Nathan Schmitz is currently studying to earn his doctorate in Polymer Science under Dr. Li Jia. Read more about Nathan and his academic journey in CPSPE.

How does your major fit into your life’s plan?
I’ve had enough life plans to know that they are of very limited usefulness at best. I think it is much better to have goals and to expect that some degree of flexibility, patience, and persistence will be required to pursue them. One of my life goals has been to obtain a Ph.D. in the sciences, however I wasn’t able to go directly into graduate school after acquiring a B.S. in chemistry (2009) due to having started a family at an early age. At the present, my wife and I have a son (age 12), daughter (age 10), and a newborn son (age 2 months)! 10 years after most students start a Ph.D. program, I am back in school and pursuing the dream!

Why did you choose The University of Akron, specifically the College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering?
In the 5 years preceding my time at The University of Akron, I worked for a local general lighting company and it was there that I first became enticed by the expansive field of polymers. Being that my wife would have to interrupt her career if we were to move elsewhere, it was a fortuitous coincidence that two of the leading polymer science programs were here in northeast Ohio. After carefully reviewing the research interests of all faculty members, I decided that the ongoing research at The University of Akron was the most interesting. Halfway through the program, I can say with confidence that I made the right choice!

Who is your favorite professor (or staff person) and why?
While I am lucky to have been taught by so many great professors, Dr. Li Jia gets the award for being my favorite. He is enthusiastic, highly competent, and our research interests overlap.

What are your plans after graduation?
That is 3 long years away. If I have my way, I will work as a post-doctoral researcher, become a professor, and continue to learn within academia until the day I die. If my wife has her way, I will return to the private industry and bring home a slightly higher salary than I would as an assistant professor.

Anything else you would like to share?
I have quite a few somewhat unconventional hobbies, which have all been put on hold for the duration of my time at The University of Akron, and I look forward to starting them up again upon graduation. I enjoy backpacking, shooting sports (NFAA Indoor Archery and USPSA), SCUBA diving, and rock climbing. One of the long term goals that my wife and I have are to hike all ~2,200 miles of the Appalachian Trail.