

# Arthur Zankel Urban Fellowships 2009-2010

**This year 48 TC students worked with under-served urban youth to enhance educational opportunity and equity in Upper Manhattan**

**James Alford**  
**History and Education:**  
**African American Male Initiative**

African American males continue to face disproportionate struggles in achieving success. A program of The Children's Aid Society and established in 2007, The African American Male Initiative, is developing ways to combat these obstacles and chart paths to success for young Black males.

In the fifth year of his History and Education Ph.D., James Alford is devoted to showing young African American men just how much they are capable of achieving. With the support of his Zankel Fellowship, James has embarked on a project to expose students to technological and visual tools to document their lives, helping them express the stories of their communities, and envision brighter futures. Using video cameras, audio equipment and digital cameras, James led the young men, all of whom he met at an alternative incarceration program, through a project he calls "Reimagining Futures." When James first



met the young men, he did not know what to expect. "I walked into the room that first day, and looked around at all these sullen faces, and I wondered if this was going to work. But they completely blossomed."

One of the young men was, as James describes, "the guy with a chip on his shoulder." But James was persistent. The young man realized that he was a natural author, and worked hard to tell his story. Now the young man mentors the other boys. "What the guys love is documenting their community, their city, and their daily lives. It's a powerful way for them to show the world where they are and where they want to be."

**Rachel Althof**  
**Art and Art Education:**  
**Reading Buddy**

Rachel Althof is a first year doctoral student in the Art and Art Education department. Born in Buffalo, New York, Rachel lived in Columbus, Ohio, until beginning her studies at TC last year. Rachel knows that confidence is a large part of any learning

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process—and this is exactly what she was able to give her Buddy. “Memorizing a book isn’t our end goal, but when my Buddy learned Eric Carle’s *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by heart, it was a significant achieve-



ment that grew her confidence to continue learning how to read. One Friday, while I was working in the classroom, my Buddy asked if we could read. She opened *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and began to read it to me. Only this time she read it very loudly. She was almost screaming the words,

and it began to disrupt the class. Students stopped and turned their heads. Her teacher, on the other side of the room, turned her head, wondering about the loud voice. I politely interrupted my Buddy to ask why she was reading so loudly. She responded, ‘I want my teacher to know that I can read.’ Her confidence had reached a new level.”

**“This is the joy of teaching—guiding a student until he does not need you anymore.”**



**Dena Simmons**  
**Health Education: Math Buddy**

Dena Simmons is in the first year of her doctoral studies in the Health Education department. Originally from the Bronx, as a Math Buddy, Dena has connected with all of her students. One student in particular, however, made enormous strides during their time together. As she explains, “When I first met my Buddy, he was timid. He sank into his chair as if he hoped to melt into the chipped wooden seat. My first interaction with him happened in the classroom when I was observing him. I watched him struggle with his work and hide his misunderstandings behind the chaos of the classroom. But now I see a different person. I see a boy who has worked diligently and seriously in our sessions and who does not need to hide anymore. He is proud and loud about his math abilities, but more than that, he is confident. He is the strongest math student in the class, who often volunteers to explain work to his peers and who does not seem to need my guidance as much anymore. This is the joy of teaching—guiding a student until he does not need you anymore.”



“The Urban Science Project is definitely shaping my studies and my future career.”

## **Elise Paul** **Science Education:** **Urban Science Project**

Elise Paul works in a science class at a high school in the Bronx. In the classroom, however, Elise’s work goes beyond teaching. As part of the Urban Science Project, Elise runs cooperative dialogues with members of the class. She asks students to think not only about what they’ve learned, but also how they learn it. “We are involving kids in the learning process—they are our co-teachers. Often our discussions are about the lessons themselves, but we also talk about the experience of learning. We interrogate the issues, and this really involves the students.”

