Educational Highlights: Through the course of seven internships and service roles with Habitat for Humanity, Fields to Families, and the Eastside Community Development Corporation, I discovered the importance of active engagement with one’s community and the role of the built environment in contributing to issues of access and social justice. It was through these hands-on experiences that I learned the glory of a city is fully dependent of citizen participation.

Research Focus or Project: In summer 2011, I seized the opportunity to conduct research in the Thar Desert of western India. Initially drawn to the region’s unique architectural feature, the ancient stepwell, I soon discovered overlapping themes that forged a hostile political climate. Issues of gender inequality, urban bias in water allocation, and high farmer suicide rates all became intertwined with religion-laced politics. While my original goal was to examine the feasibility of resurrecting the ancient stepwell as a primary means of water collection and cultural gathering place, I soon learned that views towards historic preservation in India varied greatly from views within the United States. Despite this system’s productive value, it no longer meets the expectations and desires of the inhabitants of the region. With a focus turned towards industrial productivity in cities, the most practical solution to replenishing the region’s rapidly depleting aquifers melds techniques of the past with modern construction materials.

Future Plans: I plan to further explore issues of access and social justice through enrolling in a transportation systems engineering graduate program. My ambition is to bring urban planning theory into the rigid realm of transportation engineering guidelines in an effort to shift the focus in transportation away from single-occupancy automobiles towards more sustainable systems.