



COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT
Awards

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Department of
Biological Sciences

Scott Hodges

BS '82

Endodontist, West Michigan Endodontists

Scott J. Hodges earned a Bachelor of Science at Western Michigan University, studying pre-dentistry in 1982. Hodges was then the only Bronco accepted into the University of Michigan School of Dentistry for the fall of 1982, and upon graduation from dental school, was commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Public Health Service, Indian Health Service and served in Keams Canyon, Ariz. Hodges and his family spent two years serving the USPHS before being accepted at the Rackham Graduate School of the University of Michigan, School of Dentistry, Master of Endodontics program, from which he graduated in 1991.

Hodges is the senior partner at West Michigan Endodontists, as well as an Adjunct Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan, School of Dentistry, Cariology, Restorative Science & Endodontics with over twenty years of volunteer teaching. Hodges has led dental teams, provided dental equipment and participated in over 25 international dental trips, providing care to thousands of patients, education to students, dentists and dental schools. Hodges has participated in similar events in the U.S., including being the dental Chair for the Mission of Mercy, a Michigan Dental Association Foundation, a 100+ dental chair free clinic in Michigan.

Hodges has participated in community activities, being a former Hastings Area School board of education member for ten years. Hodges has received various awards for his accomplishments, and currently has memberships in a multitude of professional and personal associations and organizations.



School of
Communication

Stephanie Slingerland

BA '02, MA '07

Chief Philanthropy Officer, Kellanova (Formerly Kellogg Company); Executive Director, Kellogg Company Fund & Kellogg Company Employees' 25-Year Fund

Stephanie Slingerland is a Lee Honors College graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in Journalism and a Master's Degree in Communication from Western Michigan University. Slingerland joined Kellogg in 2006 and progressed through a variety of communications roles with increasing responsibility until joining the Philanthropy team in 2016. Her previous roles included leading and executing global corporate reputation communications strategies to advance and promote Kellogg Company's reputation with key stakeholders. Before joining Kellogg, Slingerland worked as a technical writer and freelance journalist.

As Chief Philanthropy Officer, Slingerland is responsible for leading and implementing hunger and community impact initiatives as part of Kellanova's social and environmental purpose strategy. She serves as Co-Chair for the company's global Social/Environmental Council and leads impact reporting. In addition, she leads the U.S. giving campaign and other employee engagement activities. Slingerland serves as Executive Director for the Kellogg Company Fund and the Kellogg Employees' 25 Year-Fund, a private foundation assisting 25-year employees experiencing financial hardship.

Slingerland currently serves as 2nd Vice Chair on the Board for the United Way of South Central Michigan, and as Chair of the United Way Worldwide Global Corporate Leadership Advisory Council. She is also a member of the No Kid Hungry Leadership Council. Slingerland serves as Co-Chair on the External Advisory Board for the WMU School of Communication, and on the WMU Alumni Association Board of Directors, the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra Board of Directors and leadership team for the Women of Kellanova employee resource group.



Department of
Comparative Religion

Cynthia Visscher

MA '07, Ph.D. '12

Faculty Specialist II and Graduate Advisor,
Department of Comparative Religion,
College of Arts and Sciences,
Western Michigan University

Dr. Cynthia Visscher spent the first part of her career in social service and health care organizations where she developed an interest in person-centered care, cultural understanding and interfaith relations. Visscher took what she calls a mid-career gift to herself and completed her Master of Arts in Comparative Religion in 2007. Her masters thesis focused on culturally competent healthcare and human services and formed the foundation for the Spirituality, Culture and Health program and much of her teaching and field training work today.

The next step was the WMU doctoral program in Sociology. While writing her dissertation, she worked with Dr. Steve Covell, her thesis advisor in Comparative Religion, to develop an online graduate certificate in Spirituality, Culture and Health. The certificate became the first of its kind in the nation. She then spearheaded the drive to expand the certificate to a full-fledged M.A. program.

Her dedication to the program, her students and the department has led to an outstanding program where students can take their transformative WMU experience back to those they serve in health, social services and community-building professions.



Department of
Economics

Isabel Ruiz

Ph.D. '06

Associate Professor and Fellow in Economics,
Blavatnik School of Government and Harris
Manchester College, University of Oxford

Dr. Isabel Ruiz is an Associate Professor of Political Economy at the University of Oxford. She is a Fellow in Economics at Harris Manchester College where she is also a Tutorial Fellow, and an Adjunct Faculty member at the Blavatnik School of Government. She is Associate Editor for the Oxford Review of Economic Policy (OXREP) and the co-convenor of the Economics of Forced Migration Project (Econforced). Prior to her current position, Ruiz was Associate Professor of Political Economy and Director of Studies in Economics in Continuing Education at the University of Oxford and Assistant Professor in Economics at Sam Houston State University.

