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Alumnus Helps Deaf Students Develop Skills in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)

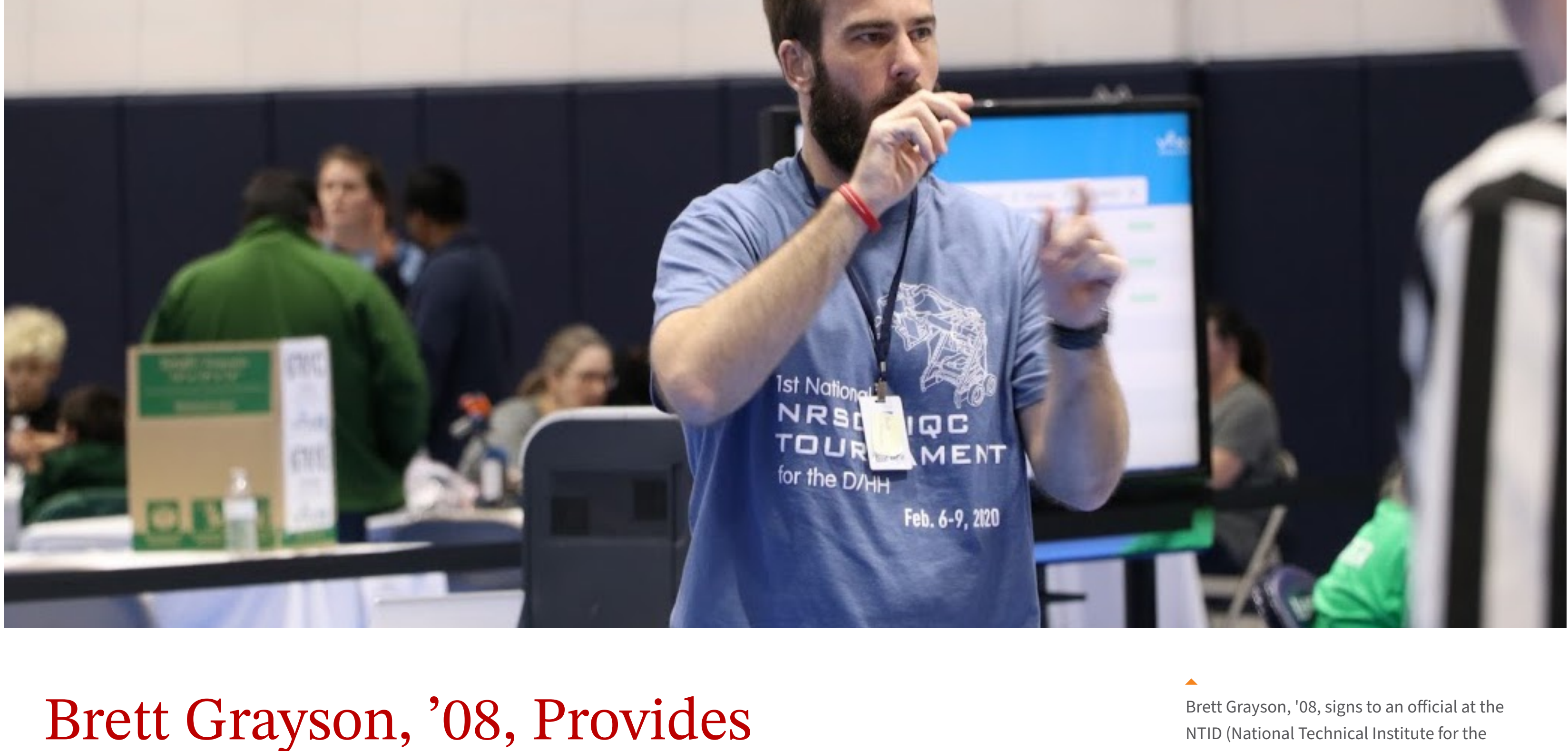
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ALUMNI

Alumnus Helps Deaf Students Develop Skills in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2020



Brett Grayson, '08, Provides Robotics' Resources for Middle and High School Students

After graduating from Gardner-Webb University in 2008, Brett Grayson took a job that changed his career goals. Grayson, a Deaf individual, majored in mathematics with a minor in American Sign Language (ASL). He was hired as a long-term substitute teacher for three Deaf students in English/language arts.

