

Service Corps



2007 BRYAN FELLOW

Kristin Economo

HOMETOWN: Durham, NC

MAJOR/DEGREE:
International Studies,
Class of 2008

PROJECT TITLE:
Service Corps

FACULTY MENTOR:
Regina Cortina,
School of Education

COMMUNITY PARTNER:
Chatham County Together

PROJECT LOCATION:
Chatham County

“I have been energized and astounded by how deeply a program simply based around creativity and enthusiasm for learning can impact the youth who need it most in the rapidly-changing rural NC communities”



The aim of my work as a Bryan Fellow was to cultivate community support and develop a plan for a 2007-2008 session of Service Corps, a multi-level public service and leadership program for public school youth in Siler City, NC. In the program, high-school students tutor middle-school students and both engage in creative, community-awareness art enrichment. More specifically, the program is focused on addressing the need for ESL tutoring and leadership and public service opportunities for Latino youth in rural North Carolina. On Mondays after school, UNC students provide tutoring and arts enrichment for high-school students. Then, the Service Corps teens get the chance to step up as the leaders of Wednesday sessions and guide middle-school students through the same activities.

Project Goals

1. To ensure the future of Service Corps.
2. To work more closely with the Chatham County Public Schools in order to eventually move Service Corps within a school.
3. To create a Service Corps 2007-2008 arts project curriculum, business plan, tutor recruitment plan and training guide, calendar, and other program materials.

Towards the end of the summer while I was away from North Carolina, after pitching Service Corps to Sage Charter School, after planning in-depth with the administration, and after orchestrating a recruitment and parent orientation plan, I found out that the school system decided to cut funding for Sage's



seventh and eighth grade classes--our pool of middle-school students. My community contact, Kim Caraganis, said "welcome to a low-income school district."

After receiving the news, I immediately got on the phone and started making calls to administrators and staff at other possible host-sites, re-structured the schedule, and ultimately figured out a way to make the program still function. Ultimately, I feel that our fall plan--which will allocate more one-on-one between

high-school students and UNC mentors, while still providing tutoring and art enrichment for middle-school students at a local after-school program desperate for tutors, will build a stronger element of leadership development for the adolescent members.

The fellowship was both challenging and interesting. I was not able to meet with every person that I had hoped to meet with but the people with whom I did meet have been extremely helpful. The best part of the fellowship has been absorbing both general (national funding) and very specific (art project ideas) information about how after-school programs run.

This summer, I got a first-hand view of the challenges involved in working in a public education system and all of the unexpected barriers involved with establishing sustainability for a program. I would never change a minute of my experience simply because I was forced to think quickly and be a true advocate for the program and the students involved.



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