

Jordan Hillman uses her landscape architecture degree as a community development director in Brandon, MS. Her work focuses on both long- and short-term planning, downtown development, bike and pedestrian improvement, urban design, historic preservation, and capacity building. (Photo submitted)

## Jordan Hillman

**Jordan Hillman** graduated with a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture in 2009. She began working at a garden center in high school and two landscape architects at the center mentored Hillman toward the profession. She is the community development director of Brandon, Mississippi.

**DESCRIBE AN MSU MEMORY.** My freshman year we had put up a volleyball net in the courtyard. I was new and didn't know very many folks, but that volleyball net was a source of fun for weeks each night. We would take a break from studio work to play each night after dinner, and sometimes during the day. I really got to know many of the third and fourth year students through that volleyball net, many still in my network to this day.

**DISCUSS YOUR CAREER JOURNEY.** I took a turn toward municipal government during my senior year at Mississippi State. After graduation, I earned a master's degree in city and regional planning from the University of Memphis. During my senior year as president of the MSU student chapter of the ASLA and then as a national representative for ASLA, I knew my future would be in planning. During my master's, I worked for the University of Memphis in the Soulsville Community of Memphis doing community planning work. After graduation, I went to the Mississippi Department of Transportation and then to the city of Canton where I spent two years working for their Main Street Program. After that, I found my place in Brandon. I serve Brandon, Mississippi as community development director. How did your degree prepare you? While I don't practice in name, I very much still value the lessons learned in this program. This program equipped me to look at problems, break

them apart and put them back together. Problem solving has been a part of each and every job I have ever held, and is critical to succeeding. The design process instilled while I was in school is something I inherently apply to everything as a professional. From defining a problem or accepting a goal from a client to inventory and analysis to building functional diagrams and concepts to creating design through to implementation and evaluation, the process is iterative and the skills I learned at MSU are always applicable.

**HOW HAS THE INDUSTRY SHIFTED?** The scope of the profession has widened immensely. The recession and changes in the job market have caused many landscape architects to think outside the box when pursuing employment. Young professionals especially have had to expand the scope of the profession to get their foot in the door.

**WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT THE INDUSTRY CURRENTLY?** Landscape architects are making more of a mark on cities and how they grow and develop. I have seen over the past five years more landscape architects making the transition into city planning and other municipal roles. Landscape architects make great city planners.

**WHAT ARE YOU MOST FOCUSED ON IN YOUR CAREER RIGHT NOW?** I am a point in my career where I am heavily invested in municipal government. Brandon is

growing and we have spent the last two years completing a downtown plan, a comprehensive plan, and a zoning code replacement that introduced context sensitive street design, traditional neighborhood design, and architectural standards. We have extensive plans for pedestrian and bike improvements throughout the city with the end goal of fully interconnecting our park system with our downtown that is currently experiencing a renaissance of redevelopment.

**DESCRIBE A TIME WHEN YOU TURNED A CHALLENGE INTO AN OPPORTUNITY.** I oversee the building department which covers everything from large commercial development to the construction of a single family home. Single family homes often have silt and storm water runoff issues during the construction period. My background in landscape architecture taught me a lot about drainage and grading so I can help builders solve the problem quickly. It's a nice piece of knowledge that the builders don't necessarily come to the table with and I can fill in that gap.

