

Graduate Student

Master in City Planning Candidate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology



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Macalester College, Class of 2014



Describe your current position and the journey that led you here.

For the past year, I worked as a Project Manager for the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC). I originally came into this job in 2015 with the New York City Urban Fellows Program, a nine-month fellowship program focused on public service. At NYCEDC, my work was focused on a wide range of projects, including site, industry, and neighborhood scale. After three years at NYCEDC, I will be starting graduate school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) this Fall for a Master's in City Planning ended, and I will be starting graduate school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the Fall for a Masters in City Planning.

For my undergraduate degree, I went to Macalester College in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. When I initially started at Macalester, I had a strong interest in economic, social, and racial justice, but I didn't know where to focus all of the passion and interest I had for these subjects. With my Geography major, minor in Political Science, and Urban Studies concentration, I was able to essentially get an undergraduate degree in City Planning, which combined all of my passions.

What does an average work day and year look like for you?

I would describe my role as a Project Manager as the person on the ship who runs around to plug all the holes to make sure that the ship stays afloat. There is a lot of community engagement and interagency coordination in my work. In my field, things are very cyclical. Most projects get planned for a number of months, then go through public review. Depending on the stage the project is at, my daily duties are different. However, I do a fair amount of field visits and working out in the community.

What are the best and worst things about working in your current role or sector?

The best thing about working in my sector is that it is a really good way to get to know a place. When I first moved to NYC I didn't have any experience here, and working for the government and planning helped expose me to the ins and outs of the city.

The most challenging aspect is that there is not a "one size fits all" solution, especially in New York, which is such a diverse place. There are a lot of different histories in the communities, and the policies all impact people and communities differently. The hardest part is trying to figure out how to "right size" the plans and policies that are being implemented and ensure that they are reaching the people in a way that has the most benefit.



Do you feel like you have to financially sacrifice to be in your field? Are you happy with the pay?

Yes and no. If you are working in New York, in any sector, you need to find a way to make ends meet. At this point in my career, I'm comfortable; however, in the public sector, you are often not paid as much as peers in the private sector. There are a lot of people in this field that work for the government for a few years and then go into the private sector or consulting to make more money. I think that there is security in the public sector, more so than in the non-profit sector. They often have secure jobs, possibilities to be in a union, etc.

What has been the biggest impact Bonner has had on your life or work?

Bonner has helped me develop the language of vocation: thinking less of service as a hobby, but more of how you live a life of service and how you make your service work intersect with your commitments to justice, equity, and more.

Do you stay engaged in the community through work or life? How

One thing that I try to do is either go to interesting talks or events that organizations are having that I find interesting. One thing that I have struggled the most with post-college is the work-life balance. Because of this, I try to be more creative in how I am involved in the community. I enjoy brewing my own beer, so every couple of months my roommate and I hold a beer release party where we collect donations for local community groups.

What do you wish you knew as a recent Bonner graduate preparing for this field?

One of the best ways to get involved is when you are in college (or after), stop to either read newspaper articles or take a class that you may not have too much experience in. For me, it was really powerful as a freshman and sophomore in college to be taking classes that challenged the things that I took for granted - things like living in a city or experiencing different topics related to housing and transportation. In regards to getting into the field, there are a number of great fellowship programs: NYC Urban Fellows Program and the City Halls Fellows Program in San Francisco.