

## 2017 Myra L. Frank Memorial Graduate \$10,000 Scholarship Recipient: Ribeka Toda



*Ribeka Toda (WTS-LA Myra L. Frank Memorial Graduate Scholarship Recipient), 2017*

UCLA Urban and Regional Planning master's degree candidate Ribeka Toda focuses almost exclusively on roadway safety in her studies. And with very good reason. "Last year, 3,680 Californians died on the road, and 2017 is projected to be even worse. Roadway safety is not just a statistic to me. Car crashes have claimed the lives of two individuals in my life and it is difficult to explain the senselessness of these deaths and the unshakable feeling that they could have been prevented. Embracing the mother of one, gone at just 24 years old, I felt the overwhelming realization that each fatal crash I had ever analyzed in a database had a mother, a father, a child, a dear friend. As a transportation planner, I feel a deep sense of responsibility that we have not done enough." For many, passion is more than enough. For Toda, that's the foundation on which she's constructed her career.

An exemplary student—she carries a 3.9 GPA—she also earned a BS in civil engineering from UCLA. According to UCLA Distinguished Professor Emeritus Martin Wachs, "She was clearly the top student in a strong class of sixteen graduate students and is a student leader among the cohort of students entering their second year of the two-year Master's curriculum, including her active participation in our student chapter of WTS." Wachs also noted that Toda perceives her work in transportation as both a technical field and a necessary public service. But her efforts are in no way only academic. Toda also garnered considerable work experience in both the public and private sectors including working with LADOT, Metro, Kittelson & Associates, and Mexico City's *Laboratorio para la Ciudad, Ciudad Peatón*. The combination of academia and real-world experience means quite a lot to Toda. "As much as I loved working with numbers and spreadsheets, I felt that I needed to understand the *why* behind transportation issues, rather than just the *how* to fix them.

I enrolled in graduate school, this time in the urban planning department, to study transportation from a different perspective. Through my coursework, I have not only gained technical skills in mapping in ArcGIS and transportation demand modeling in Cube, but I have had the luxury to spend time reflecting on the role of transportation within the larger objectives of urban planning. In a course about transportation megaprojects with Professor Marty Wachs, I developed a deep appreciation for the role of history, politics, and public enchantment in the planning and construction of public works projects." And that sounds like a page right from Myra Frank's book.