

CONVERSATIONS

Young Planners



KATHY TRAN
Student Liaison | OC APA



MIA YUEN
Marketing Co-Chair | OC APA



EBONY PRADD
*Young and Emerging Planners
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ANASTASIA GRANT
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We are proud to celebrate the people on our board, and how they are making a positive impact in the planning industry.



Leadership Letter

At four years old, I dreamt of becoming an ice skater, performing at the Disney Anaheim ICE arena all the time. I loved the experience of storytelling in front of a large crowd through a layer of different elements from my dance routine, facial expressions, props, and outfits.

Then that ice skater dream evolved into becoming an actress. Storytelling excited me, and I wanted to take it beyond the skating rink boundaries. I wanted to tell even more powerful stories by sharing the stage and exploring different genres. In pursuing this dream, I found myself performing in school plays, musicals, and acting in commercials as a Screen Actors Guild member.

After my ice skating and acting days, eventually I went off to the east coast to pursue my BA at Smith College and MPA at Cornell University. And yup, you guessed it - my dream of who I wanted to be when I grew up evolved *again*. At Smith and Cornell I discovered the meaningful impact I could make when I combined my academic interests in environmental science and public policy with my passion for public service. I fell in love with the type of impact that could be made on individuals, communities, and the global environment. So, I relentlessly chased after it. This led me to the urban planning field and founding my own firm, Impact Alliances Group, Inc. (IAG). This journey has been a lesson in **evolution**.

My original dream of being able to tell impactful stories is very much alive in what I do today, and has evolved far beyond storytelling. The through line between my ever-evolving dream is the impact that storytelling has to create unity and ignite true change. Nothing gives me greater satisfaction than seeing our clients at IAG evolve from mere businesses into indispensable community champions. They become recognized as more than mere businesses, but renowned members of the community that contribute toward social and environmental progress.

In a world that is constantly changing, **evolution is necessary** for the solutions that our communities need. **A better tomorrow requires today's youth to be audacious thinkers, visionary dreamers, and bold trailblazers who are unafraid to embrace the idea of evolution in their holistic journeys.**

For this edition of *CONVERSATIONS*, we sat down with the young planners on our board who share more about the evolution of their goals and the launch of their careers in planning. Enjoy!