"I planned to obtain my civil engineering degree. However, that never happened," Grayson shared. "I have always loved kids, but this experience sparked my passion for teaching. I enjoy knowing that I am a role model for the younger Deaf students, giving them confidence that they are capable of doing whatever they set their mind to do. Another perk to teaching is to see the 'aha' moments on the faces of my students. Immediately following that school year as a sub, I enrolled into graduate school at McDaniel College (Westminster, Md.), where I obtained my Master of Science in Deaf Education in 2012."

While working on his master's degree, Grayson was employed as a dorm parent at Maryland School for the Deaf. After receiving his degree, he relocated to South Carolina for the Deaf and Blind and worked in the outreach program. Next, he taught middle and high school mathematics. In January 2020, he was ready for a new challenge and took a job as a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) trainer at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) Regional STEM Center, which is located at the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind in Talladega, Ala.

"My main responsibility is to serve 12 states in the Southeast, promoting STEM educational resources to Deaf and Hard of Hearing students," he noted. "We provide a wide spectrum of resources, workshops and camps. We also plan and host an annual nationwide robotics tournament for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students to provide them an opportunity to qualify to the highest level of robotics competition for middle school and high school students, the VEX Robotics World Championship."



Brett Grayson works with students at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) Regional STEM Center's Second Annual VEX VRC Tournament for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing held at the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind in Talladega, Ala.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Grayson traveled to schools to conduct STEM and robotics training. In the summer, the center hosts camps for Deaf students that are held around the country. The camps provide more information about the STEM field, and they hear from Deaf professionals. Because of the pandemic, all the programs were switched to a virtual format. "One of the greatest needs that we observed and received feedback on was the lack of coding/programming materials, specifically for robotics," he said. "We decided to dive head first into this when the pandemic began and offered multiple online trainings via Zoom on how to develop a program to run a robot autonomously using VEX's Virtual Reality software. This was a huge success!"

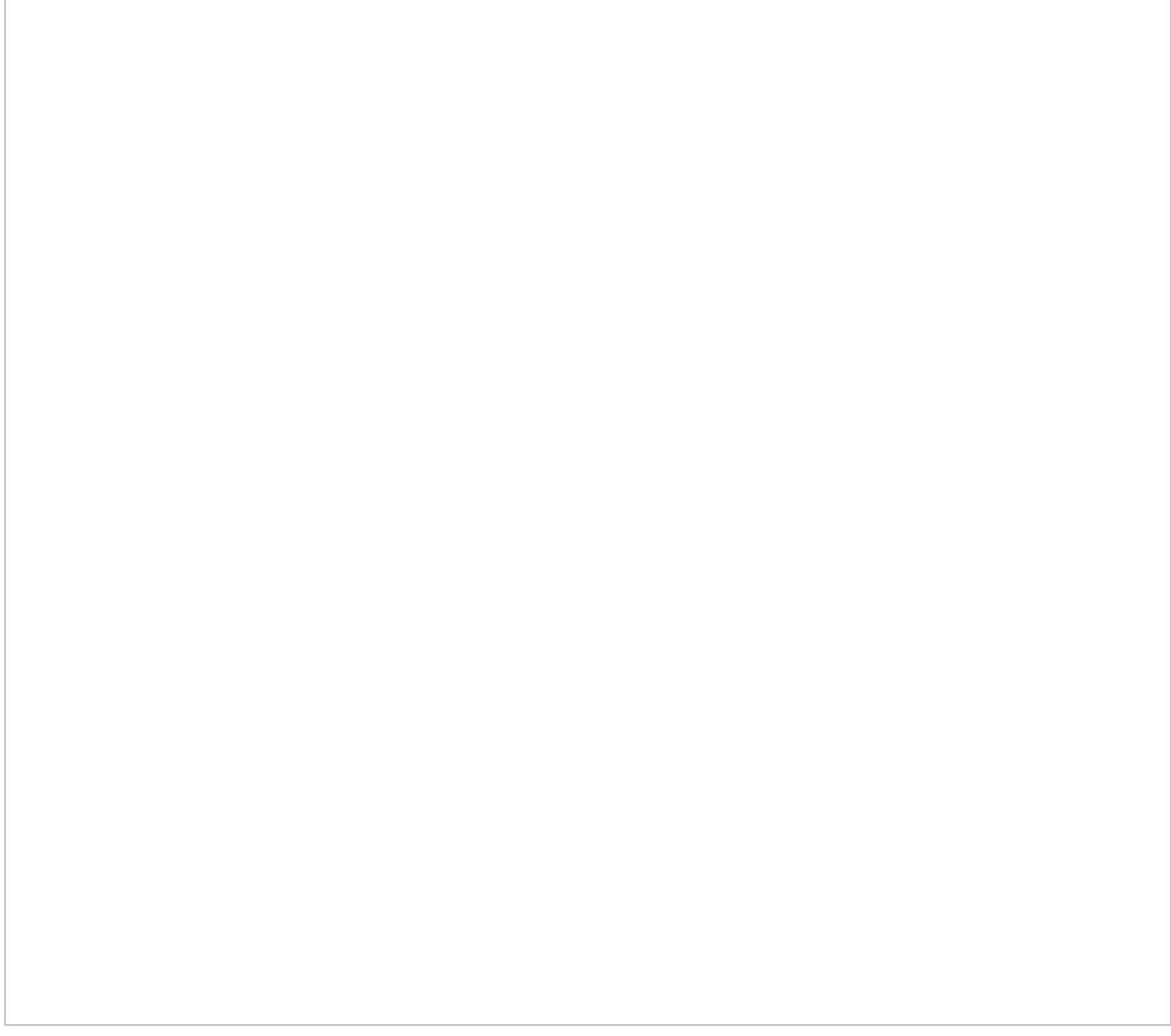
As the country recognizes Deaf Awareness Month during September, Grayson emphasizes the important contributions of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community. "We are capable of doing anything that we set our minds to," he affirmed. "There are innumerable Deaf individuals who hold advanced degrees and have well-respected occupations. We have the ability to contribute to society, just like anybody else, when given the opportunity."

