



# UNH Wildcat Friends Brings Developmentally Disabled Young Adults To College

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Students in the Wildcat Friends program work with UNH students to learn the art of drumming during a recreation class.

DURHAM, N.H. —A new program at the University of New Hampshire has 14 young adults with developmental disabilities attending college.

Wildcat Friends grew out of the Friends Project in Portsmouth, a program that offers young disabled adults social and recreational opportunities. Director Heidi Chase got the idea to bring students to UNH after talking with several parents.

“There are very few programs that offer college experiences for people with disabilities and they are very expensive,” Chase says. “Friends needed to create a program that would meet the needs of young adults with disabilities by offering them an affordable, exciting, age-appropriate program at the University

of New Hampshire.”

Students in UNH’s therapeutic recreation option of the recreation management and policy major are required to conduct service-learning and fieldwork experiences as part of their curriculum. Currently there are two other sites that host the therapeutic rec majors: UNH’s Northeast Passage and Stepping Stones, a brain injury/stroke program in Portsmouth.

With Wildcat Friends, the UNH students are paired in one-on-one relationships with the disabled students and design and facilitate an individualized treatment plan for them.

The UNH students are learning the treatment planning process in class this semester and will be implementing the steps during the lab experience.

“You can imagine the win-win outcomes here—our students get to directly apply what they are learning in the classroom with real people with real needs, the clients get access to some expertise to help them reach functional leisure-based goals, and as a faculty member, my class discussions are so much more enriching since we can use specific examples of their work to further illustrate the concepts and processes they are learning,” says Patti Craig, assistant professor of the department of recreation management and policy.

Other UNH students involved with community service will work with the Wildcat Friend’s students as will those in Kate Hanson’s community leadership program. Hanson is an associate professor at the Thompson School and co-founder of the nine-year-old program.

“These students will get to experience campus as other college students would. It will enrich their lives in the same way it does traditional students,” Hanson says. “College is more than

academic.”

Editors and reporters: A photo of some of the students can be downloaded at [http://www.unh.edu/news/cj\\_nr/2009/oct/05friends.jpg](http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2009/oct/05friends.jpg). Caption: Students in the Wildcat Friends program work with UNH students to learn the art of drumming during a recreation class.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.