



TRANSPORTATION SPOTLIGHT

PROFESSIONAL: KAYLA HOLCOMB

NAME: Kayla Holcomb

COMPANY: Gannett Fleming

TITLE: Transportation Operations Specialist

COLLEGE: Villanova University

DEGREE: Masters of Science in Civil
and Environmental Engineering

Q: How did you select your college major or certification program?

A: I have a distinct memory as a child of taking the bell off my bike, walking over to my dad's tool box in the garage and searching for the right tools to help me take the bell apart and put it back together. I had a fascination for figuring out how things worked. From then on, I knew I was more of a left-brained person. The summer going into my senior year of high school, I attended the PAVE program at Vanderbilt University. It was a five-week summer program designed for rising high school seniors and first-year college students who were planning to enter a college; engineering, pre-medical/healthcare, science, or technology based undergraduate program. This program was to help me decide if an engineering, medical/healthcare, science, or humanities degree was really the ideal undergraduate path for me. A typical daily schedule included three hours of lecture or lab work, one-and-a-half hours of course work applications/recitations, and one to two hours of homework.

Sure enough, at the conclusion of the program, I was set on pursuing an undergraduate degree in engineering. The next step was to figure out which discipline I wanted to pursue. One of the courses I had to take my freshmen year of college was basically an introduction to the different disciplines of engineering – civil, mechanical, electrical, chemical, and computer. After learning more about civil engineering, I was fascinated. To me, civil engineering was the jack-of-all-trades discipline that was an incremental part of creating the world around us. Everything from tall skyscrapers and complex stadiums to bridges, railways, highways, and tunnels. Additionally, it was appealing to me that I would have a monument to show that "I was there". A profession in civil engineering would provide me with a huge sense of accomplishment to make it all worthwhile. I would know all the challenges and effort that went into transforming the blueprints into a fully functional structure. With my undergraduate discipline set, I was ready to hit the ground running and build the world around me.

Q: What was the biggest influence in your selection of career pathway?

A: I touched on this a little bit in my answer above, but I think what influenced me the most in the selection of my career pathway is three-fold. First, as a civil engineer I get to help build really cool things and turn ideas and concepts into reality. Second, the idea of beautifying and improving the quality of life in my community sounds intriguing to me. Lastly, I would have the opportunity to leave my mark forever. Iconic sites like the Empire State Building, Hoover Dam, and Eiffel Tower are tokens of the hard work and expertise of civil engineers.

Q: What attracted you to the transportation industry?

A: What lured me to this profession was the fact that transportation is central to improving the lives of people. By continuously developing and upgrading the services and facilities of the public, it not only gives me a sense of responsibility towards humanity but also brings forth a sense of satisfaction that the work carried out by all Civil Engineers contributes significantly to the wellbeing of the society.



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Q: What is your favorite aspect of your job?

A: I don't know if I can pick one favorite thing about my job. Aside from knowing my work helps the community around me, I also really love the collaboration and teamwork involved in my job. I think it's really important to have a dynamic group of people you work with to bounce ideas off of or ask for professional/career advice. Fortunately, the team I have at Gannett Fleming is a great support system.

Q: How do you/your company make a positive impact on society/our community?

A: I think that all engineers actively work to make a positive impact on society/our communities just through the nature of our jobs. Building healthy and vibrant communities is part of our DNA – the desire to create a better world is at the heart of what we do. More specifically, Gannett Fleming employees not only connect to communities through projects but also through volunteering to make the world a better place. For example, through Gannett Fleming's sustainability program, many employees volunteer for many causes that provide access to clean water, improve health and sanitation, and support charitable organizations and sustainable development initiatives. Additionally, Gannett Fleming employees foster an interest in engineering careers through involvement in the Future City Competition, the ACE (architecture, construction, and engineering) Mentor Program, job shadowing, and other STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math)-related programs.





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Q: What's the most interesting thing you have been able to do in your professional career?

A: I think I've really enjoyed working on a variety of project types in a variety of locations across the United States. Having a varied project portfolio helps develop a diverse skill set. I enjoy the diversity and the different challenges each project entails.

Q: What makes you get up each morning excited about your profession?

A: Knowing that I may face a new challenge makes me excited about my job every day. There are really no two days that are similar in our field. I like being challenged and kept on my toes so to speak. The client expects that you are enthusiastic and interested in their project. Being excited about my profession every day makes it that much easier to go the extra mile to come up with innovative solutions and show that I can meet the challenge.

Q: If you could go back to high school and select any elective course to take that would have better prepared you for the future, what would it be?

A: To be honest, I don't remember what electives were even offered at my high school. But just as a general statement, if you seem to have an interest in STEM related careers, I would urge you to take elective courses that are related to those areas. Soak up as much knowledge as you can and get as much exposure to those areas so you can get a better understanding of what's ahead.

Q: What advice would you share with K-12 students that are considering your profession?

A: Pursue whatever your interests may be with excitement. There is much that the transportation industry has to offer and it is certainly an industry that is ever-changing. Since traffic and population growth create demand for more transportation infrastructure, but many jurisdictions don't have sufficient money or space to build more roads and rail, leaders in the transportation industry must rethink the very nature of existing transportation systems. Seems to me like the possibilities are endless in terms of career and innovation opportunities.

Constantly push yourself out of your comfort zone and continually challenge yourself. Work hard as most things in life worth-while are never given to you, they are earned. Be innovative and always express your ideas. Network and develop lasting relationships everywhere you go. You never know who you will meet. You will need people on your side to mentor you, recommend you, or even partner with you in business.

The transportation world is full of opportunities. It's your job to go out there, explore, and pursue the opportunities that are going to make transportation better for everyone.