A native of Monroe, N.C., Grayson chose to attend Gardner-Webb after one visit. "I felt welcomed the second I stepped on campus," he reflected. "Furthermore, as a Deaf individual, accessibility was important to me and I was pleased to learn that the disability service program was top notch. Not only that, several students took ASL as their major or foreign language requirement, and were able to communicate with me."

He counts his time at Gardner-Webb as one of the best in his life, recalling pancake nights to take a break from studying for midterms, Deaf Awareness Week with the Deaf Club, especially Deaf Performance Night, weekly ASL table that lasted for hours, hanging out at the Broad River, late nights playing Halo in Royster Hall, visiting local restaurants and cheering on the Runnin' Dawgs.

The vibrant and caring GWU community provided a safe place for him to develop his skills and grow as an individual. "There were several different groups on campus that would check in to make sure things were going well," he asserted. "The professors genuinely cared about me and would go above and beyond to make sure that I had what I needed to be successful with my academics at Gardner-Webb. Additionally, there are several different organizations that a person can get involved with and often these opportunities create lifelong relationships, whether it is a mentor or a friend."

Grayson continued, "Developing the ability to advocate for myself in a safe environment was something that benefited me as a graduate student and a working professional. I worked closely with the Noel Center for Disability Resources to ensure that I received the services I needed for my classes, such as interpreters and note takers. The program provided me with the tools I needed to advocate for myself. These skills transitioned me into the working world, and I often find myself applying these strategies today. I left Gardner-Webb with confidence that I could conquer any challenges that I may face."



Brett Grayson, standing in the center, works at the VEX VRC Tournament.

Brett Grayson, '08, signs to an official at the NTID (National Technical Institute for the Deaf) Regional STEM Center's first VEX IQ Tournament for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. VEX IQ is a competition for middle school students (sixth to eighth grade). It was hosted in Austin, Texas, at Texas School for the Deaf.

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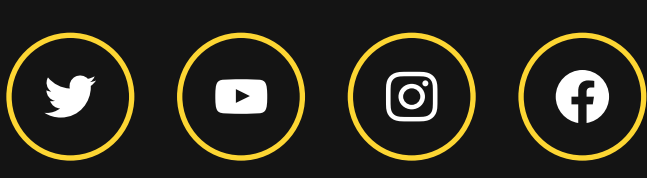
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