

## What's in a name? Apparently, quite a lot...



*Rachel Lindt (AECOM), Carmen Chen (Nelson/Nygaard), Darlene Gonzalez (Mott MacDonald), Todd Nguyen (WSP), 2018*

Descriptions matter. So, when WSP transportation and environmental planner and WTS-LA College Outreach Committee chair Todd Nguyen wanted to rebrand the Transportation Résumé Book (TRB) Committee, he had a compelling rationale. “For many, the TRB Committee was tied to an annual publication; that was the perception. But the name didn’t really address the other things we do. And we do quite a lot. That’s why we wanted to rebrand the committee as the College Outreach Committee.

Each year we do an exceptional amount of college outreach—we’ve reached out to 500+ students in my 4 years as chair. Initially, the end goal is to publish the TRB, a collection of résumés of aspiring transportation professionals, and connect them with our corporate partners; that’s all most people see. They think we stop after we publish the TRB, and all of that outreach stops, too. But nothing is further from the truth. The work we do goes way beyond publishing the TRB, as we provide comprehensive mentoring and support for college students studying transportation and emerging transportation professionals.” Through mixers, workshops, and other interactive events, Mr. Nguyen and the committee hope to teach and promote networking and the transportation field. But they also want to do more.



“We’re casting a wider net than before to tap previously overlooked populations. From young professionals in colleges and universities to community colleges and trade schools to recent graduates, we want to expand our targeted outreach and provide exceptional, practical, and meaningful professional development opportunities. But we also want to make sure that the young people that join WTS-LA are better prepared for professional life. For many students, the TRB is only a way in, but they need to learn better what to do once they’re ‘in.’

“For seasoned professionals, WTS-LA events tend to feel fairly formal. But to students, they seem extremely formal and, in many ways, intimidating. In my experience, students are nervous about attending events where they meet with agencies or consultants. They feel very uncomfortable. They don’t know if they have anything to add or contribute to the proceedings and for many students this is the first time they’ve ever attended a professional event. Our workshops and events help train them to interact professionally. We get them used to being in that kind of setting, but with a group of people that are there



to help them and support them. We're providing comprehensive guidance, but it is the kind of guidance that's rarely covered anywhere else. I like to call it, 'mentoring on steroids.'"

To achieve that, Mr. Nguyen has assembled an extraordinary, committed group for 2018. They include PlaceWorks project planner Cat Callaghan, Nelson/Nygaard associate Carmen Chen, Metro environmental specialist Andrina Dominguez, Mott MacDonald transportation planner Darlene Gonzalez, Metro senior community relations officer Janet Ouch, and AECOM planner Rachel Lindt. And together

they have planned an impressive roster of events to pursue their goal.

From a résumé building workshop to an annual student/company mixer to an interview skills workshop to a student transportation project poster session, Mr. Nguyen and the committee see each event as a priceless opportunity to provide an essential skill. For example, at a BYOR (Bring Your Own Résumé) workshop, more than 40 participants (20 students and 20

professionals) convened at Metro's downtown headquarters to help students learn to carefully craft résumés according to what professionals actually look for and expect. Through group and one-on-one events, the workshop provided useful, profound guidance for the students. According to UCLA's Tiffany Chu, "Getting one-on-one feedback from transportation professionals was immensely helpful. It's not often you get to hear feedback on someone's first impressions, where they think the gaps are, and how they would have edited your résumé. I was able to incorporate all of their feedback and now my résumé is much tighter."



But the professionals on the other side of the table also saw great value in the process.

Mott MacDonald transportation planner Darlene Gonzalez felt that, "The BYOR workshop was a great way to engage with students and professionals all over LA County and beyond. We had students from as far as Cal Poly Pomona and UC Irvine visit downtown Los Angeles on a Wednesday evening to get solid and personalized feedback from multiple transportation professionals. The workshop was relevant, dynamic, and offered up lessons from all sides of the profession, including human resources, transportation planning, marketing, and engineering."

HDR bridge engineer James Suk agrees. He felt that, "It was really beneficial for the students and young professionals. Overall, it was just a fantastic event."

Ms. Gonzalez and Mr. Suk represented two of the nine companies that participated. The others were AECOM, Arcadis, LKG-CMC, Metrolink, Stantec, STV, and WSP.

As the College Outreach Committee's program expands, the team looks to capture even more emerging transportation professionals. They want to create an access point to help them transition into

the industry and into WTS-LA. Ultimately, Mr. Nguyen sees the committee as providing an essential service to young people in the transportation industry.



“We reach out to them as college students and young professionals and we teach them the ‘soft skills’ of networking and professionalism they may not get anywhere else. But we also give them an opportunity and a forum to share their thoughts on what they think are industry trends and what’s happening next. They learn for themselves, but they also learn to help each other, to rely on each other to advance and serve the industry. So, you can see why we wanted to change the name from just the TRB Committee.” Descriptions do matter. And from what Mr. Nguyen described as his committee’s mandate, they are providing a necessary service to college students, young

professionals, and the transportation industry itself.