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## Ossabaw Island serves as summer school campus

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By [Chuck Mobley](#)

Amid its sea breezes, stately oaks and softly-treading deer, Ossabaw Island has seen an unusual amount of student activity this summer, a situation that will help bring this singular environment into classrooms across the state.

Video: Watch and listen as Ashraf Saad explains how the OssaBest program works and how it benefits its participants by clicking [here](#).

Located just seven miles from Savannah, yet accessible only by boat, this barrier island is the host for OssaBest (Ossabaw E-Exploration for Students and Teachers). Funded in part by a 3-year, \$1.2-million grant, the program represents a collaboration between Armstrong Atlantic State University, Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools, Skidaway Institute of Oceanography, the Ossabaw Island foundation and the University of Georgia Marine Extension Service.

During July and August, 40 students and 30 teachers from Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools spent several days on the island. The students collected weather data and took GPS measurements, information that will be placed on the program's Web site - [ossabest.armstrong.edu](http://ossabest.armstrong.edu), - thus making it available to anyone with access to a computer.

Savannah Arts Academy students Mikiala Mays and Matthew Munsey were delighted by what they found on the island.

"Aside from the bugs, this place has been great," Matthew said. "The beach is pristine because there is no development."

"In a lot of places it's just untouched - just like it was 500 years ago when the Indians lived here," Mikiala said.

The teachers augmented their time on the island with seven days on the AASU campus, time devoted to developing lesson plans. "This is my first experience on Ossabaw," said Cindy Hicks, who teaches biology, chemistry and AP environmental science at Savannah Arts Academy. "We're disconnected with technology but connected with nature."

Hicks said that real-time video and sensor-obtained data from the project will give her and her students an opportunity to compare Tybee and Ossabaw islands.

The activities on Ossabaw and in the classroom were accomplished under the tutelage of several AASU faculty members - Ashraf Saad, head of the department of computer science; Joy Reed, a professor in the computer science department; Lei He of the information technology department; and Patrick Hannigan and Edward Strauser, both of the college of education.

The partnership, Saad said, will continue over the next couple of summers as OssaBest is scheduled to train 90 teachers and 120 students during a three-year span. The program will eventually lead to a guided-by-electronics exploration of the island, he said.

### WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION:

Go to [ossabest.armstrong.edu](http://ossabest.armstrong.edu) for an overview of the program. This site has a project summary, maps, student PowerPoint presentations, teacher information and links to several relevant sites, including Armstrong Atlantic State University, the National Science Foundation, Skidaway Institute of Oceanography and Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.

### ON THE WEB

Go to [savannahnow.com/accent](http://savannahnow.com/accent) and watch and listen as Ashraf Saad, head of the department of computer science at Armstrong Atlantic State University, explains how the OssaBest program works and how it benefits its participants.

### OSSABAW ISLAND TIMELINE

1763: John Morel, a Savannah merchant, purchases the island. Its primary products are indigo and the sale of live oak timbers to shipbuilders.

1776: Morel dies. His three sons split the island and its slave population into three plantations, South End, Middle Place and North End. Each raise sea island cotton as a primary cash crop. Subsistence crops grown for slaves include corn, rice, sugar cane, rye, potatoes and peas. In addition, cattle and hogs are raised for consumption by island residents.

1848: George Jones Kollock of Savannah buys South End Plantation. His ownership is well-documented through plantation journals, letters and diaries in the University of North Carolina's Southern Historical Collection.

1860: The slave census shows 71 slaves live in 12 houses at South End. Middle Place has 69 slaves in 17 houses.

1865 to 1877: Tunis Campbell of the Freedman's Bureau is appointed superintendent of Ossabaw and several other Georgia barrier islands. Ossabaw is one of the islands included in the "40 acres and a mule" special order. Many former slaves remain on Ossabaw, but the land eventually reverts to its former owners.

1878: The Zion Baptist Association notes that a congregation lives on Ossabaw and attends the Hinder Me Not Church.

1880: The census reports 160 people live on the island.

1880s to 1890s: Several hurricanes strike the island, and most of the African-American population departs. The Hinder Me Not congregation moves to Pin Point, where it establishes the Sweet Field of Eden Church.

1916: Strachen Shipping Co. buys the island and uses it as a hunting resort.

1924: Dr. Henry Norton Torrey and his wife of Grosse Pointe, Mich., buy the island and build a palatial residence on its north side. The Torreys use it as a winter residence, living there from January until May.

1978: The Torrey and West families sell the island to the state of Georgia. It becomes the state's first heritage preserve, set aside solely for study, research and education.



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