

## Mixer Cements Future for TRB Students with Concrete Advantages for WTS-LA Corporate Partners

### COMMITTEE REPORT



*Andrina Dominguez (USC), Cassandra Gogreve (USC), Todd Nguyen, and Rachel Lindt (UCLA), Photo © John Livzey, 2016*

Networking can be challenging. So WTS Los Angeles Transportation Résumé Book (TRB) Chair and Caltrans Transportation Planner Todd Nguyen found a way to make networking simpler, even more valuable, and fun for young transportation students.

“Asking someone in their early 20s what they want their future to be is overwhelming. I created the WTS TRB mixer to put the students before a diverse range of transportation companies and agencies so that it could help them figure out their career goals and sharpen their people skills. My hope for the mixer was to give students a rare-but-comfortable opportunity to have candid conversations with transportation professionals and really ask anything they wanted, while highlighting the prominence of WTS.”

And it worked. Held at Caltrans District 7 headquarters, the TRB mixer brought together more than 25 students and 13 transportation professionals from Cambridge Systems, CH2M Hill, Hatch Mott MacDonald, HDR, Iteris, Jacobs Engineering, JL Patterson, Port of Long Beach, and STV Inc. The debuted mixer proved to be a perfect complement to this year’s TRB.

In 2015, the TRB set a record by receiving résumés from more than 100 students across ten universities. Nguyen delivered the TRB exclusively to WTS-LA corporate partners on May 8. But Nguyen wanted to better prepare students for the realities of the working world. He thought networking was the perfect place to start.

“Networking is not usually taught in school. Having gone through the recruitment process myself, I want to help students sharpen their networking skills, as they are skills that students must have. The mixer was an opportunity for students to sharpen those skills as they build relationships and connections. Any student who’s mastered ‘friend making’ is well on their way to a successful career.”

Nguyen taught students what he sees as the four key elements to make someone a good networker:

- **Mindset/Attitude:** View networking as a learning opportunity. Approach people as if you were talking to an old friend. Introduce yourself and ask open-ended questions.
- **Research:** Research companies that will participate. Do homework and learn as much as possible prior to the event.

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- **Listen:** People genuinely enjoy talking about their projects and companies. Take the opportunity to really listen and ask relevant questions.
- **Follow Up:** Set a goal to meet X number of people. But remember it's not about quantity, but about the quality of conversations you have. Obtain contact information and follow up later.

Although the mixer was held in April 2015, this fall we revisited it to find out what students experienced as a result of the mixer. So, what did they think?

USC's Thomas Check had a virtually ideal experience. "Upon arriving I noticed many familiar company names, as well as some new ones. At the time, I was an intern at LADOT, but I was looking to get exposure to other aspects of transportation, namely rail. I met many recruiters, all of whom were friendly and seemed genuinely interested in our development as young professionals. One recruiter in particular, Zach MacDonell of HDR, thought I would make a good candidate as a rail intern at HDR and set up an interview. After the interview, HDR extended an offer to intern in their downtown LA office! I was incredibly excited and have been working there for a few weeks now. I am thankful for the TRB mixer and the doors it opened for me."

According to University of California, Irvine, student Gabrielle Abdon, "I found the WTS TRB mixer event surprisingly very helpful. The ratio between professionals and students was really great in that it allowed for students to really have a conversation with each company representative."

University of California, Irvine, student Wesley Luong reported, "The mixer was an amazing experience to get to hear more about each of the participating companies, about what they specialize in, any upcoming or existing opportunities, and career advice for new graduates. It was a pleasure to have so much time to interact with each company. I would definitely recommend it to everyone to come out to the next time."

"Following the mixer, I landed an interview with Iteris and also made several connections with professionals and fellow students. I am looking forward to next year and the opportunity to have my résumé included in the book," wrote USC student Cassandra Gogreve.

Every student who participated gained invaluable experience. But there are more objective measures of success. According to Nguyen, three students received interviews, two received job offers, and at least one student gained an internship opportunity. And that is only what Nguyen knows about right now. Students and the corporate sponsors are continually reporting back to him about the value of the program.

Given the overwhelmingly positive feedback, Nguyen looks to make the mixer an annual event. "What made the TRB mixer successful was its intimate feel and career-fair format, with various company giveaways and information brochures. My hope is to see the mixer grow and become one of WTS-LA's premier and most successful networking events."