Brian King, Ph.D.; Director - Interlayers Technology at Solutia, Inc., a subsidiary of Eastman Chemical Company, discusses his career path since graduating from the College and how the Department of Polymer Science has contributed to his success.

How has the College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering (CPSPE) influenced your career choice?
My experience at CPSPE was very important for influencing my career choice. The breadth of the CPSPE academic and research programs offers an opportunity to learn about different ways to apply principles of polymer science and engineering to add insight to, and ultimately solve, a wide variety of technical challenges. Additionally, the large network and broad experiences of the faculty and alumni present the possibility to learn more about different industrial, governmental, and academic career choices through their first-hand experiences. As I neared the completion of my doctoral research, discussions with my advisor, Professor Harwood, and other professors and alumni led me to choose a career in industry. Finally, it was through the interview process with several different companies, large and small, that I came to decide that a career with Eastman Chemical Company was the best choice for me and I’ve been extremely happy with my choice ever since.

How has CPSPE prepared you for your career?
First and foremost, the CPSPE provided a first-rate education in polymer science and polymer engineering that forms the foundational knowledge, practical experience, and confidence to take on difficult technical problems. Equally important to the technical knowledge, my experience at the CPSPE also taught me how to solve problems with the intellectual curiosity and scientific rigor needed to find good solutions. Defining a problem well, using available resources to collect background information, formulating reasonable hypotheses, designing meaningful experiments, and data analysis are all critical skills that are complementary to the technical knowledge needed to find differentiated solutions for difficult challenges. Finally, during my experience at CPSPE and since, I’ve come to recognize that the most meaningful and impactful inventions, developments, and scientific learnings often tend to be from the results of effective and diverse teams. Learning how to work with others having different expertise and perspectives is an important skill that I started to learn during my graduate schooling and still continue to practice today.

What has your journey been like since graduating from CPSPE?
Eastman Chemical Company is a global specialty chemical company that produces a broad range of advanced materials, additives and functional products, specialty chemicals, and fibers that are found in products people use every day. As a world leader in diverse markets, Eastman is focused on delivering innovative and technology-based solutions while maintaining our commitment to safety and sustainability. Working for a company like Eastman offers me the privilege to work in different fields to invent, develop, and commercialize innovative materials that enhance the quality of life in a material way. In 1999, I hired into Eastman’s Polymer Technology Division that invents and develops engineering plastics for a variety of durable, medical, and packaging applications. Since my initial plastics assignments I have had the opportunity to take on diverse technical challenges in support of different businesses including developing materials used in optical films, to differentiated resins and additives for coatings, and now with functional interlayers used in laminated glass applications. In addition to the variety of technologies that I’ve been exposed to, I have also been presented opportunities to take on several leadership roles from leading projects, to leading joint developments with external partners, to group leadership and now Technology Management. In each new assignment I’ve learned a little more about different technologies, manufacturing capabilities, businesses, intellectual property, and customers, and it is that variety of experiences and seeing future possibilities that I continue to find exciting about my journey.
What is your career path now?
Although I will always be a polymer scientist at heart and greatly enjoy working with our teams to navigate technical challenges, my current career path in technology management includes many additional responsibilities. A primary role of a Technology Director at Eastman is to work with our Business, Manufacturing, and other functional partners to devise, develop, and execute a technology strategy that supports the continued growth of our businesses. That strategy execution includes leading the team with courage and optimism by providing vision, focus and direction, managing the technology project portfolio, and managing resource capabilities to support current and future growth efforts. Perhaps most importantly, my current career path offers a great opportunity to mentor, coach, and develop the talented young scientists and engineers who will become our next generation of leaders all over the world. This career path allows me to contribute to the strategic direction of the enterprise, shape the technology platforms and product strategies, develop new applications, and influence the directions and success of our businesses for years to come.

Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself or your family?
I currently live in Springfield, Massachusetts with my dog Bailey and we take frequent weekend trips to see my parents, brothers, and rest of my family in New York and the surrounding northeastern United States. I still enjoy sports and games of all kinds although I don’t participate as much as I used to. I have also been fortunate to travel a great deal over the past few years and learn about other countries and cultures, particularly in Western Europe and Asia.

Finally, in closing I did want to share that Crystal, my partner of the past fifteen years, unexpectedly passed away in November 2016. Although the last year has been a difficult adjustment for me, our family, and our friends, I did want to share something I learned from my personal misfortune… Much of this Alumni Spotlight has focused on career paths, work responsibilities, and ambitions. I would like to use these closing comments to simply remind everyone to consider keeping an appropriate balance between your work life and your home life. Remember that many of us work tirelessly for long hours and strive toward excellence and growth to provide a comfortable living for, and assistance to, those family, friends, and organizations we care about. It can be easy to get caught up in work, experiments, travel, meetings, conferences, and paperwork that compete with other priorities outside work that are equally important. Take some time to reflect on your priorities and ensure that you are taking the time for what is important to you – finding that balance makes for an enjoyable, fruitful, and satisfying career and life.