Ruiz's research interests are broadly in labor, development and political economy. Her most recent work draws from these three areas and focuses particularly on the economics of migration—with an emphasis on forced migration. Ruiz is co-convenor of the Economics of Forced Migration project, Econforced, a research initiative which provides quantitative evidence on the impacts of displacement on host communities, the displaced and the communities of origin. She is currently working on a research project using conjoint survey experiments to increase understanding of the factors that affect individual attitudes and policy preferences towards migration in the context of south-south migration and in the UK.

Ruiz is a Fellow at the International Migration Institute (IMI) at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, and a Global Labor Organization (GLO) Fellow. She is also an affiliate (and part of the management board) of the Latin American Centre at Oxford.



Department of
English

Henry Sias

BA '98

Executive Director, Pennsylvania
Governor's Advisory Commission on
LGBTQ Affairs

Henry Sias earned his bachelor's degree in English from Western Michigan University in 1998. Born and raised in Detroit, he came to Kalamazoo to study creative writing, with the goal of becoming a novelist, but instead went on to Yale Law School and received his law degree in 2005. Sias now lives in Philadelphia, where he has become a criminal defense and civil rights lawyer, a community advocate, and the city's first transgender candidate for elected office. Sias is currently Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Governor's Advisory Commission on LGBTQ Affairs. Philadelphia Magazine has called him "a trailblazing public figure."

While still a law student, Sias began working on pro bono projects for the LGBT+ community. He also contributed to an amicus brief for a landmark case in which the Supreme Court struck down all laws criminalizing same-sex relations in the United States. After he graduated from law school, Sias clerked for two Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and went on to co-found Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity, a legal nonprofit that has helped to clear the criminal records of thousands of low-income Philadelphians. For over a decade, Sias was also involved in efforts to reform Philadelphia's indigent defense program.

As a civil rights lawyer, Sias has worked to promote marriage equality, fight discrimination and help keep immigrants to the United States from being deported. In his pro bono work, he has represented several transgender individuals with name changes and cases involving medical care and coverage. As an appointee to Pennsylvania's Commission on LGBTQ Affairs, Sias has drafted inclusive language for an executive order on sexual harassment policies for state employees. Sias was additionally a candidate for judge of Philadelphia's Court of Common Pleas in 2017 and 2019.



School of

**Environment, Geography,
and Sustainability**

Cheyenne Lei

MS '16

Research Fellow, Institute for Global Change Biology
in the School of Environment and Sustainability
at the University of Michigan

Dr. Cheyenne Lei possesses a deep appreciation for diversity in teaching, research and educational outreach, grounded in her trio citizenship from Barbados, the United Kingdom and the United States. She earned her Master's degree in Geography, Environmental & Resource Analysis from Western Michigan University in 2016, followed by a Ph.D. in Geography from Michigan State University in 2022. Currently, she serves as a Research Fellow with the Institute for Global Change Biology in the School of Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan.

Lei's research investigates the factors influencing surface reflectivity to understand the mechanisms behind climate warming in various ecosystems. She aims to establish a research and teaching program centered on practical applications of global change biology, particularly at the intersection of climate, agriculture and human-land-atmospheric interactions. Her work received recognition from the Department of Energy in 2021 and serves as an educational resource for high school and outreach programs.

Her efforts encompass a wide range of applications, from ecological research on greenhouse gas exchange to industrial applications like landscape conversion, irrigation optimization and agricultural carbon sequestration. Lei actively engages with high schools, undergraduate student projects, internships and outreach to local farmers and land stakeholders.

Recently, Lei delivered keynote lectures at the United States-China Carbon Consortium, educating over 300 students and scientists on environmental modeling of global warming and ecosystem analysis.

Over the last six years, Lei led a recruitment campaign to encourage the study of geography, ecology, agriculture and atmospheric physics among eager students. She has mentored 10 undergraduate students with diverse backgrounds, many of whom are minorities, women and international students. Most of these students have successfully pursued advanced programs, published research in journals and secured future employment in their respective fields.

Outside her academic pursuits, Lei is a certified United States Motorcycle Safety Foundation instructor, advocating for motorcycle safety while enjoying riding her motorcycle.



