

Kevin Blankenship, B.A. English, 1998

By Sarah K. Miller

Chief Information Officer, Volunteer State Community College

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Kevin Blankenship, from Hudson, Tennessee, graduated from WKU in 1998. As a student at WKU, Blankenship began his career in higher education as a lab assistant in Academic Technology. "We were helping faculty integrate technology into their classrooms way back in the early days of the internet, Blankenship said. "I left to pursue other opportunities and progressed through my career from a technician to a director of an information technology department at a community college as part of the KCTCS system." He continued his education to receive a Masters of Business Administration from Morehead State University in 2005. Afterwards, he began a job as Director of User Services at Berea College. "While at Berea, I was promoted to the Computer Center Director, then to an Associate CIO. I began my career at [Volunteer State Community College](#) in Gallatin, Tennessee, as Chief Information Officer in March of this year. In many ways, being this close to WKU again has been like coming home."

Blankenship is thankful for his degree because of the focus on effective communication and technological skills. "The communication skills I developed during my degree at WKU have been the foundation of my success. I have always felt that collaboration and communication are essential to my career; even though I am working in an information technology area, working with others is how I achieve success. I feel my degree has been essential in that skillset, and I am very thankful for my background." Even though much of his career deals with information technology, the communication skills as well as empathizing with and connecting with people are essential in Blankenship's opinion, especially as he began to be involved with leadership positions. "Reading Shakespeare, Keats, and Shelley is really about understanding and connecting with human nature, and I think that has contributed to a lot of my success in director positions and as a CIO. A large part of leadership is about forming relationships and connecting with

others, and I think my background in English and the humanities really underpins all that I do in my career. For anyone aspiring to a leadership position in technology, communication and people skills are as essential as understanding networks, security, and software.” Despite his career in a technological field, Blankenship has not left all his background in literature and writing behind. “I have three published chapbooks of poetry as well as several short stories. It is hard to squeeze in time for writing, but it is a good release from the stress of my daily job.”

His advice for students is to be aware of the opportunities the department offers, and he urges students to follow their passions as he did. “Take advantage of your opportunities to communicate and learn from your classes and your peers. Your degree will enable you to be successful no matter what direction you choose to go. This time will be a special time in your lives, and you should look back on it with no regrets. Despite a lot of focus on STEM careers and the ever talked about ‘death’ of humanities, I fully believe there is a need in the world for people who think about why we do the things we do, not just how we do things. In fact, I have spoken with a number of employers who prefer people with humanities backgrounds, as they tend to possess communication and critical thinking skills that make successful employees.”

