For immediate release

Contact: Dee Dobson Harper
252-737-1351, harperde@ecu.edu

The Expanding Reach of ECU Innovation

Greenville (August 2009) – What began last summer as a pilot program to spur innovation through East Carolina University’s Innovation Design Lab has expanded reach from the university campus to North Carolina public school students.

The Innovators Design Academy launched in summer 2009 as an intensive eight-week program for ECU faculty, staff and students from numerous disciplines to create innovative products for a variety of industries. Through sketching techniques, 2-D and 3-D digital imaging essentials, physical model building strategies and presentations skills, participants gained hands-on experience in ideation, innovation, documenting the development of their designs, and marketing their innovations to investors and economic developers. One product, the Venom Lock, has advanced since the academy to full prototyping and its inventors are pursuing commercialization.

This summer, the program expanded with the Middle School Innovators Academy, a two-week, team-based education workshop for seventh and eighth grade innovators from Hope Middle School in Pitt County and Centennial Campus Middle School in Wake County. Participants were specially selected for the program, which mirrored the original Innovators Design Academy curriculum. However, instead of an eight-week program, these middle school students, along with teachers and guidance counselors, identified real world needs, developed innovative product solutions, conducted initial patent searches and market evaluations, and took their product ideas into full renderings ready for manufacturing specification in only nine days. The program culminated with students presenting their product concepts to parents and peers, university leaders and regional economic developers.

ECU and NC State faculty and grad students taught the Middle School Innovators Academy course. The program allowed young innovators to realize their potential in product design development and gave ECU and NC State students a hands-on opportunity to teach innovation and share their enthusiasm for design to younger students.

The courses were devised and taught by Percy Hooper, director of NC State’s Industrial Design Graduate Program, and Wayne Godwin, director of ECU’s Innovation Design Lab.

ECU’s Office of Engagement, Innovation and Economic Development actively aligns, supports and celebrates ECU faculty, staff and student engagement with communities, industry, and government to address pressing regional needs. This engagement not only makes ECU a go-to partner in enhancing the region’s economic vitality and quality of life but also improves education, research and innovation, and scholarship across the campus. For more information about the Innovators Design Academy, the Middle School Innovators Academy, or the Innovation Design Lab, please contact Director Wayne Godwin at godwinw@ecu.edu or Dee Dobson Harper at harperde@ecu.edu.