Scholarship Proposal: Write a short essay (500 words) describing your personal and intellectual journey, explaining how this particular experience fits into it.

As a designer there is no greater joy than witnessing the realization of your own ideas in physical form. We may slave over an idea for weeks, months, over countless iterations and prototypes, but at the end of the day when the final product is completed the sum of our efforts is in the way people will interact with it. It is at this point that the design ceases to belong to use, and becomes instead a product of the people, to be used in a way which they see fit and which may be contrary to its designed purpose. It may very well be true that the users will know more about the “intended” function and usability than the designer themselves. It is this crossroads of design and public use that draws me the most in my studies of Landscape Architecture.

I believe that Landscape Architecture in particular is driven more by the voices of the people than any other school of design. In being a form of civic engagement, Landscape Architecture has a propensity to influence change that forms the base of its discipline. I was drawn to Landscape Architecture fairly late in my academic career because I felt strongly in its ability to help humanity. I myself came from a modest household. I have never had to face the kind of struggles that half of the world outside of America sees daily. I can say wholeheartedly that I have benefited from the global system of capitalism, although I cannot say that everyone else’s experience is the same. Access to higher education has never been much of an issue to me, even though in my younger days I was not the best student. I have studied at 5 different college campuses, been on academic probation and the dean’s list, paid for tuition on financial aid, student loans, and out of pocket, and declared four different majors. I have in no way taken a linear path to education.

Although it has been a very confusing journey, I can say at this current moment, without a shadow of doubt in my mind, that I am undeniably in the pursuit of my passion. Landscape Architecture makes sense to me, and I can see its validity as an art form, design paradigm, and a bridge between other disciplines. I respect Architecture, Urban Studies, as well as the humanities in the way they interact with the Landscape. There is no reason those schools should remain distinct, and I have always felt more is to be done to bridge those gaps. I studied Architecture at my community college and competed in numerous architecturally based design build competitions. Some of my biggest idols are architects, in particular architects like Samuel Mockbee who dedicated their life’s work to the betterment of mankind. I see no competition in the disciplines of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, only collaboration.

I think both fields are facing the larger issues of a global context in terms of a degrading social and environmental network. As designers we must turn our attention to the need of the world before ourselves and our respected disciplines. Designers are the new problem solvers of the 21st century, and it is our duty, not merely our desire, to face these issues head on. If at the end of my career I can say that I at least contributed to this change of thought and consciousness then I would have done my duty as a designer and a human being.
Declaration of Interest: Compose a declaration of interest (no more than 500 words) describing your topic of study, your research questions, and your proposed methods of research. Applicants are highly advised to collaborate with a local NGO or non-profit organization with expertise in their proposed site and/or topic of research.

Through the Judith Lee Stronach Travel Scholarship I hope to bridge the gap between institutions, disciplines, and countries. I will travel to El Salvador with a close friend of mine who is an Architecture student at the California College of Arts in San Francisco. We will be working in close connection with the Tamarindo Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedication to promoting physical well being in the community of Guarjila, El Salvador. Our goal is the design of a significant work of public infrastructure through community engagement and planned charettes with local civic leaders, craftsmen, and members of the Guarjila community. Depending on the scope of the design we will require funds mainly for materials and cost of labors. All of our experiences will be carefully documented and archived for future years. If we can get enough support we hope to the program running into the future. Our main caveats are to keep the program open to both design/nondesign students from various institutions and to dedicate ourselves to promoting the creation of innovative works of public infrastructure in rural El Salvador. In keeping with the tradition of Samuel Mockbee and the rural studio, our designs will reflect the needs and voices of the community as well as the spirit of innovation.
Travel Itinerary

July 6th: Travel to San Salvador

July 7th: Arrive in Guarjila

July 8th – 9th: Case studies of rural architecture, community engagement

July 10th: initial assessments, proposed design initiatives

July 11th-12th: multiple community charettes and brainstorming sessions

July 13th-15th: Design developments/Meetings with craftsmen

July 16th-18th: finalize initial design phase/plans for future

July 19th: fly back to San Francisco