I am pursuing a summer internship in the Paris office of UNESCO’s Culture Department. My primary responsibility as an intern will be to assist in the planning of the 2013 World Heritage Meeting in Cambodia. The meeting functions as an annual assessment of global architectural and natural landmarks that are deserving of the protection and recognition of the United Nations as world heritage sites; sites are designated as “World Heritage Sites” for significant historical, contemporary and socio-cultural value for their local communities as well as for the greater world. The issue of cultural preservation through the protection of architectural sites is of great interest to me for several reasons. First, as an architecture student, I am constantly seeking to further my knowledge of the world’s great architecture – and this internship would provide me the opportunity to become well acquainted with examples of outstanding architecture from around the globe. Second, UNESCO’s emphasis on the preservation of both the natural and the built environment resonates with my own interest in sustainable architecture that fulfills societal need without contributing to environmental degradation. Third, and perhaps most importantly, UNESCO’s focus on fostering cultural diversity and vibrancy through architectural preservation parallels my own belief in the power of architecture as a powerful socio-cultural tool: I believe architecture should not only respond to the unique needs of the surrounding community, but should also reflect and enhance that community’s unique identity.

In sum, this internship with UNESCO’s cultural branch would allow me to deepen my understanding of architecture’s potential as a tool for cultural enrichment and for promoting cross-border global solidarity. I believe this experience would add an invaluable hands-on layer to my architectural education, and I know this opportunity to further cultivate my socially-oriented design philosophy will ultimately help me to become a more culturally responsible and more socially responsive architect.
I am eager to pursue this internship to further develop my interest in socially and environmentally sustainable architecture, an interest that has evolved within me since childhood. From my elementary school days, I assisted my dad in his endeavors as an inventor and artist. Later, in high school, I spent my free time designing, fabricating and racing bicycles. Even though I realized my passion for design early in my life, I thought of design as a mere hobby; I did not consider how I could translate this interest into a meaningful career. Consequently, when I began my undergraduate studies at the University of California at Santa Cruz, I chose to study law, not design. A career in law, I thought, would allow me to realize my greatest aspiration: to make a positive difference in society.

After two years as a legal studies major at Santa Cruz, I came to the conclusion that I was not, in fact, drawn to law, but instead drawn to the idea of building a meaningful professional life. Santa Cruz’s lack of design forced me to closely consider what I wanted from a new education and a new future profession. Several months of research led me to conclude that Berkeley’s architecture program was the perfect fit. Berkeley was as interested as I in the intellectual study of architecture as a process that can merge many professions, connect people, and mitigate some of the largest social and ecological issues we as a civilization face today. So, I spent the busiest year of my academic life taking two years’ worth of architectural prerequisites in two semesters, simultaneously enrolling in three community colleges to fulfill the requirements for transfer. My true intellectual journey began when I was accepted into Berkeley’s architecture program in 2012.

I have laid out a rigorous academic schedule for myself so that I might take fullest advantage of what Berkeley’s architecture program has to offer me: I plan to take a studio course every semester of my time here, in addition to pursuing a minor in sustainable design. Outside of the classroom, I am continuing to look for opportunities to compliment my formal design education and deepen my understandings of the social and cultural implications of the field of architecture. I currently work as a
research assistant for Raphael Sperry, a John Sorros Foundation fellow who is sponsored by the CED for his research on the social implications of the architecture of super maximum security prisons and death chambers in the United States. The ultimate goal of Raphael’s fellowship – and of my research assistantship, as well – is to amend the AIA bylaws to ban architects from designing such structures. This example of my current work in the field of architecture illustrates my interest in the intersection between architecture and social policy.

An internship with UNESCO’s world heritage site project will allow me to deepen my exploration of this intersection between architecture and socio-cultural policy, and will ultimately help me to design more culturally relevant, socially impactful, and environmentally sustainable buildings in my future career as an architect.