Working with TC Professor Chris Emdin on the Urban Science Project, Elise and her team focus on issues of race, class, and diversity in urban science classrooms. Professor Emdin’s work in Science Education and Hip Hop in action has been receiving much praise and attention for innovation in his field. Using new theoretical frameworks to transform science education, the Urban Science Project is a model in science education

reform. Elise’s confidence in the program has to do with the fact that she’s seen it work: “One student in particular, a young man from Ghana, was getting into a lot of trouble and failing. With this program he was given a real sense of agency and power over his own experience. After eight weeks, he made a complete turnaround. He rose to the occasion in a leadership role and is now mentoring other students.” In addition to her students, the Urban Science Project has also guided

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Elise. “Because of the Zankel Fellowship, I got to know about this field of work that I’m really passionate about. The Urban Science Project is definitely shaping my studies and my future career.”



**Alexander “Sandy” Pope  
Social Studies Education:  
Reading Buddy**

This year, in a Harlem elementary classroom, Sandy Pope learned just how much of a difference a Buddy makes. As a Zankel Fellow Reading Buddy, Sandy works every weekday for two hours at the same school, spending 30 minutes with each of his four Buddies for an entire academic year. Principals and teachers love this regular support, as it makes all the difference

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in assuring growth and success for each child. As Sandy explains, “More than anything else, it was the consistency that helped. We support them in whatever way we can. We get them comfortable with the things they don’t know, and comfortable with correcting themselves. There’s often such disconnect between what they are supposed to be learning, and what



they are actually taking in. One-on-one time with a Buddy allows for a safe haven in which the kids can actually learn.

Having that special attention to focus on

reading or writing, or even just hang out and have a respectful conversation really inspires and changes them.” This was Sandy’s first time in an elementary school setting, and he too learned a lot from the Buddy experience. “One of my Buddies was six years old and did not yet know how to read. Spending time with him, I came to understand how this kind of thing can happen, and the variety of things that can leave a child behind.” Sandy has a new appreciation for the importance of elementary education, and for the work ahead of him as a teacher. “My Buddies became increasingly curious, and more interested in learning. That felt really good.”

**Tamara Naparstek  
Speech-Language Pathology with  
a Bilingual Extension in the  
Biobehavioral Studies Department:  
Math Buddy**

Tamara Naparstek continues her work from last year with third graders at PS 154 in Harlem. As a Math Buddy, Tamara loves helping her students solve problems. “It is great when you see the light bulb go on. Working with the kids so consistently allows for me to really see how much they progress.” With the help of her Zankel Fellowship, Tamara is able to guide and support students to help them have improved experiences. While the focus of their Buddy time is math based, Tamara likes to think that the skills her students learn are transferable. As Tamara explains, “I love working with the kids, and coming up with different strategies. Whether it is skip counting, or how to ask for help; there’s always more than one way to solve a problem.”



**“It’s great when you see the light bulb go on.”**



**“Just as we asked the kids to take on different roles, we did too.”**

**Shaquinah Taylor & Rashidah Bowen**  
**Counseling and Psychology:**  
**Participatory Action Research**

This year, with the support of their Zankel Fellowships, Shaquinah Taylor and Rashidah Bowen worked with Harlem high school students on a PAR project. A methodological stance, participatory action research (PAR) is grounded in challenges to ways of knowing, ways of being, expertise and power. It offers an alternative paradigm in which social and research hierarchies are dismantled through restructuring power dynamics.

PAR provides activities that help teenagers become active interpreters of the world and their own options. Students were interested in examining and understanding social networking websites. Shaquinah and Rashidah were amazed by how engaged their students were with the project. In addition to the normal stresses every adolescent experiences, many students in New York City public schools face developmental and emotional obstacles related to poverty, racism and other socio-cultural factors. PAR’s group projects tackle issues that personally affect adolescents and their peers. Whether they look at wellness and health disparities of a student’s community, the reasons and consequences of leaving school to pursue a GED, or images of young women of color in the media,

students always collaborate, critically understand, and openly discuss the topics affecting their daily lives. They then create websites, pamphlets and presentations to document what they have learned and express themselves to the outside world. As a result, students learn to find and use their own voices, and envision ways to empower themselves and their communities in the future.

