

# BSOS ALUMNI CAREER PROFILE:

## DATA AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR

# CAREER THE TURTLE

...because **SUCCESS** starts here.



### Cole McCarren '17

**Title:** Data and Outreach Coordinator  
**Employer:** Center for Mobility Equity  
**Major:** Geography - Environment  
Systems and Natural Resources  
concentration  
[LinkedIn Profile](#)

#### What do you enjoy most about your current position?

While there is certainly a workplace hierarchy that gets things moving for funding opportunities or bigger projects, working as part of a small, like-minded team makes for an office environment where anyone's ideas can be heard. I really like that, and I think it allows staff creativity to shine through in ways that might be harder to notice in larger workplaces.

#### What is a typical day like in your position?

I'll come in first thing and begin reading local transportation news (new transit or bike programs, new transit-related bills in legislatures) and locate something to share to our social media pages. From there, everything I do during the day is project-oriented. Time-sensitive projects, like technical assistance/mapping requests from transit agencies, board members, or local governments get worked on with a higher priority than other projects.

Google Maps, Apple Maps, Transit App, and virtually every other app or program that utilizes bus or train schedules are powered by small zip files known as GTFS feeds, which are the most widely-used format to maintain transit schedules and their associated geographic information. I'm currently responsible for maintaining 17 of these feeds statewide, for agencies ranging from larger systems like Prince George's County TheBus, to smaller systems, like Ocean City Transportation, so that people can use their smartphones and computers to quickly determine how to get around their communities without needing a car.

#### Which undergraduate experiences did you find most helpful in preparing you for this position?

The biggest reason I know so much about how transit systems work and the immense benefit they can provide communities is because I decided to get a job as a Shuttle-UM bus driver back during my sophomore year. I didn't realize this at first, but after one semester of driving, they let you apply to different departments, like dispatching or student management.

I spent my junior year as the assistant route planner, and during my senior year, I had the opportunity to be the Operations Planning Manager, where I created shifts for every driver on the road and signed off on all route schedules and maps. I spent many hours learning more than I can even put to words at that job, and am so thankful, because now I can hold conversations in my work or build an agency's GTFS feed knowing exactly what goes in to planning and dispatching a medium-sized bus network.

#### How has your coursework helped you in your current position?

Any map products we make and any geographic data we analyze at CME is done through ArcGIS, either via ArcMap or ArcGIS Online. I learned nearly everything I know about ArcGIS from my geography and GIS coursework at UMD, and it enabled me to gain multiple tricks from the get-go, like utilizing the MD iMap site, for easy access to shapefiles I need for projects. My communication skills and my ability to work efficiently with people were also improved thanks in part to my internships and group projects I completed as part of the geography curriculum.

#### Any job or internship advice?

Intern! The Geographical Sciences Undergraduate department makes it very easy to take your learning outside of the classroom, so definitely take advantage of that and get course credit for it. And when you are interning, try and get out of your comfort zone. The best kind of growth happens when you're doing things that are new and challenging – plus you'll have more fun, and people around you will take better notice of your work ethic. It's a win-win-win!