

**NOMINATION FORM**  
**COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICE LEARNING COMPETITION**

Institution: **Coastal Carolina University**

Title of Project: **Camp Smiles**

Project Director: John Delport, Nanci Howard, and Anita Howell

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Establishment Date of Project: June 2015

Unit That Administers Project: Coastal Carolina University, Spadoni College of Education, Area of Special Education

Total Number of Students Involved: 22 College level students (10 Graduate and 12 undergraduate), 21 Campers with disabilities, 6 Peer Campers (Horry County Schools)

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS REGARDING THE NOMINATED PROJECT (Insert your response after each question; the response to each question should be no more than one page)

1. For purposes of this competition, the Commission on Higher Education defines service learning as college student learning at any level and in any situation that is *linked* in a direct, hands-on fashion to the resolution of a problem or concern in a target community outside the institution *and is related* to a college course with some type of reflection activity. How does your project meet the parameters of this definition?

In its first implementation, Camp Smiles provided 10 Literacy Master Level students in EDLL 620: Literacy Assessment and Instruction for Diverse Populations the opportunity to assess, develop, and implement literacy activities for campers with Cerebral Palsy and Down Syndrome. M.Ed. students participated in the camp and interacted with the campers with the express purpose of being exposed to students with special needs. They were expected to develop a lesson plan based on their assessments and to deliver these lessons to campers in 1:1 or small group. They were required to write reflection papers at each step of the process as well as a culminating reflection paper. The face-to-face meetings were held at the camp location during the time the camp was in session.

An additional eight special education undergraduate majors in their sophomore year were included as camp counselors. Their roles were to support the instructors in the four enrichment areas – Music, Movement, Literacy, and Art. Several worked as 1:1 support for campers with higher needs, and others rotated between enrichment areas. Two of the lead instructors for the Literacy group were seniors in the special education undergraduate program. An additional two undergraduate majors in music therapy from Charleston Southern ran the Music enrichment sessions. These students wrote reflections on their experiences that will be used in research about their experiences. Additionally, students have used their experiences at the camp as the basis for presentations and papers in their various programs of study.

Prior to the camp, the students were provided with training and given instruction on working with the students. This instruction was guided by an analysis of the campers' IEPs, parents' input, and other documentation. All of these students were involved in morning circle time, lunch, and other whole camp activities. At the end of each day, the students were involved in a reflection session. These sessions were a guided reflection of the day and their time with the students, as well as the logistical aspects of daily operations. The sessions were led by the camp director and assistant director. Individual debrief sessions were held with these students weekly to assess their learning, as well as to assess the need for additional support.

Both sets of students were busy all day with campers, helping them in the relative enrichment activities, feeding, toileting, and transitioning between activities. Additionally, they needed to figure out ways to motivate reluctant campers to engage in activities as well as help manage campers who were having a harder time.

Although not enrolled at the university, six mainstream students in the Horry County elementary and middle schools attended the camp as peer mentors, engaging in all the

Activities and acting as socialization and peer support for campers. They were an incredible asset to campers and staff.

2. Specifically, which segments of the college/university community does your project involve?

Camp Smiles directly involved the College of Education, specifically the M.Ed. in Literacy and the B.S. in Special Education programs. Students in the Music Therapy program at Charleston Southern University in Charleston, SC, led the music enrichment group and earned school credit from their university. A faculty member from theatre arts provided drama enrichment activities once a week. Additionally, the university's Student Involvement office assisted with the development of the camp. Horry County Schools (HCS) allowed us to use their Early Scholars Academy building, which is on our campus but under HCS control. Because students from the Scholars Academy were on campus for various reasons during the summer, they were exposed to the camp and the campers, creating a positive interaction between special needs students and mainstream students. HCS also provided some adaptive equipment. A local pediatric nurse volunteered and assisted the college students with moving the more involved students as well as with providing some opportunities for students to reflect on the medical issues involved with the campers. Several other community programs came and ran sessions, and these included: Ripley's Aquarium, Little Talkers Speech Clinic, 2Live Beyond, Therapy Dogs, and Star Wars characters from the local Shriners organization.

3. How many students (specify degree levels to the extent possible) does the project affect?

Masters in Literacy - +/- 15

Special Education Majors – 10-15 (hope to expand this with more resources)

Music Education Majors (Charleston Southern) – 2

HCS - 6

The goal is to increase the sustainability of this camp by having special education sophomores work at the camp and return in following years, with greater responsibility, including serving as mentors to the incoming sophomores and juniors. Creating this process will increase the sustainability and quality of the camp over the years. For example, the students that worked last year's camp will become assistants to the lead teachers in the enrichment activities this year, helping to develop and to deliver instruction as part of their job role, while the incoming group will focus on supporting the enrichment activities.

4. Describe the target community or communities your project serves.

This camp is designed to serve students with Cerebral Palsy and Down Syndrome and their families in the greater Horry County area. The Horry County School system currently has over three hundred children that are served in classes for children with more severe disabilities. There are no summer camps specifically targeting this group of students in the area.

5. Describe your project's effectiveness in helping to solve the problems or concerns in

the target community.

