Background
Argentina once enjoyed a flourishing middle class, an accountable government, and equal income distribution during which time it also developed a rich and artistic culture that blended its European and indigenous roots. Commonly and currently referred to as The Old Dream, that was the Argentina of the past; one that exists in the hearts and minds of the oldest living generation and in the imaginations of the youngest. In 2001, the collapse of Argentinean economy pushed more than half its population below the poverty line; middle-class families lost most of their savings and many were forced onto the streets. Argentina is a fragile country, polarized by inequality and a distant memory of a country in which equality and access to basic rights was respected. The persistence of inequality in Argentina has especially affected children. In 2003, the Argentinean National Institute of Statistics and Censuses found that poverty affected 73.5 percent of children under 14, of whom 41.2 percent lived in extreme poverty. Today, 50 percent of children below 15 live in poverty; while Argentina has made progress, half of its children are impoverished, forced to make livelihoods in slums, where there is little access to education, safe activities, health facilities and where crime and violence pervade in a perpetual cycle of despair. It is within this context that I wish to apply for a Davis Project for Peace scholarship.

My Proposal
La Ciudad Oculta (Hidden City) is the most impoverished slum in Argentina, located on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. While it was first home to immigrants who worked on the railroad in the 1930s, it has become a home for the forgotten children of Argentina. When Argentina's tourism sector flourished in the 1970s, right before the military coup, the president of Argentina decided to build a wall around Ciudad Oculta, in order to hide it from the tourists, effectively cutting off the citizens of Ciudad Oculta from educational, health, and recreational activities that were made available to children and citizens on the other side of the wall. With little hope, limited living conditions, and no encouragement, children of this city found solace in drugs and alcohol, abandoning education and turning to delinquency. While the wall has been torn down, Ciudad Oculta continues to attract broken families, where children often have to assume the role of parent at a very young age. With the support of Conviven, an NGO run by a local family and that acts as a community center for the children of Ciudad Oculta, I wish to teach music and photography to thirty children, where they will learn the basics of musicianship while documenting their peers' efforts through photography. The programme will run from the beginning of June until the end of July. The goal of this project is to inspire in the children confidence in having a skill while working collaboratively through hands-on, creative self-expression; through photography I hope to reinforce children's confidence in each other, generating cycles of positive action. Through participatory photography, taking photographs of a collaborative effort has been shown to build trust among peers. Most children in Ciudad Oculta are not trusted in Buenos Aires and have not been recipients of trust in their own country; mutual trust are important seeds to peace. A photography teacher at New York University has generously offered to donate ten digital cameras for this project. It is my hope that participatory art will be an outlet for these kids who are trapped in cycles of disparity. At the end of the two months, there will be a concert with the children and local musicians, in addition to an exhibition of the children's photographs. The concert will be for Ciudad de Oculta. While this concert will be a form of entertainment for the city, its objective is to develop a sense of community and belonging in the city.

Details of the Proposal
I will arrive two weeks before the programme starts, in order to go over the lesson plan with the Director of the NGO, familiarize myself with the surroundings, and assess whether or not additional or different supplies will be needed. I will meet with three separate groups of ten children, ages 7 - 11, five times per week, for 1.5 hours at a time. The first part of lesson will be devoted to learning music; through listening, reflective, and creative activities, the goal of these lessons will be to: i. establish cooperative and interdependent relationships with their peers, ii. learn about positive ways to express their own feelings by learning about ways that music can be used to convey emotion, iii. expand their worldviews and compassion by learning about musical genres within different geographical and historical contexts. Each lesson will incorporate different goals, using relevant activities. It is the combination of these goals through
interdependence, listening, understanding and compassion—the hope to engage the children in the spirit of peace building in their own community. The first week will be devoted to rhythm, where the children will learn to read and improvise simple rhythms, feel and listen for a beat, and reflect on the emotions of a beat. The following two weeks will be devoted to melodies, where children will learn to interpret the mood of pieces and how it is conveyed through music, understand music as a way of expressing one’s feelings, and imagine different lives of musicians studied based on the lyrics. The remaining weeks will be devoted to learning the recorder, incorporating previous lesson plans about rhythm and melody. When the children can play simple melodies, we will join percussion and melody to form a band. I will accompany on the piano, unless we identify a student who can play the piano. Each lesson will involve a lecture on the topic, an artistic component, collaboration, and a reflection. For the teaching component, I will teach the basic concepts of each lesson using a chalkboard and reinforce the lesson by inviting kids to take part in various group activities; kids will make their own percussion instruments, using various art supplies; collaboratively and with the instruments they create, we will have sessions, inviting a local drummer to join the group and incorporating the recorder when the skill develops. At the end of each week, each child will create and design a journal, where I will ask them to record their thoughts about the week. I will also play various types of music and ask them to write about how the beat and melody makes them feel. International music will be played to foster a sense of globalhood. Each lesson will include a shorter session in photography, where kids will familiarize themselves with the camera and go on various shooting assignments. Each class will have a designated photographer, so that by the end of the project, everyone will have had a chance to experience these activities through a personal lense and obtain a unique sense of ownership. Lessons will be supplemented with excursions to live music and photography exhibitions that are both local and international in nature in order to connect with artists on a dynamic level. When the children feel comfortable with their skills, we will invite local musicians to perform with the children in a small concert; their photographs will be shown in an exhibit. It is my hope that through the activities, these children, who are considered “outsiders” and the “lost ones” of Argentina, will create a sense of belonging and accomplishment in a way that can be sustained. By developing, expressing, and sharing a talent, I believe that a new light can be filtered into the lives of these children, showing them how hope can be turned into action.

My Motivation and Skills

Music has been lifelong passion for me and I am grateful that I can express myself through it. I have recently become interested in photography and would like to share this with the children. Starting in high school and until the end of my undergraduate degree, I volunteered at a hospice for terminally-ill children, where my role was to be a companion to these children and to come up with artistic activities in which to engage them. In this time, I understood what it truly meant to be compassionate and patient; I also witnessed how much joy and confidence art can bring to children who have lost hope. I have also spent time interning at the UNDP in Guatemala. There, I participated in many meetings that centered on a project for youth participation in democratic forums, where I learned about the importance of planning ahead and of being flexible in terms of projects. In Guatemala, I also taught English, where I developed the ability to teach in a classroom setting and maintain the momentum of a lesson. I speak Spanish at the intermediate level. Most of my internship and work experiences have been centered on poverty and inequality in Latin America; I am very familiar with the culture, development work there, and the relationship between citizens and the government. What has struck me most, in all of my experiences, is the lack of artistic endeavors funded by development organizations. In light of how powerful and effective art can be in terms of building confidence and bringing people together, I feel that development organizations need to invest in these programs. The Davis Foundation for peace scholarship will give me the opportunity to address this in a meaningful way. The Mission of International House and my experience there has shaped my vision for peace and my proposed project in tremendous ways. Most profoundly, to me, is that in living with a diverse group of students, I have learned that activities that foster responsibility, respect, and awareness can create lasting bridges, uniting people and creating a space to share a vision. This is the space I wish to create for children in Cuidad Oculta, so that they, too, can share and work toward a common vision; to me, this means peace.