Department of
**Geological and
Environmental Sciences**

Franklyn Legall

MS '98, Ph.D. '02

Director, Global Environmental Remediation
and Due Diligence, Procter & Gamble

Dr. Franklyn Legall, who graduated with both a Master of Science and Ph.D. from Western Michigan University in hydrogeology, has over 25 years of experience in Health Safety and Environment (HS&E). Legall is the Director, Global Environmental Remediation and Due Diligence at Procter & Gamble (P&G) located in Cincinnati, Ohio. Legall joined The Gillette Company (Gillette) as an Environmental Remediation Manager at its Boston corporate headquarters in 2003, and then Procter & Gamble via its 2005 acquisition of Gillette. He currently oversees the cleanup of a portfolio of legacy and active contaminated sites worldwide, in various geologic settings and regulatory jurisdictions, with complex technical and regulatory issues and legal challenges, including third-party claims, litigation and insurance recovery.

Legall began his career as a geologist in oil and gas exploration at Petro Canada, Inc., a Canadian multinational, located in Calgary, Alberta. Legall then launched a successful small business in Calgary, which he owned and managed prior to moving to the U.S. Before joining Gillette, Legall spent eight years in environmental consulting in Michigan where he managed environmental projects at the federal, state and local level. Prior to his current role, Legall was a technical leader within the Global Innovation HS&E Group (GI HS&E) at P&G.

Legall holds a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Earth Sciences from the University of Waterloo, in Ontario, Canada. He obtained his Juris Doctor (JD) from the Massachusetts School of Law and is a licensed attorney in Massachusetts and a member of the Massachusetts Bar, and the American Bar Association. He is also a member of the Association of Professional Geoscientists of Alberta (APEGA); the National Groundwater Association (NGWA); and is a Certified Hazardous Materials Manager (CHMM).



Department of
History

Hanmo Zhang

MA '05

Professor, Institute of Chinese Classics,
Renmin University of China, Beijing

Dr. Hanmo Zhang graduated with a Master of Arts from Western Michigan University in 2005, and a Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2012. Zhang previously taught at UCLA and the State University of New York at New Paltz. From the year 2006 on, he has been teaching at Renmin University of China, one of the top universities famous for its leading role in the study of social sciences and humanities.

Since Zhang joined the WMU academic community to be trained in pre-modern Chinese history in 2003, he has published broadly in both English and Chinese on early Chinese history, literature, thinking, textual culture and art history. Zhang's monograph on the nature of early Chinese texts from the perspectives of authorship and text formation has made major contributions to the field of Chinese philology and inspired many to further explore the issues brought up in his work. His groundbreaking study on the archaeologically recovered early Chinese "maps" on silk from tombs built almost 2,200 years ago opens up a totally new way of studying these materials by revealing the art features ignored by scholars ever since the excavation of those tombs half a century ago. Inspired by the theoretical power of the middle-range theories developed both in sociology and in New Archaeology, Zhang has also proposed the necessity of methodological change to do research on history and literature in the same vein of examining primary data to make them supporting evidence for an argument.

Zhang is the author of *Authorship and Text-making in Early China* (Mouton: De Gruyter, 2018) and numerous articles on topics related to early Chinese textual and material cultures. He is currently working on several book projects on early Chinese texts, mythology and art history. These works are expected to be published in the coming two years.



Institute for
**Intercultural and
Anthropological Studies**

Cleothia Frazier

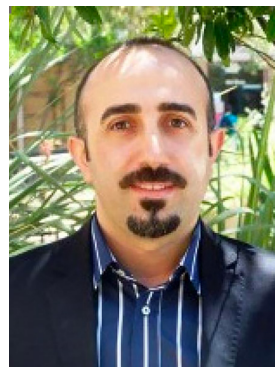
MA '08

Assistant Professor,
Pennsylvania State University

Dr. Cleothia Frazier received her Master of Arts from Western Michigan University in 2008. Frazier was awarded the Robert F. Mahar award for excellence in graduate scholarship. After leaving WMU, Frazier's interest in Medical Anthropology and health disparities led her to pursue a Masters of Health Degree (MPH) from Michigan State University (2010) and then a Ph.D. In Medical Sociology from Vanderbilt University. She successfully defended her thesis in 2021, and spent two years as a postdoctoral scholar at the National Institute of Aging Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development at Duke University Medical School. While there, she was on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee at Duke University Medical School and she was recently invited to join the Editorial Board of The Journal of Health and Social Behavior.

