

Jason Grissom, '01 and '02 (capstone project in Siberia)

“I was developing an understanding of educational disparities – people coming from different school districts in North Carolina, from vastly different levels of preparation – and it seemed so unfair but I didn’t know how to attack that. Service-learning helped me think through my interest in this issue, and then I went on to study it in graduate school, and now this is what I study for a living.”

Jason (Political Science, Economics, Statistics, Multidisciplinary Studies) spent 10 weeks during the summer in the Siberian republic of Buryatia, serving with an international NGO whose mission was to promote education for sustainable development in rural areas around Lake Baikal. He worked with teachers and students in rural villages as they attempted to start small school-based micro-enterprises, an experience that offered him an opportunity to explore the intersection of education, economics and entrepreneurship in a world still transitioning from Communist rule. He also participated in the International Green Walk, a ten-day hike through villages along the southern shore of Lake Baikal with 75 students, teachers and organizers from the region to meet with community leaders and promote sustainability. Jason kept a daily journal and also engaged in periodic comprehensive reflection using a more developed version of Nick and Gretchen's reflection framework, and he sent reflection products via email (when available) to his faculty mentor.

Brandon Whitney, '05 (capstone project in Ecuador)

“My international service-learning capstone project was instrumental in helping me plan my future. My exposure to the complexity of the issues surrounding conservation and development, the processes by which I learned with mentors, and my immersion in the dynamics of partnerships and community building set me on my graduate and professional path. I also gained a tremendous sense of my place in the world, an abiding appreciation for the wealth of our differences, and a set of values that encourage me to take seriously my responsibilities as a global citizen.”

Brandon (Biology & Political Science) wanted to integrate some of the themes of his undergraduate education by exploring the ethics of environment and development and the concept of sustainable development and he wanted first-hand experience in conservation and development – experience that would help him choose future educational and career paths. He spent 7 months (spring semester and summer) in Ecuador: a semester abroad with academic courses and increasingly intensive service (with Peace Corps volunteers doing environmental education and eco-tourism projects in the Andes Mountains) and a summer of intensive service-learning (with an NGO focused on community development and environmental conservation, conducting an ethno-botanical survey of how villagers used wild and domesticated plants medicinally). Brandon developed an extensive curriculum (readings and reflection prompts) and completed analytical weekly reflection essays, which he sent via email (when available) to two faculty mentors.