

## **In STEP with students: Nadeesha Thewarapperuma**

by Audralynn See - Tuesday, November 30, 2010

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/7126/in-step-with-students-nadeesha-thewarapperuma/>

As part of the Student Titan Employment Program (STEP) at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Nadeesha Thewarapperuma researches and collects information to be used for creating a new transportation plan to end commuting and parking distress.

**Name:** Nadeesha Thewarapperuma

**Role:** Transportation intern

**Department:** Sustainability office

**Major:** Economics, environmental studies

**Year:** Senior

**Hometown:** "I am originally from Kandy, Sri Lanka, but spent a few years growing up in Oshkosh."

### **What specific tasks do you do for your internship?**

"I work under the supervision of Dr. Michael Lizotte, the director of Sustainability. As a transportation intern for the department, my job is to collect information regarding commuter (faculty, staff and student) driving habits. The research will be used to draft a transportation plan for UW Oshkosh."

### **How is the internship benefiting your education?**

"I was able to apply research skills learned in class to a more practical situation."

### **How is the internship benefiting your future?**

"Right now I'm applying for graduate schools, so the research is an added qualification. It has also shown me what I should expect in graduate school."

### **How is the internship benefiting your department?**

"The research will be used by the sustainability office to draft a campus transportation plan. The transportation plan will include details on traditional automobile parking and alternative options.

"One part of the study was to determine where commuters lived. By using sample parking permit data, we found that most commuters tend to cluster in Oshkosh and nearby cities. Therefore, the best alternatives are car pools and van pools for commuters who travel from the Oshkosh suburbs or cities such as Appleton, Fond du Lac and the Neenah/Menasha area.

"Commuters from within Oshkosh will also have several other options. Right now, alternatives include free ridership on the city buses and Titan Transit for anyone with a UW Oshkosh ID. Additionally, we plan on expanding the number of bicycle routes and bicycle, moped and motorcycle parking spaces. Finally,

pedestrian sidewalks and walkways will be expanded to better handle user traffic.

“We realize that not everyone will be able to use these options, but if a number of commuters can, more parking stalls will open up and this might possibly eliminate or delay the need for additional parking spaces.”

### **What has been your favorite part of the internship?**

“I’m looking forward to seeing the recommended alternatives in use. Right now most of the recommendations are in paper format, but we already have a different style of bike racks at the new buildings (see the Student Success Center). These racks are less damaging to bikes, easier to use, more secure and look tidier.”

### **Have you faced any challenges? If so, detail how you overcame them?**

“One of the challenges the department is still facing is uncertainty. We don’t know if there will be many people willing to try and use alternative transportation options. The next step would be to gauge commuter interest, get the information out, and convert a number of single-occupant drivers into using alternative forms.”

### **Supervisor comments**

“Nadeesha is a model student for independent research,” said Michael Lizotte, director of sustainability. “When we come up with a new idea for campus transportation research, she gets right to work checking leads, making contacts with campus and city staff or acquiring skills she needs.”

*The Student Titan Employment Program (STEP) offers students quality educational experiences while providing faculty and staff members with needed assistance in areas such as media services, student-faculty research, supplemental instruction, library assistance, instructional technology and academic computing support, and Web page development and maintenance. The program is funded through a one-time investment of \$500,000. More than 110 students are funded through STEP.*

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