

Maddy Ruvolo: WTS-LA 2019 \$10,000 Myra L. Frank Memorial Graduate Scholarship Recipient



Maddy Ruvolo (WTS-LA 2019 \$10,000 Myra L. Frank Memorial Graduate Scholarship Recipient), 2019

“When I first started working in transportation planning, I realized how little most planners know about the daily lives of people with disabilities. Maybe the average planner can explain accessible design standards. But dry code requirements do not capture the real experiences of some of my peers, like the feeling of hearing other passengers groan when you board the bus because the driver takes ten extra seconds to secure your wheelchair. That said, I have also come to recognize that most disability advocates know little about the process of transportation planning...I seek to be a bridge between academics, activists, and community members, approaching the difficult problems with the fiery drive of an advocate and the technical knowledge of a planner.” And therein, Maddy Ruvolo illustrates perfectly her mission.

A UCLA master’s degree candidate in Urban and Regional Planning, Ruvolo currently boasts a 4.0 GPA. That’s not surprising. At Scripps College, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in American Studies, she graduated with a 3.94 GPA. But Ruvolo’s story goes beyond numbers. For example, she interned this summer with the Oakland Department of Transportation and currently serves as a researcher for UCLA’s Institute of Transportation Studies. She also held multiple roles with the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA). These are just some of the reasons why WTS-LA awarded her the 2019 \$10,000 Myra L. Frank Memorial Graduate Scholarship. But Ruvolo was not always so focused on her current passion.

“Though I did not always know I wanted to be a transportation planner, I have long been interested in the politics of mobility. When I first learned about the disability rights movement and realized that my chronic illness meant that I, too, was part of the disability community, I was inspired by protesters in the 1970s who blocked buses with their wheelchairs to demand access to transit.”

Ruvolo has gained recognition for both her academic achievement and her ardent belief in equality. According to Tim Quayle, who worked with Maddy at SFMTA (now with Brown and Caldwell), “Maddy’s strongest career motivation is supporting and expanding transportation accessibility for people with disabilities. It was rewarding to watch her leverage her passion for this subject in collaborating with colleagues and experts to develop meaningful metrics that track our agency’s accessibility programming.”

UCLA Urban Planning professor and Ruvolo’s advisor Evelyn Blumenberg echoes Quayle’s assessment, “She has outstanding academic and professional experience and is dedicated to understanding and improving transportation services...Over the course of her career, she will have a major impact on transportation policy and practice.”