**“It was a great way for everyone to provide support for one another.”**

As Rashidah explains, “It changed the way they communicated with each other. At one point a student was suspended, and so we talked about suspension. The students came up with alternative ideas and even created a workshop as an alternative to suspension. It was a great way for everyone to provide support for one another, and talk openly about communication that works, and that which doesn’t.” Shaquinah was equally impressed by how reciprocal the process was. “When the kids realized they were part of the process, they really began to learn. But just as we asked the kids to take on different roles, we did too. It was challenging. I think I learned as much from the kids as they did from me.”

**Christina Esche**  
**Sociology and Education:**  
**Reading Buddy**

Being a Reading Buddy is not always easy. Yet, for Christina Esche, this is precisely what affirms her mission. “Being a Buddy challenges the way I think—I am reminded that it’s not supposed to be easy to grow and change. I love knowing that because it is not always easy for me, my students and my teacher, we are all participating in a process that leads to

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learning.” Originally from Woodbury, Connecticut, Christina spent three years teaching first graders in Phoenix, Arizona prior to coming to TC.



Connecting to individuals in the Harlem community has been incredibly meaningful to Christina, especially as a first year Master’s candidate in the Sociology and Education program. As she explains, “I love

the small moments I share with my teacher and my students, when my teacher and I take a moment to smile at a child, or the surprise when we see a student acting out of character. They serve as reminders that we are two adults swimming in the same pond. We may choose to do different strokes, but both of us are staying afloat the best way we know how, and it’s the same water that surrounds us. I like the moments in which we both recognize that shared experience.”

**“My students look forward to the time we spend together.”**



**Rachel Labrecque**  
**Cognitive Studies: MathemAntics**

Rachel Labrecque wants to do everything she can to make the process of learning math fun and easy for students. With the support of her Zankel Fellowship, she can do just that. Rachel is helping a team to develop MathemAntics, a software initiative that allows children to explore and learn about mathematics through a series of game-like activities. As part of the project, Rachel regularly plays MathemAntics games with Harlem second graders and kindergartners. “My students look forward to the time we spend together, seeing it more as play than as a typical lesson.” Students practice number recognition, counting, cardinality, addition and subtraction, estimating, and a whole host of mathematical concepts. Because MathemAntics allows for individualized practice, students receive a thorough knowledge of these concepts, and are never left behind. What’s more, Rachel’s time in the classroom provides the MathemAntics team direct feedback as to what works best for young mathematicians. As Rachel explains, “It is so exciting to see my students’ progress, and wonderful to know that these concepts will help them for the rest of their lives.”



## **Suzanna Schell** **Curriculum and Teaching for** **Elementary: Reading Buddy**

Suzanna Schell is truly inspired by her experience as a Zankel Fellow. In her own words: “Working as a Reading Buddy has been the most valuable experience of my graduate school career. I have the opportunity to gain experience working intimately with my stu-

**“He wants to read. He is confident and excited that reading on his own is opening up a world.”**

dents and their teacher, and learn from fellow academics and educators too. Not only have I been introduced to the important concepts of Organizational Learning and Social Capital through our group meetings, but have been able to observe these concepts at work while in the schools—ultimately feeling I am a part of something that can and will perhaps bring about real change in the education system. My studies this year have focused on the power of empathy in education and how important it is to the success of the student that he and she feels heard, cared for and trusted. Working as a Reading Buddy provides me proof that this concept is effective and true. It is a gift to have developed relationships with my four students, all of whom have grown so much. It makes me more excited

