

USU Students Create Award-Winning Plan for Ranch and Ability Center

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09/22/2017



A team of students in Utah State University's Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning created a plan to convert the Hinckley Ranch, located in Ogden Valley, into an ability center with facilities for equine therapy and community gatherings.

The Hinckley Ranch Mountain Ability Center project recently received an Achievement Award from the American Planning Association Utah Chapter—the organization's highest honor—for being an outstanding student project.

Associate Professors Caroline Lavoie and Todd Johnson led the project, and landscape architecture students Haley Borden, Spencer Burt, Nelson Champion, Margie Haight, Emmeline Hoover, Tyler Knab, Tyson Murray, Steve Ormsbee, Alonzo Rhodes and Skyler Smith conceptualized and designed the proposed changes to the ranch.

"These types of endeavors offer more than just a real-life project experience, they teach students that any project they complete has the potential to improve the common good of all community members and next generations to come," Lavoie said. "This shows that landscape architects play an important role in making positive changes."

The students produced a 47-page document outlining proposed changes for the ranch. The students suggested the construction of equine facilities, including a 20,000 square foot indoor riding arena. The facilities would mainly be used for equine therapy, involving interactions between patients and horses. Equine therapy is used to treat physical ailments and also many mental conditions, such as depression and PTSD. The students also suggested a community center that includes an art studio and an indoor climbing wall.

"My favorite part of the project was the amount of creative freedom and ability to collaborate with real-world professionals," Knab said. "We really came to understand the rich context of the site and then we were able to make informed and unique design choices."

Conservation of the surrounding landscape was also a priority for the students. The students' designs focus on preserving the natural context of the Ogden Valley. According to Lavoie, this focus on conservation is one of the main reasons the project was chosen for an Achievement Award.

"To communicate the importance of any issue, you need to be able to illuminate that importance and why it matters to your audience," Murray said. "We did this with the Hinckley Ranch project by showing the threats to Ogden Valley, like suburb encroachment and population inflation, and then showed how it would affect important wildlife corridors and the rural feel of Ogden Valley."

To learn more about USU's Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning, visit laep.usu.edu.

September 22, 2017

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