

## *Experiential Learning, Play and Curriculum Development: Student U Summer Extension*



2009 BRYAN FELLOW

*Jessica Speed*

**HOMETOWN:** Cranberry Township, PA

**MAJOR/DEGREE:**  
Doctoral Candidate in Communication Studies  
Class of 2011

**PROJECT TITLE:**  
Experiential Learning, Play and Curriculum  
Development: Student U Summer Extension

**FACULTY MENTOR:**  
Madeleine Grumet  
Communications Studies

**COMMUNITY PARTNER:**  
Student U

**PROJECT LOCATION:**  
Durham, NC

*“I felt compelled to help the next summer’s teachers gain the skills, courage and material resources to create more engaging and fruitful learning experiences for our students.”*



This fellowship project was an attempt to “bring life” to curriculum for students in an academic-intensive summer enrichment program through activities and experiences that broke the mold of what they are used to doing in their traditional schools.

Through this project, I attempted to do this by providing financial and developmental support to our teachers, who are college students or recent graduates from area universities.

### **Project Goals**

1. Provide Experiential Education Teacher Development
2. Increase Experiential Education Opportunities
3. Create Curricular Ties With Experiential Education

I worked with middle school students in Durham, North Carolina who are enrolled in Student U, a year-round academic enrichment program. Additionally, I worked with these students’ teachers, college-aged students and recent graduates from Durham-area universities.

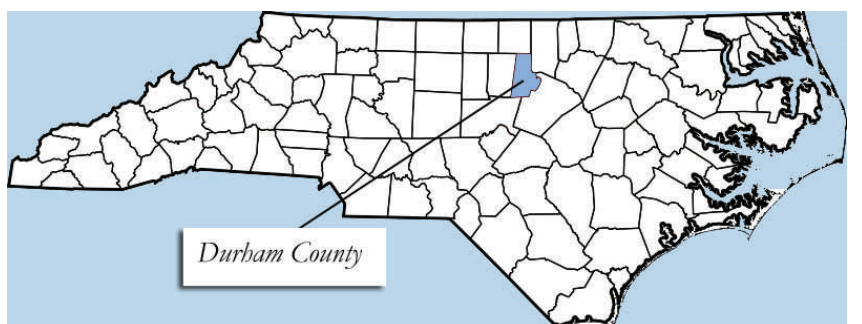
The middle school students are Durham residents, and are involved with Student U because they have academic potential and an interest in participating in an academic enrichment program. When students are selected to be a part of the program, they are typically performing in the academic middle. They also have one of the following factors, which increase the likelihood of disconnecting from the school system at an earlier age: limited parental education, single-family home, lack of access to adult mentoring, low family income, or limited English proficiency at home.

The college students who teach at Student U have an interest in education and a desire to know and love the community of Durham better. I felt compelled to help these teachers gain the skills, courage, and material resources to create more engaging and fruitful learning experiences for our students.

Carrying my Bryan Fellowship into my role as the Teaching Director of Student U, I experienced a convergence of these communities. Inevitably more challenging and more complicated than conversations among one audience, the conversations between these two communities have deeply enriched my understandings of this kind of work: its problems, its precariousness, and, most hopefully, its promises.

Of all my experiences, the closest to my heart is the story of a boy named Jairo. Jairo came to Student U last summer as rising 6<sup>th</sup> grader who spoke so quietly that those around had to strain to hear him. Jairo and I got to know each other between my English classes in the summer of 2008. We began a routine that included Jairo whispering questions and begging for more information on the world around him. We talked about the fact that he needed to speak up and “show his brilliance.”

When I moved into my new role as the Teaching Director, I did not see Jairo as much, but I heard from his teachers that he was speaking up more. By the time he became a rising 7<sup>th</sup> grader, he was *not* the same child who I had met the previous summer. He wrote a speech on pollution that he delivered to his peers at school loudly and clearly, and then he *won* the privilege of giving that speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. I saw the video of Jairo presenting his speech – he was so proud. I cannot wait to see the great things that Jairo does with his voice and the commitment to follow his passions; I do not think that he will surprise any of us with the great things that he will accomplish.



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