There are no other camps or care programs in the area that serve this important population. Some students receive ESY services but not for a significant amount of time and often in isolation. A camp run by SOS Health Care Inc. for children on the Autism Spectrum is the only other camp in the area, but they do not serve the same students we serve. We have a good relationship with SOS, and they referred several students to us. Likewise, we were able to refer several students to them who were on the spectrum.

In addition to this lack of summer enrichment, many of the children did not qualify for any summer stipend from DDSN due to being on existing waivers.

A common theme across the exit evaluations parents completed was their relief at having a place where their child “fitted in”. This was echoed almost daily when parents dropped their children off and picked them up. One particular parent literally cried at the joy her child found at camp because it was the first place where she felt “normal.”

For many of the parents, it was the first time their children (some as old as 17) had any access to summer programming. This had the impact of their children having a “typical” summer experience, as well as allowing parents to work, complete tasks they wouldn’t have been able to, and to have some respite. Often these families have siblings who cannot enjoy their summers because the energy of the parents is spent on supervising their special needs child. This also allowed the siblings to have parent attention and participate in summer activities they would not otherwise be able to

6. Describe the degree to which your project enhances student learning while providing specific examples of the service learning activities the college students engage in. Also explain how the service learning activities reinforce or apply what the college students learn in the classroom.

The students involved reflected very positively on their experience through their projects as well as in the reflection sessions held each week. Students were able to work directly with campers with high needs and were able to modify and adapt materials to make them accessible to the campers. This is integral to any special educator and at the core of our practice. Students also had to think on the spot and make decisions based on campers’ behavior and non-verbal and verbal cues. This too is integral to any special educator because, in the classroom, teachers make thousands of these decisions daily. This experience provided them practice in a non-threatening and supported environment with the guidance of a highly trained director and assistant director.

Students also were able to spend time with the students during non-structured free time and to get to know them as individuals. This is not always possible while they are in schools, with so much pressure with university projects, as well as schools having little down time. The camp director guided them to focus on this as a chance to connect with no other competing forces. A focus of the camp was to see the children as individuals, to connect with them, and not to focus on their disability or be scared of it. Based on observations, parent responses, and student feedback, this was achieved!

Literacy graduate students were able to work with students that many would not likely have worked within their mainstream public school setting. The campers are students that are often excluded from general education, and this experience allowed these general

education teachers to have success in working with them, which increases the likelihood of them pushing to include students with the same needs into their own classrooms. This was consistently included in their reflections.

Students consistently reflected on how valuable this experience was to them. Some of these include:

Even though I am not formally trained to teach special education, I know there is a chance I could teach students with special needs in an inclusion class.-----Chet

I have learned that each student deserves attention and quality teaching regardless of their disabilities. I realize that these students are capable of doing so much when someone takes the time to work with them. Students with disabilities should not be thought less of and need support and encouragement as much as any other student.-----Vernita

7. Is there academic credit associated with the project (not necessary for submission)? If so, please explain the particulars.

Graduate – Yes, This was a required component of their graduate class. The students were to spend 18 hours at camp over three days, once a week. The first day, they observed and started to get comfortable with the group. On day two they were to help the literacy lead teachers run a group. On day three, they were to run their own class and follow their assigned group for the day. They received credit for attendance, weekly reflections, and their lessons.

Undergrad – Music Majors, yes. Special education – no, but this coming year students can complete the required practicum that would be used towards their SC Add On endorsement in Severe Disabilities.

8. If funding is required, how is the project funded and what is the approximate annual budget for the project?

Yes. The budget for this program is \$60,000. 00.

This past summer, it was funded by a patchwork of sources. Several foundation grants were given, individual donors (included a gofundme page) contributed, and several staff worked with no financial compensation. The Chanticleer Literacy Center at CCU provided the money to pay for three staff, as well as money to buy materials; however, they are not able to make such a contribution this year, which will severely impact the budget.

9. Add any other comments you may have about your project.

This camp is critical to the families in the area who need more support for their children. It is a way in which the university can serve as an ally, addressing inequities and also preparing educators with a passion and desire to serve those in their community that are

not seen, and often not heard. Financial constraint – specifically helping cover costs for staff – is a constant threat to this program and others like it.

One parent thought the camp was for only one week, and when she found out it was for several weeks, she cried. She had never been able to have any time with her other child during the summer, one-on-one, without having to constantly attend to the needs of her special needs daughter. When she asked her son what he wanted to do, he said he just wanted to be able to go to the movies and be able to watch the entire show without having to leave.

Another parent commented on how much more engaged her child was after a summer of interaction. She felt like he would not lose the progress he made in school during the year. Several parents stated that their children slept better and were happier than they had been before. Without a doubt, this unique camp provides a vital service to the community of children with special needs, their families, and students in the education programs at CCU.

You may also include supplemental information about the project (such as brochures, pictures, etc.).

Please see CCU article written about Camp Smiles (Photos at the bottom capture the student and camper interactions wonderfully).

<http://www.coastal.edu/newsletter/issue/70/articles/2046>

The video below also provides some overview of the camp as well as some student feedback on their experiences.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H41lDnEsymY&feature=youtu.be>

Please return this form via e-mail by **February 26, 2016**, to:

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