

## With Doctorate in Hand, She Looks to Become a Real Road Scholar

### MEMBER PROFILE



*Jielin Pan (PhD candidate at the University of New Mexico), Photo courtesy of New Mexico Department of Transportation*

Jielin Pan is not your typical PhD student. A summer intern at the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) and a PhD candidate at the University of New Mexico, this WTS Los Angeles member has very specific ideas about how she wishes to use her education.

“After getting my PhD, I plan to look for a job in the transportation industry, working in the field and applying what I’ve learned. Most people feel that if you earn a PhD, you should take a faculty position or go into research. But for me, I want to translate my knowledge and use it in the real world to do real things. There’s a big gap between PhD studies and other degrees. So it seems like a waste not to use that knowledge in the field and solve real-world problems.”

But a PhD will not be her only training and education. She holds two bachelor’s degrees, one in international economics and trade from Wuhan University, one of China’s top 10 comprehensive universities, and one in mining engineering, as well as a master’s degree in mining engineering, from Wuhan University of Technology, one of China’s prestigious technical universities. She’s also an expert in geotechnical data analysis. And she’s using that education in her work with NMDOT.

“I’m helping them do a traffic study. I attend construction and plan review meetings. I do anything related to transportation and traffic planning and design. I also go into the field and observe construction operations, evaluate traffic signal timing, pavement condition, striping, drainage and roadway signage, collect traffic data and conduct field survey for roadway design. For my PhD, I’m researching asphalt aging to understand how asphalt ages before and after oxidation and how its property changes before and after oxidation. I’m writing my dissertation now and hope to finish it by August, defend it, and graduate in the fall.”

Working at NMDOT has been an exceptional experience for Pan. She credits NMDOT for allowing her to explore a vast range of transportation work, while continuing her studies.

“Working at NMDOT has been a wonderful experience. I have been able to put my theoretical knowledge to use in a practical way in many different areas. They have been extremely supportive.”

Pan also had another compelling reason to choose New Mexico for her studies. “My husband got an offer from the university and we wanted to be together.”

Pan is a relatively new member of WTS-LA, but the organization has already made a profound impression.

“At the beginning of this year, I presented at the Transportation Research Board (TRB) annual conference. And I received an email from WTS explaining that they were having a reception at the TRB annual meeting. So I registered for the reception. And I thought it was amazing. I hadn’t seen any organizations out there that help women with their careers. So I was very excited. There is no chapter in New Mexico, so I joined WTS Los Angeles. And I really like California. I hope someday to find a job in California, particularly Los Angeles. But I’m open to exploring opportunities throughout the country.”

Soon-to-be-doctor Jielin Pan is not your typical doctoral student. And that is a very good thing for the New Mexico Department of Transportation and anywhere else Pan brings her unique talent.