## **Scott Anthony Lupi** **Arts Administration:** **Say Yes to Education**

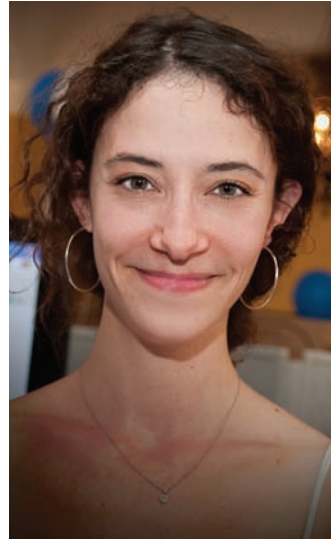
This year, Scott served as a member of the Say Yes to Education program at PS 180 in Harlem. He worked with over 50 fifth and eighth graders, all of whom were preparing to go on to middle or high school. Scott used theatre education and public speaking techniques to prepare students for their upcoming placement interviews. He worked with them on eye engagement, listening, articulation, expression, posture and concision. As a result, Scott’s students became confident and successful interviewees. The competi-

tion for one’s top school is always fierce, yet each one of Scott’s students was accepted into his or her top three choice schools. “It has been an incredible experience working with—and learning from—the students at PS 180M. The school community could not have been more welcoming and supportive of my work, and the students benefited tremendously. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to make a difference in the community.”

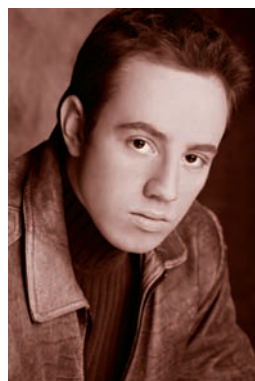
than I have ever been to start my career as a teacher.” One of Suzanna’s Buddies struggled with his confidence and ability to stay focused. Here, she tells his story: “We started with exploring snakes, learning everything:

names, geographies of habitat, prey and reproduction patterns. As a snake lover, the ritual was intoxicating for my student. Yet, I was still doing all of the reading. The printed words on the page intimidated him, although I could see an understanding develop within him that the words were the true gateway to the facts, more so than even the images.”

“I knew this kid could read—he just did not think he could, and was easily frustrated by the experience. One day, I brought in an advanced book about great white sharks. It clicked for him that other worlds were out there, all awaiting him in books. Motivated more than ever before, my student has since blossomed. He is eager to learn as much as he can and is now reading by himself.”



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**Sharin Glasser**  
**Art and Art Education:**  
**Math/Reading Buddy**

As a first year student in the Art and Art Education department, Sharin Glasser was not initially sure that being a Reading Buddy would fit in well with the rest of her studies. “What I have found, however, is

**“I have brought methods from the classroom directly into use with the kids.”**

that the one-on-one experience and getting to work with the same four kids for a whole academic year is something completely unparalleled to my experience in the classroom. I found my studies compliment-



ing my work with the students. I have brought methods from the classroom directly into use with the kids, and working with them has helped contextualize all of the things I

am learning. I feel so fortunate to have been able to pair my studies with this work. The one-on-one time is usually thought of as a benefit for the student, but it is definitely a benefit for the Buddies as well. Being a Buddy has enabled me to understand myself as an educator, as well as to learn about the community TC is surrounded by. Understanding the students, and myself, has been enormously valuable. I am so grateful for the Zankel Fellowship experience.”



**“It takes a lot of patience and courage for a student to overcome what they’ve been through.”**

**Jillian DeCosta & Beth Guadagni**  
**Reading Education: Reading Specialists at The Heritage School**

With the help of their Zankel Fellowships, Jillian DeCosta and Beth Guadagni are able to pursue their passions of helping students to read. Both Jillian and Beth work at The Heritage School in Harlem, and have been inspired by their ability to make a difference. As Jillian describes, “I work with a handful of 15 and 16 year olds who are reading at a third grade level. It is not easy. It takes a lot of patience and courage for a student to overcome what they’ve been through and get to a place where they can open their minds to learning. There is nothing better than reaching that place with someone.” Part of this motivation has to do with being pulled out of class. Jillian and Beth agree that the special attention is motivating for their students, and working in small groups of three or four allow for individualized teaching. As Beth explains, “I live for those days where it clicks and they realize how engaging reading can actually be.” Beth proudly remembers when, after reading a particularly difficult text, her student looked up with bewilderment and said, “I didn’t know I could read so many words!”