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The following is a writing sample which was submitted for the Olmsted Scholar Award:

Growing up, conversations around incarceration were few and far between in my family. The only time it was spoken of was when my parents were trying to teach life lessons; "Don't do this, don't do that - you don't want to end up like your cousin's dad." To me as an outsider to this community, the world was painted in black and white, good and bad, cause and effect. As I got older and began to take classes and read about the history largely left out of my early education, I learned that this is far from the truth. I learned how racist and discriminatory our justice system was and continues to be. I learned that my cousin's dad, always in and out of prison, was less of his own doing but more so a reaction to a structure his life was oriented around for generations. I was enraged at a system that took my cousin's dad away from him and more angry for the people unlike my cousin who didn't have other healthy relationships and people they could trust so they eventually ended up in the same system their parents may have. I was angry, I was empathetic, and I was empowered to make a statement and a difference however I could.

When it came time to choose a thesis project, I saw it as an opportunity to explore how landscape architecture could be a part of the discussion in solving such a major problem. I decided I would design a prison with a more humanistic and rehabilitative approach. I began by researching case studies in Norway and Sweden and believed that by designing something biophilic and people oriented like those ones, we would see the same result – practically nonexistent recidivism rates, lower crime rates, and ultimately a low prison population. I thought that the solution lived in the design of the structural response. But then I spoke about this with my sociology professor one day and he was terrified of that thinking. This conversation was the first of many about trust and relationships regarding my project. He pointed out that designing nicer prisons would justify those in power to send more people to prison. This excuse would further strain the relationship and increase distrust between the government and the communities most targeted. He introduced me to the abolitionist movement and a new course of action for my project.

From this new way of thinking I began to take a preventative approach to incarceration. My studies led me to design in a way that challenged the traditional approach to crime preventative design by instead creating spaces that were people oriented and worked towards healing by building healthy relationships and trust upon multiple scales. The most challenging aspect of my thesis project proved to lie within the question of trust. I learned through research and conversations that trust appears at multiple scales: government/authority with the people, the designer with the community, people to people, and self.

A pivotal moment for my thinking on these relationships happened at a workshop I attended that addressed the mass incarceration. The workshop began by questioning the intent and authenticity of each attendee. Why are we individually motivated and authentic in our desire to see the end of mass incarceration? This was the first exercise in self reflection and understanding that change begins with individuals that are true with their intentions. This exercise was new for me, something I hadn't been asked to do before in my education. I'm not sure many projects or professionals begin with this thinking either. The next step of the workshop evaluated the relationship and role of trust between the government and the people, particularly those who are disenfranchised or historically neglected. This was the first time that I heard an equity approach being criticized. My thinking here was totally flipped: I cannot simply plan to build the infrastructure for resources and assume they will be adopted. The people running the workshop, all those being closely impacted by incarceration, reiterated that people will not utilize the resources if they're provided by people they don't trust – the government or designers. They have no reason to trust us, the people who have historically displaced or excluded them. To build this trust takes community engagement that allows the community to run the process, not react to it. Allowing for ownership and flexibility became the major theme in my district scale due to this revelation – allowing for the government to show their trust in the people to run the show, and the community hopefully gaining trust for the government through this show of respect. I see this as just a beginning, though, to building trust with the communities and I would need a lot more time than a year long thesis to fully explore this persisting challenge of trust within my project.

If I were chosen as the national scholar, I would be inclined to further study this problem many designers with true

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intentions face: How do we as outsiders begin to build trust within a community, particularly one that has every reason to not trust us?

Answering this question will prove to be vital to the progressive direction the field is currently taking in working towards equity, inclusivity, and diversity when designing with and working with marginalized communities. I would suspect that any project that wasn't built on a strong foundation of trust did not achieve the goals or intent that the community or stakeholders had. By learning how to build trust and healthy relationships, designers and communities can better influence desirable outcomes.

I would begin to approach this problem by studying and documenting how one can begin to self-reflect and understand their true intentions and motives. The guiding questions here being: How is trust connected to motivation, intention, and authenticity? What is the responsibility of gaining trust, and are they the right person to handle that responsibility? What is your comfort zone, why is that your comfort zone, and what can you gain by stepping out of it? This on-going self-reflection and understanding continues to drastically change the course of my thinking, the questions I am asking, and ultimately my project. I'm curious to see what would come of every designer being honest with themselves and their constituents.

The second part of the studies I would conduct would be directly addressing how to gain trust as an outsider. For this effort, I would have conversations and document interviews with a well-rounded scope of people, asking them how their trust is gained as well as how they believe they earn trust. It would be interesting to analyze how their approach or assessment of trust influences their way of life or work. These conversations may be with designers who practice community engagement, ones who don't, members of privileged communities, members of communities with less privilege and then also people from less traditional design approaches with power disparities such as politicians, healthcare workers, business owners, and other professions. This compilation would begin to showcase how others address power, trust, and relationships and what is and isn't successful – building a guide to what designers should carry through or leave behind in community engagement.

As a final deliverable for this project, I would like to document all my findings and leave it open ended enough for others to establish their own opinions and direction. It may take the form of a documentary that could be an easily digestible medium for a wide range of professions, students, and community members to understand. Through this project, I think it could result in a continued journey of education for myself, but also a way to have others reflect, educate, reevaluate, and re-form the way they work or live. This could result in better intentioned and stronger community engagement practices, allowing for resilient and trusting communities and support systems to be built.