Frazier's work on aging, stress, inequality and sleep is groundbreaking and brings together disparate literatures in Sociology and Behavioral Health to interrogate the intersectional "social determinants of sleep." She has been invited to speak at grand rounds at Duke University, the University of Texas A&M and Indiana University. Her newest projects consider how race and class intersect with retirement and sleep. She has a dozen publications, including peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters.

In the Fall of 2023, Dr. Frazier began a tenure track position at Penn State University in College Park, PA. She has a dual appointment at Penn State as an assistant professor in the Sociology Department and in the Social Science Research Institute.



**Mallinson Institute for
Science Education**

Ozcan Gulacar

Ph.D. '07

Associate Professor of Teaching, Chemistry
Department, University of California, Davis

Dr. Ozcan Gulacar received his Ph.D. (2007) in Science Education: Chemistry from Western Michigan University. Since receiving his Ph.D., Gulacar has worked as a chemistry professor at three universities and is currently an Associate Professor of Teaching in the Chemistry Department at the University of California Davis. Prior to starting his Ph.D. at WMU, he taught high school chemistry in Mongolia for six years.

At UC Davis, Gulacar primarily teaches undergraduate chemistry courses. Since 2017, he has offered Course-based Undergraduate Research Experience seminars to introduce undergraduate students to science education research. In addition to teaching, Gulacar continues to be active in conducting science education research. His research interests include student problem solving and knowledge structures as well as issues related to incorporating sustainability-related topics into instruction. He has received nearly \$6M in external grant funding to support his research and has published 43 peer-reviewed research articles.

Gulacar is known as an innovative and passionate teacher and mentor. He has received many awards related to his research and teaching. These include the Award for Incorporation of Sustainability into Chemical Education from the American Chemical Society (2019), a Fulbright Specialist Award (2020), the College of Letters and Science Teaching Award from UC Davis (2022) and the Best Paper Award from the 5th International Conference on New Approaches in Education (2022).



Department of
Mathematics

Raluca Gera

MS '00, MS '02, Ph.D. '05

Professor, Mathematics; Director,
Chunk Learning

Dr. Raluca Gera, a Professor of Mathematics at the Naval Postgraduate School, serves as the director of CHUNK Learning and the program manager of the Network Science Academic Certificate. Gera is a three-time graduate of Western Michigan University with a Bachelor of Science, Master of Science and Ph.D. in Mathematics.

A forward thinker, Gera is a leader in the classroom and research, with an education strategy focused on quality, effectiveness and innovation in the learning experience as well as teaching experience. She supports personalized education through intentional learning strategies that emphasize excellence, exploration and experimentation in the face-to-face or online environments. Gera empowers students to be confident learners by cultivating curiosity and inquiry, inspiring them to take ownership of their learning experiences. She's been leading innovation education research projects such as Classroom of the Future with the output of Flexible Spaces, Campus of the Future, the Future of Learning and she is the Educational Lead for ASPIRE.



Department of
Philosophy

Coreen Geary

BS '93, BA '93, MA '95

Global Marketing Programs Manager,
Exact Sciences

Coreen Geary is a three-time graduate of Western Michigan University. She received her Bachelor of Arts in philosophy and her Bachelor of Science in public relations graduating magna cum laude in 1993. She was a 1993 Department of Philosophy's Presidential Scholar and a recipient of the department's Friedman Prize. Geary also received her Master of Arts in organizational communication in 1995, during which she was a graduate research assistant, and graduate assistant and moderator for the Third National Communications Ethics Conference.

Currently Geary is a Global Marketing Programs Manager with Exact Sciences and has spent the last few years as a marketing leader in the biotechnology space, most recently in companion diagnostics for oncology precision medicine. Geary's recent successes include starting up new business units and launching new in-vitro diagnostic medical devices in precision oncology. Her career spans healthcare, education, philanthropy, human capital management, genomics, biotechnology, diagnostics and pharmaceutical industries.

Geary has presented at national marketing conferences on the topic of marketing automation technologies and garnering data and insights through martech stack integration. She has also led rebranding and brand integration for several of her employers during her career. Geary is a member of the Southwest Michigan chapter of the American Marketing Association and has served as a board member for several years. She has also served on the board of other professional associations and on Kalamazoo community nonprofit committees.