Yours Truly,



Catherine Aguilar

Vice Director of Membership | OC APA

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IN THIS ISSUE

04 KATHY TRAN

Student Liaison | OC APA

06 MIA YUEN

Marketing Co-Chair | OC APA

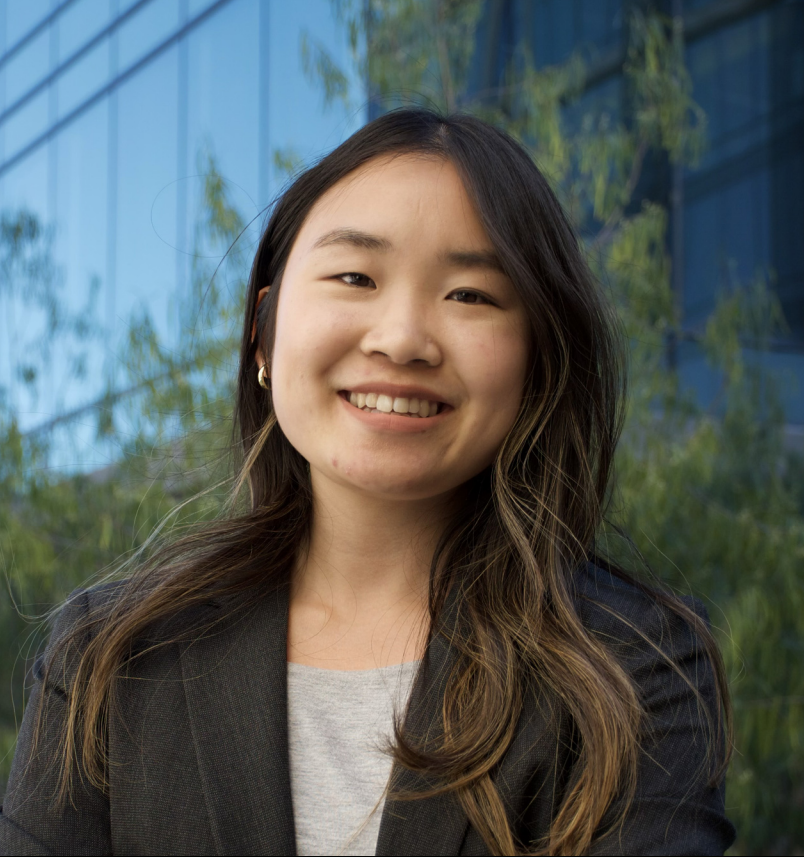
08 EBONY PRADD

*Young and Emerging Planners Co-Chair
OC APA*

10 ANASTASIA GRANT

*Community & Agency Outreach Liaison
OC APA*

14 LET'S CONNECT



KATHY TRAN

Student Liaison | OC APA

Kathy Tran is a current MURP student attending UC Irvine and is passionate about the intersectionalities and principles surrounding human-centered city planning.

Currently, she works as a part-time contract planner with MIG - a firm providing planning services. Kathy is excited to continue growing professionally in the planning field, and looks forward to supporting OC APA.

OC APA: What led you to explore a career in the planning industry and how has that been like so far?

TRAN: One of my core memories that sparked my interest in urban planning was the time I volunteered in my local city back in highschool. I went to a protest in LA fighting against installing an oil drilling rig in neighborhoods. It opened my eyes to see that nasty oil rigs could be put near homes. I started getting more interested in environmental injustices and in how I can help people's quality of life. I felt these were the most impactful and meaningful ways I can help the community.

I started off as an environmental engineer as an undergrad, but I ended up switching to urban studies, because I liked how urban studies combined many disciplines. I liked that I was exposed to many different aspects of planning like housing or transportation, but also heavily leaned on sustainability and the environment.

OC APA: Can you share more about your experience in the planning field so far?

TRAN: I'm still learning about the planning industry, but I got my feet wet as a planning intern at the City of La Habra.

During my time in graduate school, I met people who were involved in the OC APA and I quickly jumped on board. I've really enjoyed getting to know people in the field and seeing everyone's unique experiences.

I learned a lot from them. I see now that the planning industry is evolving towards engaging with people and incorporating different disciplines to create truly unique solutions. I hope to see planning that serves people rather than just follow theory in school.

OC APA: What were your initial career goals? And how have your career goals evolved?

TRAN: What I knew was to be a city planner in the public sector. This was before the experiences I gained. Over time, through the course I've taken, work experiences, and getting to know other planners, I think my trajectory is still pretty similar.

I'm still pretty interested in the ideas of placemaking and how the built environment can impact quality of life for people. I still want to meet more people and see what opportunities lie for all planners. In terms of what that looks like for the day to day in my future career, I'm not sure, but hopefully I can keep doing what I love.

OC APA: How has the planning community influenced the evolution of your growth?

TRAN: I've been very fortunate to have a network of people in the planning field. I realize that one connection often leads to more and more.

At the City of La Habra, I connected with planners there and built good relationships. The director then connected me with another Asian American planner and we connected through our shared culture.

Also, being in school has also put me in a good place. I've gotten to know many different backgrounds and interests from my cohort. I think the planning community really gives me an opportunity to expand my perspectives of what I can contribute to the field and what direction I may want to go. I have the support for my future endeavors - whatever that may be.



Touring a planned community at Rancho Mission Viejo with MIG OC Intake Team



Attending her first APA Conference in Anaheim!



Getting ice cream with UCI MURP Cohort after APA Conference in Philadelphia



MIA YUEN

Marketing Co-Chair | OC APA

Mia Yuen is a second-year UCI Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) student and the planning technician for the city of Rancho Santa Margarita.

As the Co-Marketing Chair of the OC-APA, Mia is able to combine her interests in graphic design and urban planning to create media content for the community. When she's away from work or studying, Mia likes to explore different parts of Southern California. Recently, she was able to see the Perseid Meteor shower in Laguna Beach!

OC APA: What led you to exploring a career in the planning industry and how has that been so far?

