

TRANSPORTATION SPOTLIGHT



LIESEL GOETHERT

COMPANY:

KCI Technologies, Inc.

TITLE:

Senior Transportation Planner

TRAINING ORGANIZATION OR COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY:

Undergraduate: Univ. of Tennessee-Knoxville, Bachelor of Arts – Environmental Studies (Concentration: Geography)

Graduate: Univ. of Memphis, Masters of City and Regional Planning

CERTIFICATION/DEGREE:

Post-Graduate Certification; American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP)

memphis.edu/setwc



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

A: Going into undergrad I didn't know what I wanted to study nor did I have a specific career in mind. Therefore, I needed and wanted flexibility in my major, both in the sense of keeping me on a four-year track if I decided to change it, as well as in the types of careers I could ultimately pursue. I selected Environmental Studies based on my interests in science and the outdoors. I concentrated in Geography given my interests in communities and sustainable development. This is where I was introduced to the field of city planning.

A "trade-off" of choosing an Interdisciplinary Program (at least for my program) was that I would likely need a Master's degree or at least some level of additional education to further hone my skills and knowledge in a specific arena, such as law, education, or city planning. I contacted a municipality known for its sustainable practices to explore internship opportunities. I completed a brief 4-month stint with their city planning department and subsequently entered a graduate program the following fall.

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

A: My desire for flexibility - to have career opportunities in a variety of venues as well as topical areas.

Q: What attracted you to the transportation industry?

A: Honestly, I applied for a range of jobs after grad school and transportation was the door that opened. However, what has kept me attracted to the industry is how dynamic transportation is. New concepts like Uber or Bird scooters can arrive in a city and turn mobility on its heels within a matter of months. Large developments can be constructed or close subsequently impacting traffic patterns and surrounding land uses. This definitely keeps things interesting when planning transportation systems for communities. Plus, the transportation industry impact everyone's lives and is a critical component to the sustainability of our cities, states, and nation.

Q: What is your favorite aspect of your job?

A: The spectrum of projects I get to work on, including the variety of topics, settings (urban and rural), and scope. These have included long-range transportation plans, bicycle and pedestrian plans, safety studies, corridor plans, and neighborhood traffic calming design plans. Being able to see tangible results, such as the construction of a neighborhood traffic circle or the striping of new bike lanes, is really encouraging after putting in a lot of time and effort.

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

A: Our office specializes in traffic engineering and transportation planning. We provide consultant services to a range of customers, including municipalities, counties, state departments of transportation, as well as property developers. Products we produce (such as roadway and traffic signal design plans, long-range planning documents, traffic impact studies, and transportation safety studies) help communities to maximize their dollars by identifying strategic investments to their transportation system that will provide the greatest benefit to the greatest amount of users.

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

A: One of my more interesting projects was a slow-moving vehicles safety study. Spurred by a boom in tourism and underscored by troves of bachelorette parties, the number and types of slow-moving vehicles (dubbed locally as "transportainment") was ever increasing in a busy downtown core as city regulations could not keep up. Tractors pulling wagons of parties, party buses, pedicabs, mobile hot tubs, "souped" up golf carts, bars on pedal bikes, and horse carriages are a few of the transportation modes that are vying for space in the intertwined business and tourism district, not to mention the commuter, foot, transit, and delivery traffic. Identifying use limitations, safety requirements, per-determined routes, and parking areas for 4 of the slow-moving vehicle types was definitely outside the realm of the typical transportation topics we usually study.

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

A: Volunteering and serving others has always been important to me. At its most basic level, I am ultimately serving the residents of the communities I work with. I am their advocate and liaison to community officials and decision-making bodies through the plans, studies, and designs we complete. Thinking about my tasks in this manner helps to keep me energized and motivated to do quality work day in and day out.



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

A: One that focused on mastering computer skills specific to creating complex documents (ones that require advanced referencing and formatting). I would have wanted to develop a solid intermediate skill level in Microsoft Office programs so that I could quickly develop high quality, visually appealing documents (i.e., studies and plans). This course would have also equipped me with a strong foundational knowledge of ArcGIS, a software used to analyze data and make maps for planning documents. Having these skills not only makes your work more interesting and efficient, but it also increases your marketability as a team asset (i.e., job security) and sets you apart from other job applicants when pursuing new opportunities.

Q: What advice would you share with students or anyone considering your profession?

A: Gain exposure. Get involved in the planning of your own community. Attend community meetings when a plan is being developed or a study is being completed on a specific transportation topic. If you live in an urban area, look for local chapters of professional organizations to identify seminars, networking, and panel events open to the public to gain exposure to important topics within the industry, as well as meet a variety of professionals. Example organizations include the American Planning Association (APA), Urban Land Institute (ULI), and Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE). Finally, take advantage of your student status and pursue intern opportunities, or even job shadow, to gain exposure to a variety of sub-disciplines within transportation planning.