State. "The nonprofit world is filled with a number of beautiful challenges. Since I graduated, I have worked in the nonprofit sector, so I don't really have much to compare it to. Funding and staffing are the two biggest issues at QAFM. Fundraising is a year-round commitment, and money is never flowing in. So, I always have to be ready and willing to tell the story of QAFM. I'm the only full-time staff member of the organization, as well, so that has its own challenges. I am only one person!"

Dr. Ted Hovet, who taught Ryan during her time at WKU, offered generous words about his former student: “In the summer of 2017, I had the good fortune to visit the Queen Anne Farmer’s Market with another English department alum, Melissa Messer. The market is tucked into the historic Queen Anne district of Seattle, and it features local produce, local food trucks, and arts and crafts. It was packed with people of all ages, and was one of the most diverse and well-organized markets I’ve visited. It is great to see the success Brittany Ryan is having with this endeavor—proving again that English grads will succeed in a wide variety of careers.”

Ryan feels her English degree from WKU has led to her success at QAFM because she is constantly using her creative skills to develop marketing, social media content, and fresh website updates. Critical thinking, problem solving, and research are also incredibly important while running a non-profit organization. Ryan believes that working in a self-sustaining environment can present challenges not faced by the corporate world.

Ryan still finds time to be involved in a book club and networking groups, as well as reading daily. The love of books that led her to the English department at WKU is still a vital part of her daily life and she always makes time to spend reading. Some of her current choices include *The Power* by Naomi Alderman, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley and Malcolm X, and *Nasty Women*, a collection of essays compiled by Kate Harding and Samhita Mukhopadhyay.

Her advice to current students is to get involved on campus and make friends with students from all of the colleges on campus, not just those in Cherry Hall or within a student’s major. By meeting people from all different backgrounds, Ryan feels this led to her becoming a much more rounded person and successful in life. Ryan’s deep love of words makes it hard for her to narrow down a single favorite quote, but one she is very fond of is from bell hooks, “Once you do away with the idea of people as fixed, static entities, then you see that people can change, and there is hope.”

