

Allison Willian, M.B.A. B.A. English & Allied Language Arts, 1999

By Max Chambers

Strategic Account Manager, Essilor of America, Inc.

"I was always tasked with sharing my ideas during class discussions. That alone has provided me with the confidence needed to share ideas within the workplace."



Allison Willian (née Gardner) graduated from Western Kentucky University in 1999 with a bachelor's degree in English & Allied Language Arts. She returned to WKU to earn her MBA, graduating in 2012. Willian is currently a Strategic Account Manager at the American division of [Essilor](#), an international eyewear company based in Charenton-le-Pont, France.

When Willian arrived at WKU, she planned to use her English major to teach. Her professors in the Department of English showed her that the career possibilities for English majors are endless. "My WKU professors were absolutely incredible. They always mentored and encouraged me to find a job that I would love, even if it didn't require a degree in English," said Willian. She realized that the critical thinking, reading, and analyzing skills developed from studying English would transfer to any career, so she pursued a non-traditional path with her major.

Willian worked for a direct automotive marketing company while pursuing her bachelor's degree. After graduation, she continued to pursue sales and marketing positions, working for companies such as [Merck](#), [Allergan](#), and [Alcon](#), a Novartis Division. Through Alcon, Willian was offered the opportunity to pursue her MBA free of charge, so she returned to her alma mater to earn her degree in 2012. "There are plenty of sales & marketing positions to be had, but my MBA has definitely set me apart," said Willian. Her MBA and proven work record led to her current senior position at Essilor.

As Strategic Account Manager, Willian continues to use her sales and marketing skills to work with Essilor's clients. "My role focuses on increasing the profitability of my

customers through engagement of programs and promotions,” said Willian. “I visit customers in their offices and I also speak at their large statewide meetings.” Willian also consults on new product launches, and she is currently working to increase her company’s product bundle utilization.

When she isn’t travelling for Essilor, Willian enjoys planning personal trips to explore wineries across the globe. She also enjoys re-reading *Beyond Dark Hills* by Kentucky author Jesse Stuart.

Willian encourages current English students to find their passions outside of English and explore non-traditional paths like she did. “I would tell [students] to be proud of their English degrees. I would also instruct them to read [Business Insider’s article](#) about the CEO of Logitech, Bracken Darrell, and why he loves hiring English majors. He was my manager at GE Appliances years ago. He taught me that I possess a unique skillset because of my education and to leverage that every chance I got, and I have.”