Department of

Physics

John Novak

BS '10

Post-Doctoral Researcher,
Western Michigan University

Dr. John Novak, who graduated from Western Michigan University in 2010 with a Bachelor of Science in Physics and Mathematics, boasts a dynamic career characterized by innovation and leadership. With a background in nuclear physics and quantum computing, Novak's contributions span fields, including groundbreaking research in quantum annealing and machine learning. Rooted in a robust academic foundation, Novak earned a Master of Science and Ph.D. in Nuclear Physics from Michigan State University.

In the capacity of a Senior Data Scientist at QxBranch in New York City, from December 2016 to May 2017, Novak delved into pioneering endeavors. Novak specialized in machine learning proof of concepts, adeptly balancing classical and quantum computing paradigms. Novak's novel research on utilizing the D-Wave 2 quantum annealer for modeling strongly coupled systems underscored his commitment to pushing the boundaries of computational science, leading to publication.

As the Co-Founder of Standard Cognition, a successful endeavor from February 2017 to July 2019, Novak showcased his entrepreneurial acumen. Guiding the startup from inception to a team of over 90 employees with global offices, Novak assisted in securing an impressive \$85 million in funding. As Global Head of Hardware he oversaw diverse projects, including hardware design, data center setups and the construction of development labs.

From December 2019 to February 2023, Novak held the position of Director of Computer Vision at Rapid Robotics in San Francisco. In this role, Novak spearheaded the development of cutting-edge vision products for manufacturing automation tasks. Leading a team, he guided end-to-end research, algorithm formulation and product development. They harnessed classical computer vision and deep learning techniques, creating innovative solutions that were prototyped on robotic arms, leveraging cameras and point cloud systems.



Department of

Political Science

Sean McCann

BA '93

Senator, State of Michigan, 19th District

Sean McCann (BA '93) was drawn to public service as a student at Western Michigan University. Since graduation, McCann has served the Kalamazoo area both inside and outside government. He currently serves in the Michigan Senate, where he chairs the Energy and Environment Committee and the Appropriations Subcommittee on Universities and Community Colleges.

While at WMU, McCann was elected president of the Western Student Association (WSA). He also participated in the Capital Intern Program and continues to give back to the program by regularly hosting interns. An internship in Senator McCann's office is considered one of the prime placements for Capital Interns.

McCann spent his first years out of college working as executive director of the Vine Neighborhood Association. While working for Vine, he was elected to the Kalamazoo City Commission, where he served five two-year terms. He was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives in 2010 and reelected in 2012 and 2014. He was elected to the Michigan Senate in 2018 and reelected in 2022. In addition to his government service, McCann has worked as the Director of Financial Development for the Greater Kalamazoo Area American Red Cross and as Executive Director for Kalamazoo Friends of Recreation.

McCann's legislative work has been recognized by the Michigan Economic Developers Association (MEDA), the Michigan Association of State and Federal Program Specialists, ISAAC, and Michigan Citizens Action.

McCann is married to WMU Political Science Professor Dr. Priscilla Lambert. Sean and Priscilla reside in Kalamazoo with their children, Alex and Lauren.



Department of
Psychology

Emily Fredericks

Ph.D. '03

Clinical Professor of Pediatrics;
Director, Division of Pediatric Psychology,
University of Michigan

Dr. Emily Fredericks completed her graduate training in clinical psychology at Western Michigan University. Her training included an internship at Duke University Medical Center, which focused specifically on pediatric psychology, a branch of psychology that blends child clinical and health psychology. After internship, she completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan, C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, where she received additional training in the treatment of children and adolescents with chronic health conditions.

Fredericks is currently a Professor of Pediatrics and Director of the Division of Pediatric Psychology at the University of Michigan Medical School and Mott Children's Hospital. She serves as the attending psychologist within the Pediatric Liver Transplant program, where she provides comprehensive clinical care to pediatric transplant recipients and their families. Fredericks' primary research activities focus on the promotion of medication adherence, health care transitions and health-related quality of life among children and adolescents living with liver disease and solid organ transplant. Additional research interests include the promotion of self-management skills in other pediatric populations, including youth living with Type 1 Diabetes. Fredericks' research activities are supported through funding from the University of Michigan and the National Institutes of Health.

Fredericks has authored or co-authored 59 peer-reviewed papers, 8 book chapters and is currently Principle Investigator or Co-Principle Investigator on 10 active grants. The total funds of those 10 grants exceed \$95 million. She has served as Principle Investigator or Co-Principle Investigator on 22 other grants.



