

## Twice We Said Ava Doner Would Be Proud; We Were Right Both Times

WTS-LA SCHOLARSHIPS: A GOOD CAUSE AND THE EFFECT



*Camille Fink (American Planning Association (APA) senior editor), Photo © Grotto Media, 2014*

You can learn quite a lot from a bus. American Planning Association (APA) senior editor Camille N. Y. Fink, PhD discovered a new way of looking at transportation while riding many of them in Los Angeles.

“My background was in sociology and I’ve always been fascinated with social interactions and the ways in which we engage with the world around us. So I decided to do an ethnographic study of bus riding for my dissertation. I spent countless hours riding buses in Los Angeles, watching people, and participating in that world as a researcher-rider. I used the data from that fieldwork to understand the social and spatial dimensions of the transit experience and the implications for the management, operations, and design of transit systems.” Her research also covered a range of interesting transportation topics including transit security, women’s transportation-related safety issues, ridership factors, etc.

Fink’s academic rigor and determination combined with her maverick approach also led to another substantive reward. WTS-LA awarded Fink the Ava Doner Memorial Scholarship *twice* in 2002 and 2004, as a master’s degree and PhD student, respectively. Winning these awards honoring Ava Doner left quite an impression.

“The awards certainly helped fund my studies. But they also were very important to me symbolically. They demonstrated that people in WTS-LA believed in my potential in the field of transportation. WTS-LA acknowledged and invested in me. That’s a very powerful message to send to a student who is starting out in a brand new field and on a new career path.”

Fink earned her master’s degree and PhD in urban planning from UCLA. Today, as the *Planners Press* and *PAS Reports* senior editor for the APA, she’s involved in all phases of the publication process, which in turn, compels her to keep up to date on topics related to planning. But her work at APA also required a sacrifice—relocating from Los Angeles to Chicago.

“It was a big move, but it’s been a great change for me. I love being in a new city with a great transit system, where I drive my car once a week at the most. And it’s a fantastic city for walking and urban exploration, two of my favorite pastimes.”

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Though she credits many factors for her success, she believes WTS-LA played a pivotal role.

“WTS is an immense resource for people in transportation—through networking, employment help, mentoring, programs, leadership and professional development, and of course scholarships. The list of tangible benefits of membership goes on and on. But what I think is paramount, what is really invaluable, is what the organization represents through its work—the commitment to fostering and enabling the success of women in transportation. Nothing is more important than that. And while transportation has become more diverse over the years, women in the field still benefit greatly from having access to role models, mentors, and colleagues through WTS.”

You can learn quite a lot from a bus. Camille Fink clearly has. But she’s also done more. Embodying WTS-LA pioneer Ava Doner, she has used two WTS-LA scholarships to further her career in transportation.



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