Beth Neville,
MURP, 2017

Beth Neville first learned of the planning profession as a senior at Denison University in Ohio. She was studying the Newark Earthworks and the community’s relationship to them as a summer research project that year. As she considered what people knew and what access they had and did not have to the ancient mounds built by Native Americans, she became aware of the role community planners play.

She let those ideas percolate as she spent the next two years as an AmeriCorps VISTA member. The first year was with a non-profit affordable housing provider in Columbus, Ohio, where she worked on economic development issues in a predominately African-American community.

In her second year, Neville worked in Indianapolis at the Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority where one of her projects was to get the My Community, My Vision project up and running. As she met with the Ball State students involved in the project, she learned more about the Department of Urban Planning and the MURP degree from MCMV team member Jenna Harbin (MURP ’14).

“It’s a lot more international than I expected to find,” she said of the MURP program. “The studio environment is a setting I hadn’t experienced before, and I love it. Even though I commute from Indianapolis, I’m able to be close to my classmates because studio time naturally creates those relationships.”

The St. Louis native is interested in working on issues of racial and economic segregation. The racial troubles of nearby Ferguson are not unique in the area, she says, and there is much work to be done. Getting involved and making a difference there is appealing to Neville, although she’s open to other challenges as well.

“I’m just happy to have found what I’m passionate about,” she says.