Department of
Spanish

Julián Ramírez

BA '12

Principal of Southwest Middle High School -
Academia Bilingüe (7-12),
Grand Rapids Public Schools

Julián Ramírez was a first-generation TRIO college student at Western Michigan University who enjoyed great academic success. His work early on in the development of the Spanish with Internship and Service learning was central and fundamental to a successful collaboration with several community agencies, Kalamazoo Public Schools and the Kalamazoo Community Foundation. He helped to bring Dolores Huerta to campus for the César Chávez celebration and march that brought almost 1,000 local students and community members to campus. Dolores is the U.S. labor leader and civil rights activist who co-founded the United Farmworkers Association, together with César Chávez himself. Ramírez was the driving force behind this project.

After graduating from Western, Ramírez worked as a Spanish teacher for six years in Grand Rapids and Bridgman districts in Michigan. In 2019, he left the classroom to begin his administration career as an assistant principal for a dual language PK-8 program in Grand Rapids Public Schools. In 2021, he accepted a new position for the dual-language Southwest Middle High School — Academia Bilingüe (7-12) in Grand Rapids, where he is currently the principal. He was invited to deliver the keynote address at the National TRIO Day celebration this past March 28, 2023, where he spoke of the challenges he faced and encouraged those in the audience "to be the storytellers of their own stories."

Ramírez is also in his 17th year of military service with the United States Army Reserves. During his seventeen years of service, he has had the opportunity to serve in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2011 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Most recently, between 2021 and 2022, he was mobilized to Wisconsin and Washington D.C. to support the Afghan refugee resettlement mission in support of Operation Allies Welcome. He has received countless awards and decorations during his service.



School of
**Public Affairs and
Administration**

Kara Wood

MPA '06

Executive Director, Grand Action 2.0

Kara Wood is the Executive Director of Grand Action 2.0, a not-for-profit economic development organization responsible for the private sector efforts that supported the Van Andel Arena, DeVos Place, renovation of the Grand Rapids Civic Theater, among other transformational Grand Rapids projects. She leads Grand Action 2.0 in its mission to identify downtown and adjacent neighborhood building and transformational capital-intensive projects, galvanize public opinion and support, leverage public and private investments to formulate and implement funding strategies including securing private sector funding in support of requests for primary public sector funding. Prior to assuming this role, she was WMU's Associate Vice President for community partnerships in the Office of Government Relations.

Wood holds a Masters of Public Administration degree from Western Michigan University's School of Public Affairs and Administration and a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration from Michigan State University Eli Broad College of Business, and is a Certified Economic Developer. She serves on a variety of boards including the Michigan Community Capital Board of Directors, the African American Arts and Music Festival Board and the Great Lakes Commercial Capital.

She has over 20 years of experience in community and economic development and has focused her career on the unique challenges of revitalizing urban core cities through public-private partnerships and related policies and practices. She works collaboratively with business and industry to build civic and corporate partnerships of mutual benefit and lead the implementation of programs and initiatives that focus on developing and fostering community partnerships to support the development of talent, innovation and entrepreneurship.



Department of
**World Languages
and Literatures**

Mitchell Zajac

BS '12, BA '12, MS '13,

Patent attorney, Butzel Long

Mitch Zajac was a starting linebacker and four-time varsity letter winner on the WMU football team (2008-2011). He graduated from the Lee Honors College in 2012 with a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering and a B.A. in German. He received many awards as an undergraduate, including the Boughner Outstanding Engineering Athlete Award, the Mid-American Conference Scholar and the Rothfuss German Award. He was a member of Phi Kappa Phi and Tau Beta Pi and a Rhodes Scholarship finalist.

In 2013, Zajac received his M.S. in Mechanical Engineering, also from Western, publishing two theses on automotive thermal systems. He worked at Fiat-Chrysler Automobiles from 2012 to 2017 as a thermal systems engineer, program manager and auditor. Zajac also began as an adjunct professor at Trine University in 2015, teaching classes in engineering and law, which he continued to do until 2021.

In 2017, Zajac received his J.D. from Cooley Law School, with a concentration in intellectual property and litigation. Since 2017, he has been a patent lawyer at the firm Butzel Long. His specialties are automotive intellectual property, regulatory and emissions compliance, and international trade law.

He has coached football and track since graduating from Western, currently at Howell High School. At Western he was the co-community service coordinator for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the coordinator for Hurricane Sandy disaster relief. He was a county commissioner on the Livingston County Board of Commissioners (2021-2022) and is currently the president of the Board of Directors of the Association for Child Development. He remains close and committed to Western. He is a committee member of the Lee Honors College Advisory Council, director of the WMU Alumni Board and Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors at Cooley Law School.