

UMaine students' adaptive kayak project offers lessons for all

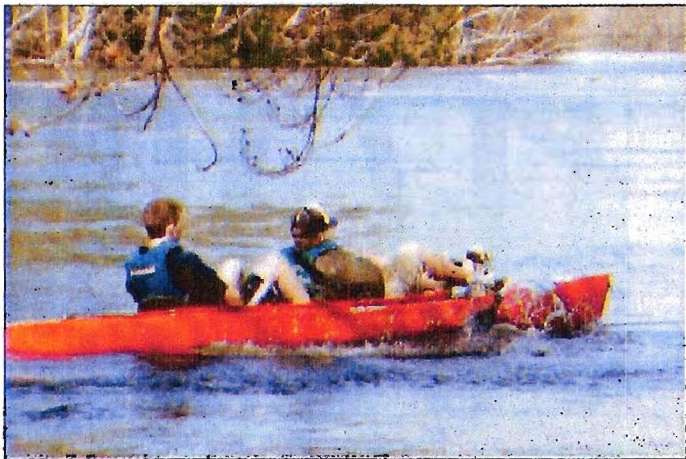


Photo by Amy Crosby

Students Robert Ferry and Ryan Fisher test an adaptive kayak designed as a project for Professor Herbert Crosby's engineering class this spring at the University of Maine.

The way Michael Noyes sees it, the kayaks invented by engineering students he met at the University of Maine this spring primarily taught them how to work as a team.

But, Noyes added, if engineers and architects around the world worked on projects as the students in Professor Herbert Crosby's engineering class do, those with disabilities would be granted new opportunities.

"I hope that this competition showed them that people with disabilities also have abilities, and also allowed them to see the needs of people with disabilities. They might be able to incorporate that into future products," Noyes said.

Noyes, who was born without arms, is a hunter, snowmobiler, snowshoer, canoeist and camper. With help from Crosby's students, now he'll become a kayaker, too.



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Every year in Crosby's mechanical engineering design class, students design a new product, but always it is one that adheres to Crosby's ground rules.

"I like to have something never before done. Something that is a real problem-solver, ideally, that someone needs," Crosby said. "Mike has helped us many times.

"Two-thirds of the time, we make products for people with disabilities. One reason that works -- they are an overlooked population."

Crosby has been showing his students how to make adaptive equipment for 25 years.

His classes have built boats and land vehicles for people with different disabilities, all of the products human-powered to assure their safety.

While companies and organizations such as Maine Handicapped Skiing do similar work, Noyes said, there are not many individuals or groups working on such equipment. Noyes lives in Levant, which is west of Bangor.

Crosby said on this spring's adaptive kayak project, Noyes spent dozens of hours volunteering his time to help the students design a useful, stable kayak.

Noyes was working on an adaptive paddle for his kayak when Crosby's class began its project.

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