YUEN: I've always wanted to make an impact on the community and I've joined various volunteer opportunities to help me do so. For example, in high school during a UC Berkeley summer program, I participated in a project for the Richmond community in Northern California. We created a community garden with a roof-based watershed system that collected water. This area also served as a food preparation deck using the garden's vegetation.

Still, when I was young, I didn't know much about planning. All I knew was this broad idea called Urban Design. Initially, I started off studying civil engineering in college, because I thought I wanted to design solutions that helped the community. I realized over time that I actually want to lean more on community involvement, policies, and planning rather than structural engineering.

Today, I'm still learning what my career interests are. I favor topics like community development, affordable housing, and sustainability, but most of all I want to explore how the public and private sector can help me make the most impact

OC APA: What were your initial career goals? And how have your career goals evolved?

YUEN: My main goal is to finish grad school first. By then, I think I'll be ready to make bigger decisions like choosing my career or choosing if I move back home to Northern California.

At the moment, when I'm jumping more into the industry, I'd say I would want to dip my feet into both the public and private sector. I'm just gaining experience in the public sector right now. In the future, I definitely would love to get AICP certified. Hopefully, I can get that done around the same time I graduate.

OC APA: Was there a particular class or experience that helped shape or define your goals a little bit more?

YUEN: There was one GIS class where I worked on creating an artificial downtown for the City of Irvine. The inspiration came from a planner discussing how the City of Dana Point had created their downtown Lantern District. That project really ignited me to create something meaningful for the Irvine Community.

I've been living in Irvine for 5 or 6 years now, and I've noticed that Irvine doesn't have a well-defined community culture. Irvine is a master-planned community which means everyone is supposed to have their own resources in each neighborhood, but it's all very secular. There's no unifying focal point. Working through all these problems on a story map for class really resonated with me. I want to work on projects that help bring a community together.

Maybe in the future I can bring my skills back home to Northern California and do the same thing. I must admit, though, I love it here! I've been in Southern California for quite some time now, so I'm very torn on moving away.

OC APA: How has the planning community influenced the evolution of your growth in this field?

YUEN: I think it's really nice to have a community where you can all share different interests and learn new things.

I was introduced to the OC APA in my last year of undergrad. Being here helped me feel confident enough to expand my network and build lasting connections. I love listening to all the other planners and now I love sharing my own experiences with newcomers to the industry.

I just love that the planning community supports one another. I want to bring this love and nourishment back to my student organizations. One of my big goals being on the board is to create that bridge between students and the professional realm.

OC APA: Are there any specific people or a community that helped you grow? Have they helped you define what you really wanted to do?

YUEN: I can shout out Stephanie Tomaino, the Section Director at the OC APA. She's definitely helped me along the way as a mentor and a leader through school – as my lecturer and section director and supervisor. She inspires me to want to work 10x harder and always want to explore more and go beyond my boundaries as a planner and personally. I'd say I get a little fearful of new experiences, so just being able to take a breath and be able to make strides in the industry feels really good. Joining the OC APA was a big leap for me, but I'm glad I'm here.



Volunteering at a fundraising event for Waymakers OC - Huntington Beach Youth Shelter



South Lake Tahoe



EBONY PRADD

Young and Emerging Planners Co-Chair OC APA

Ebony Pradd is a dedicated advocate for equitable urban development, affordable housing, and minority homeownership. She holds a Master's in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of California Irvine, where she honed her skills in understanding the dynamics of urban environments, housing policies, and sustainable community development.

OC APA: What led you to exploring a career in the planning industry and how has that been so far?

PRADD: While at San Diego State, I studied interior architecture and collaborated with an emerging real estate developer on a micro development project. This included a historic storefront within a micro community. The developer chose not to preserve its historical status and sought my input on its new potential use. I knew right away that the community should decide what goes up, so I reached out. Soon after, I learned that there was a whole Urban Planning industry that does this type of work. Thus, I went back to get my Masters of Urban and Regional Planning at UCI.

OC APA: What were your initial career goals and how have they evolved?

PRADD: My dream was to go into the prison system and serve those individuals who are aging in place. That was my way of giving back to my people and my community. I didn't even realize that urban planning was an industry.

