### COGS End of Year Reflection

#### Reuben Walker

I chose to attend the GIS Graduate Certificate program at COGS because I wanted to upgrade my education and find a way to break into the GIS industry. After graduating from Simon Fraser University during the pandemic, I found myself without any experience, connections, or notable projects, and I didn’t see a viable path towards entering the GIS industry. I spent about two years working in an unrelated job and eventually decided that I wanted another try at starting my career. I did some research online on the best graduate GIS programs in the country, and COGS, Fleming College, SAIT, and BCIT all came up as great options that taught practical skills, had good reputations, connected students to industry, and had high rates of post-graduation employment. Although these were all good options, I ultimately chose COGS because I wanted to relocate to Nova Scotia to be closer to my partner, who lives in Halifax.

I greatly enjoyed my courses at COGS – I found that many of the courses taught a lot of important and practical skills in a straightforward way. I had already taken a lot of GIS and remote sensing courses as part of my undergraduate degree in geography, but I found that they focused mostly on mapping and that I was lacking in programming and database skills. COGS did an excellent job of integrating programming, data analytics, database management, and web design into the curriculum, which are all very important skills that transfer outside of the scope of GIS. However, the most valuable part of the program to me was the genuine effort of the school to connect students with industry professionals and job opportunities. The networking events, job fair, and company presentations were very valuable for giving me connections to the industry and a better idea of how to secure a GIS job. Additionally, the small and tight-knit campus made it easy to make connections with students and faculty. This is in comparison to my education at SFU where there were less opportunities to form connections due to the larger class sizes, as well as the pandemic arriving in the last year of school.

My goal after graduating from COGS was to find a relevant entry-level job in the GIS or urban planning sector, to help me gain work experience and find a foothold in the industry. I especially wanted to apply GIS towards urban planning issues such as public transit, walkability, housing affordability, and livability. I am passionate about these issues and want to use GIS to find data-driven solutions and insights for urban planning. However, I would have been happy with any role in which I can put my geospatial skills to work. I’m happy to report that I’ve already accomplished my goal – I’ve secured an 18-month position as a Transit Planning Intern at Halifax Regional Municipality. There, I will be creating data dashboards and performing data analysis, all while gaining valuable experience working within a transit agency. Being a transit planner is one of my dream careers, and I feel extremely lucky to already be on the path towards becoming one. Now, my goal is to excel in my role and learn as much as possible about transit planning to try and build better transportation networks for the future. After my contract ends, I want to either leverage my experience into another role in transit planning, or pursue a master’s degree in urban planning.

I’m appreciative of all the opportunities that I was able to unlock by going to COGS. Before coming here, I never imagined that I would be starting a career as a transit planner right after graduation. However, thanks to the skills I learned and the connections I made at COGS, I was able to exceed my own expectations and get on track for my ideal career.