

Leslie Watkins, B.A. English, 1986, and M.A. English, 1988

By Madelyn Chambers

Senior Director of Planned Giving, Western Kentucky University

“Take advantage of every opportunity. It’s just amazing, the things that you can learn in class and out of class that will stay with you forever.”

Leslie Watkins graduated from WKU with a BA in English in 1986 and earned an MA in English from WKU in 1988. She has worked at WKU since 1999, formerly serving as the Senior Director of Development for Potter College of Arts & Letters. Watkins is currently the Senior Director of Planned Giving for WKU.



When asked why she chose to major in English, Watkins responded “Why not?” She loved reading and grammar, and she wanted to follow in her English teacher mother’s footsteps. As a Bowling Green native and a legacy student, she knew WKU would be the right choice for her.

Many English professors helped Watkins succeed during her time at WKU. Dr. Lee Little, professor of English emeritus, taught grammar courses. “Those were probably my favorite courses,” said Watkins, “and he was a role model to me and remains a good friend.” She also cited the late Dr. Hoyt Bowen as her favorite literature professor. “He always told us...when you read something a second time or a third time, you find something new.” Watkins participated in Sigma Tau Delta, the international English honors society; was appointed as a Spirit Master for WKU; and studied Victorian literature in England with the late Dr. James Heldman.

After receiving her master’s degree, Watkins taught English 200 classes at WKU. She taught at Bowling Green High School for one year but quickly realized that teaching high schoolers wasn’t her calling. She took a job at Mammoth Cave National Park as a tour guide while she decided what her true calling was, but she continued to love teaching English 200 at WKU. Watkins’ love for WKU made the position as Director of Development for Potter College of Arts and Letters a no-brainer, and when the Senior Director of Planned Giving position opened, it became the perfect fit.

Watkins explains that “planned giving” is working with folks who want to put Western in their estate plans. So I work with folks who are creating a scholarship through their will or trust provision.” Watkins visits alumni across the United States to coordinate planned giving efforts.

When she isn’t working, Watkins enjoys watching movies based on books, going to plays, and reading mystery or historical fiction books. She has also traveled to England, France, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, and Egypt with her husband.

As a parting piece of advice, Watkins recommends to students, “Don’t be afraid to fail at something. I think there were times, especially when I wrote, that I was a little more conservative than I might have been because I wanted to make a good grade, and I might not have gone out on a limb with a thought. Don’t be afraid to do that.”

