Alumni Spotlight: Samantha Patterson

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Environmental Public Involvement Specialist, Horrocks Engineers

What year did you graduate from USU and what was your major/research focus?

I graduated from USU in 2018. My thesis research investigated geographic location and depression and is titled “Maternal Depression in the United States: A Geographic Comparison between Geographic Region and Urbanicity.”

Was there a particular mentor or professor who inspired you when you were a student here? Can you talk a little about that?

Many professors within the Sociology department inspired me and encouraged me to reach the goals I had. The phrase “it takes a village” applied to my education and I am blessed to have so many caring professors to teach me and provide me opportunities to explore and gain confidence in my research abilities.

Could you tell me a little about your job/career path since leaving USU?

While I was at USU I was given the opportunity to work with Dr. Krannich conducting social surveys regarding transportation projects. During that process, I discovered my passion of survey work and of engaging the public during the transportation decision-making process. That led to a job at Horrocks Engineers working as an Environmental Public Involvement Specialist. The position allows me to contribute to social sections of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents for various projects; to engage and educate people during the environmental, design, and construction phases of projects; to conduct qualitative and quantitative surveys; and to find solutions/mitigation for social and environmental justice impacts.

As you may know, we just celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Yun Kim Population Lab last year, and we’re gathering personal stories about the Lab. In what way(s) were you involved with the population lab, and how did it impact your work, research, or career?

The lab allowed students access to programs, specifically statistical packages, that would not have been possible to supply to all graduate students. The exposure to multiple statistical software programs allowed me to be more marketable in the workforce. The lab was also a great place to work, hold study sessions with fellow graduate students, and use for our statistical courses. The application of statistics was mostly done from the lab.

Anything else you’d like to share with students considering a career in sociology, or more specifically students interested in the graduate program in sociology at USU?

Do not limit yourself to the obvious career paths a sociology degree may provide. The application of the degree is so broad. Be your own advocate and you’ll see doors open.