Now, my goal is to become a real estate developer and develop communities for the unhoused low income. But the goal is not just to develop the standard project housing that you've seen in the past. I want to develop these communities that individuals can be proud to live in, no matter what income tax bracket they fall into.

OC APA: Was there a specific case or experience that really made you define these goals or shaped the direction you're going?

PRADD: Just being in California, you see such a need for housing. Not only for unhoused populations, but also housing for the average Joe.

The cost of housing in California has skyrocketed over the years and it only keeps going up. I've always been passionate about serving the community, so when I saw the housing crisis, I knew I needed to dedicate my work to housing.

If you were to talk to me last year, I was going to solve the homeless crisis in California and America. After that, I was going to take it abroad. Now, I've honed it in – there's baby steps to it. I've learned that it's okay to take one step to get to my goal.



Ebony's family visiting Las Grutas De Tolantongo in Hidalgo, Mexico.

OC APA: How did you end up getting involved with OC APA?

PRADD: So I started off just attending meetings, then I jumped on the career development team. I'm a little older than everyone else in my cohort, so I have that career experience under my belt a little more than they do. I jumped on the career development team to show them how to curate their resumes, make connections, and build that professionalism.

OC APA: How has the planning community influenced this evolution in focus to real estate rather than a prison system?

PRADD: Having contacts in the planning field who push me toward reaching my goal of providing housing is very rewarding. In my heart, I've always felt like I was the only one who was housing focused, but the planning community really showed me overwhelming support.

People like my professors and industry leaders really motivated me to persevere and keep fighting. They would tell me that I have big dreams that may seem impossible right now, but they remind me that I am capable and on the path of achieving my goals.



San Bernardino County Transportation Authority warehouse taking a tour of their new hydro public buses.



ANASTASIA GRANT

Community & Agency Outreach Liaison OC APA

Ana is a planner at Jacobs Engineering, where she works on transit projects and grant writing. She enjoys traveling around the world and has been to 18 countries. Ana was born in Ukraine and grew up in Orange County, California. She graduated with her Master's in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of California, Irvine.

OC APA: What led you to exploring a career in the planning industry and how has that been like so far?

GRANT: Back in high school I took AP Environmental Science. That class made me think about climate change and the fact that we need to make a lot of changes. And who better to do that than planners?

I learned about planning, and I thought that planners would have the greatest potential to positively change cities for the better. They have an influence on elements like transportation and housing that play into environmental consciousness.

As a result, I studied Urban Studies in undergrad and majored in Urban Planning. Now, my work focuses on transportation, and it's been great so far! I feel like I work on projects that make a real impact on the communities.

OC APA: Were there any classes in college that continued to ignite your drive in the planning field?

GRANT: Not any specific classes, but I did enjoy studying abroad. It really helped me continue my passion in transportation planning because I got to see different cities and bring that knowledge back to the US.

OC APA: How did studying deepen your interest in transportation planning?

GRANT: I studied in Vienna, and I think at one point they had the best transportation in the world! It was very eye opening to have a transit system accessible five minutes away from any one spot. Not only that, it ran frequently, it was cheap, and I felt safe riding in them! I learned very quickly that transit is so integral in people's everyday lives.

OC APA: What were your initial career goals and how have they evolved?

GRANT: My initial career goals were to get my foot in the door. Initially, I wanted to work on environmental and transportation, but I evolved to be very passionate about transportation.

I thought that I would be focused on working on projects like active transportation or public transit, but I've been pleasantly surprised to get involved in federal grant writing - it's still transportation, but a different side. I enjoy helping communities receive that funding to advance projects that they might not have had funding for.



With friends celebrating a wedding.

I guess I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do and I'm happy where I am doing transportation work.

OC APA: How has the planning community influenced the evolution of your growth in the planning field?

GRANT: The planning community is very supportive. It is great to hear other people's experiences and integrate them into other ideas. I think the more diversity we have in planning, the better our project concepts are.

Meeting people and talking with people has definitely helped me focus my goals and move further in transportation planning.



Marseille, France at the Vieille Charite

LET'S CONNECT

Follow us on our socials for the latest scoop on our events, programs, announcements and all things OC APA!

