

2020 ARE SCHOLARSHIP | AIA MN

Thesis Statement: 1-2 sentences

It is our duty as architects to become the main communicators and facilitators of change across all community scales and socio-economic demographics. The future architect is a social enterprise entrepreneur that works across rural and urban geographies to better address the long-standing gap in access to architecture and design.

Essay: 300 words

According to the AIA's Guides for Equitable Practice, "architects will [increasingly] be called to lead efforts in finding solutions to many of our society's most pressing issues...[and] we must have the talent, passion and creativity of a diverse cohort of students, professionals, and leaders" to meet these challenges.

Since moving back to rural Southeastern Minnesota to start my own design practice ten months ago, I have begun questioning whether architects will be called to lead these efforts in rural and exurban communities. This is not because we are incapable, but rather because architects are not often seen as integral to projects in small communities. Recent changes in technology and communication have opened up opportunities in rural areas, but few support networks for architects exist outside of cities, making inroads into these projects difficult. Internships are often solely in metropolitan areas which disproportionately places emerging professionals out of reach to serve our target audiences, further perpetuating an inaccessibility to design services.

My goal as a future architect has always been to increase the financial accessibility of architecture in small towns and working-class populations. I firmly believe that these communities would embrace architects and design solutions if they knew more about where our skill sets can assist in the betterment of their lives. As entrepreneurs, this provides us a great opportunity to rethink our design practices and business models to meet their unique challenges.

If our desire is to truly create an equitable practice, we need a massive work culture shift that: (1) provides mentorship to young architectural designers in rural as well as urban spaces, (2) more purposefully engages in the practice of architecture alongside existing industries in small towns and, (3) diversifies our design services to actively propose collaborative projects that address long-standing issues in rural and exurban communities.