



UGA students present master plans for a fully accessible camp.

## ABOUT UGA

# Camp Hooray

A room full of people closed their eyes as Laura Whittaker, director of [Extra Special People Inc.](#), had them imagine they were 10 years old and entering a theme park. Whittaker walked the crowd through the park, going to rides only to find a closed door time after time.

She then had them imagine how frustrated they'd be to have gone to this magical, exciting place to find the attractions and rides inaccessible and out of reach. That feeling is experienced by thousands across the U.S., Whittaker said. Children and young adults with disabilities are wanting to go to camp, but can't find a place that can accommodate their needs.

"If they do get to camp, they can't get from place to place," or face other challenges, she said.

To help combat this issue, ESP teamed up with students from UGA's [College of Environment and Design](#) and Georgia Tech's College of Architecture to design Camp Hooray, the first-of-its-kind, fully accessible overnight camp for children and young adults with developmental disabilities. The students presented three master plans for the camp April 25 at the College of Environment and Design.

Located on a 70-acre parcel of land in Jackson County, the camp will offer traditional activities including music, sports and games, art, swimming, boating, archery, field days, talent shows and overnight stays-while providing a safe, fun and meaningful experience for campers of all abilities. The students worked to make the space sustainable and feature accessible design for residential cabins, outdoor spaces and common areas around a small lake.

"The land is basically a blank slate, which gave us an opportunity to dream big," said Grace Wooten, who is working to earn a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture.

The students started the project by researching disabilities, behavioral issues and how the environment can

play a role in them. They also did a site analysis before splitting up to design master plans that covered everything from the look of the camp's entryway to grading levels of the site.

"It's been real fun to watch this evolve," said Pratt Cassity, director of the CED Outreach Office. "We've really seen a lot of personal growth among the students."

Dean Dan Nadenicek said that the vision of a fully accessible camp is something special. Nadenicek also said he and the students, faculty and staff involved learned a lot about those who are part of Extra Special People.

"What I wasn't prepared for was how much we would learn from the campers every time we interacted with them," he said. "This was a fabulous process."

For 30 years, Extra Special People, based in Watkinsville, has focused its mission on enhancing the lives of children with developmental disabilities and their families by emphasizing their abilities, not disabilities. Camp Hooray will only further access to the world for those children, Whittaker said.

"(These plans are) 10, 20, 100 different ideas that Extra Special People can use to help hundreds of kids go to camp," she said. "This process is far and beyond anything we envision it to be."

"This is not just a project, not just a grade," she also said. "This is a moment that is going to change lives for many, many years to come."

- See more at: [http://www.uga.edu/about\\_uga/profile/camp-hooray/#sthash.z2coH45K.dpuf](http://www.uga.edu/about_uga/profile/camp-hooray/#sthash.z2coH45K.dpuf)