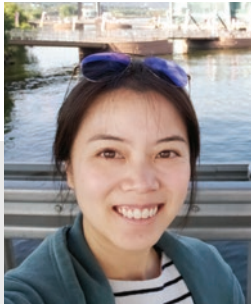


# POST-MENTORSHIP: WHERE ARE THEY NOW AND WHAT NEXT?

/ Emilie K Adin RPP, MCIP

Like many Registered Professional Planners (RPPs), I'm dedicated to giving back to the profession that has given me so much. Since my induction into the Institute, this has included mentoring 'launching' planners. This article focusses on five of the over 20 people I have had the privilege to mentor.



**WINNIE YIP** RPP, MCIP, is an alumna of the SFU Resource and Environmental Management program. I had the pleasure of being her boss in the early 2010s. She reached out to me a few years later when seeking to complete the steps to becoming a full member of the Institute. She crossed that finish line in 2018.

Winnie had childhood dreams of becoming a veterinarian, and later planned a future in environmental economics, hoping to avoid “unpredictable humans”. Ironically, she landed in a profession that holds public engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration as central tenets. She is now a senior community planner with the District of North Vancouver.

**What has surprised her?** A planning career is harder than she thought it would be. “It’s so much about the human dynamic” rather than “the technical solution.”

**What next?** Winnie wants to continue to focus on long-range planning and affordable housing, “further honing my skills.”



**EMMA FINEBLIT** was a Candidate member of PIBC when I met her at a North Shore planners event. From there, she sought me out to see her through the mentorship process towards becoming an RPP.

Emma grew up expecting to go into politics and wanting to be the Prime Minister of Canada. “I wanted to make the most change possible.” Gradually, she came to appreciate privacy and work-life balance. From an interest in inner-city community development she ended up working in her current role as the Executive Director of Wolseley Family Place, a nonprofit family resource centre in Horseshoe Bay. Previously, her social and community planning focus included land use planning work with the Tsleil-Waututh Nation.

**What has surprised her?** Certainly, it’s been the “slow and complicated process of government and governance.” Also, “the how you’re doing matters more than the what you’re doing. It’s all about change management, relationships and getting people’s buy-in.”

**What next?** While she’s happy in her job, sometimes Emma finds herself wanting to use her planning degree more as a social, housing, or long-range planner.



**KAI OKAZAKI** is a Candidate member of the PIBC. He was one of several students I was paired with in SCARP’s mentorship program in the 2010s. He is working his way to becoming a registered member of the Institute.

Kai wanted to become a park ranger, but came to hear about planning through his passion for sustainability. Like Winnie, his focus had been more technical. However, his question “how do I work with people to ensure natural places are preserved?” led him to be attracted to the collaborative aspect of planning.

More recently he is considering the broader question, “what makes a good community?”. He is currently working as a social planner at the City of Burnaby.

**What has surprised him?** “How much you can learn working under a supervisor who is willing to act as a mentor, and how much you can be empowered by them, and learn to challenge yourself.”

**What next?** Kai would like to continue pushing boundaries on how we practice and collaborate. He is determined to “continue to stretch, always.”



**ARTA NAVAB-TEHRANI** (formerly Marjan) is also a Candidate member of the Institute, and the elected candidate member representative on the PIBC Board of Directors. I met Arta at a mentorship mixer event in the late 2010s.

Arta is the third of three interviewees who spoke to me about their background and passion in science. They had a dream of becoming a medical doctor, and to that end focused their post-secondary academic efforts first in biology, and later in environmental studies and anthropology, particularly focused on climate change, resilience, and disaster planning.

Despite multiple planning interests, Arta “stumbled upon” cultural planning, and was “very grateful for that experience.” They learned about “the importance of cultural planning to connect us to each other and to place.” Arta is currently working as a Policy Analyst at City of Vancouver in Cultural Services.

**What has surprised them?** “How personal the work can be” and how much of yourself you bring to the workplace.

**What next?** Arta has many interests, including equity work and systems change, and the potential for a joint planning and anthropology PhD in cultural planning at some point in their future. For now, they’re happy focusing on cultural policy development and implementation.



**SHAREEN CHIN** is a recent graduate of the UBC SCARP program. A former student of mine in my role as an adjunct professor at UBC, she asked me to mentor her as part of the RPP requirements. Having recently completed that step, she is now wrapping up her logbook. She hopes to write the final exam in the spring.

Shareen has always been a “people person.” Despite coming from a family of entrepreneurs, she always knew she was geared towards the “social and helping side.” She is now a senior planner for the Vancouver Coastal Region of First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), currently completing Vancouver Coastal’s Regional Health and Wellness Plan 2022-2027.

**What has surprised her?** The biggest surprise out of planning school was “learning the full scale of what planners can do, influence and shape.” The COVID pandemic has become a big focus of her work. “I interviewed for one job and got two.”

**What next?** “I’m really looking forward to how I can continue bringing a planning lens to health authorities to ensure that health and well-being plans have a community-centred approach.” Will she ever bring a healthy communities lens to land-use planning? “Hopefully!”

**In conclusion**, overarching lessons that I learned through these interviews are:

- 1) It’s useful to have professional and community-level experience prior to starting a Master’s degree in planning. This experience means students bring some of the real world with them to the ivory tower, rather than landing unprepared in the real world.
- 2) People who had more of a technical planning education often wish they had more ‘soft skills’ and ‘big picture’ learning opportunities during their education. People who had more of a ‘big picture’ and theoretical planning education, on the other hand, often decry a lack of technical training and know-how. The lesson? As one interviewee said, “successful planners are skilled in both.”
- 3) You can’t always address “all the what-if’s” in a planning education or the RPP certification process. The title ‘planner’ and the pieces of paper (the planning degree and the induction into the Institute) can open doors, but real success comes with experience, mentorship, hard work, and (dare I say it) blind luck.

Here’s to all of us, in whatever stage of our careers we find ourselves!

Emilie K Adin is the Director of Climate Action, Planning and Development at the City of New Westminster. She tips her hat to all her own mentors, past and present.