

**Name: Brianna Lawton**

Doctoral Student in Civil Engineering with a focus in Transportation Engineering

**Interviewed by: Elizabeth Holloway**

Brianna's devoted involvement in research, public outreach, and the student body is only outweighed by her enthusiasm for wanting to help people and effect change. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D in Civil Engineering with a focus in Transportation Engineering at [Iowa State University](#). She also works for the Iowa State University [Institute for Transportation](#) as a research assistant. Her academic focus is driven by the goal of improving roadway safety by decreasing roadway deaths. Brianna's current research focuses on evaluating the relationship between the driver and roadway to address rural intersection safety using the SHRP2 Naturalistic Driving Study Data. This study aims to better understand how drivers react at rural intersections by identifying intersection and roadway characteristics that are correlated to more risky behaviors so that transportation agencies can better target their resources to address those issues and select appropriate countermeasures.

Brianna is aware of how graduate school has changed her. Originally from the D.C. Metropolitan area, this urban East coaster admits that the more relaxed pace of the Midwest took some adjusting. However, she has grown to love the people and places of Iowa. Stepping outside of her comfort zone has helped shape her by encouraging introspection about the person she was and the person she is becoming. She misses her family and friends back home, but says she is lucky to have their resounding support and encouragement. One of her memorable struggles as a new student at Iowa State was the feeling of jumping in the deep end. She remembers the nervousness associated with entering a new environment, having so much to learn, and not knowing where to start. Over the past couple years, this experience has manifested a new personal manifesto for Brianna: "**Learn at your own speed.**" Through this realization, she can finally take time to see her own bigger picture.

In addition to studies and work, Brianna is the graduate chapter coordinator of Iowa State's [Society of Women Engineering \(SWE\)](#) and is also the Vice President for the Iowa State [Transportation Student Association \(TSA\)](#). TSA holds academic, professional, and community-driven events focused on transportation engineering. Brianna is specifically proud of their partnership with local schools, which serve to create initiatives to teach young student drivers about safe driving maneuvers in different types of roadway geometry conditions like roundabouts which is still a new concept Iowans are adapting to. She loves that transportation engineering has the opportunity to create sustainable infrastructure, jobs, and intermodal communities, especially for disenfranchised areas. It is her desire that through these opportunities, government agencies and private companies can come together to create more safer and economical options for everyone. Brianna believes that, "**We can be better together!**"

One of Brianna's role models is her mother. She recognizes her mother's steadfast support and commitment in not only supporting her children's ambitions, but by always giving an honest opinion in order to inspire greatness. Another of Brianna's notable role models is aviation

engineer and pilot [Bessie Coleman](#), because she overcame so many obstacles of gender and race to make history as the first woman of African-American descent, and the first of Native American descent, to hold a pilot license.

Future plans for Brianna include continuing to step outside of her comfort zone starting with wanting to have a working experience abroad in Asia or South America. She also hopes to have a published paper and the opportunity to speak at a national conference in the near future. It would be her dream to start a nonprofit that introduces STEM education to young women that helps them navigate academic and professional life. In her free time Brianna loves to read, write poetry, and watch motivational videos. One of her favorites that always lifts her spirits is this inspirational video about Ray Lewis: <https://youtu.be/SJRN9b4PLG8>

