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No Paulson? No problem! says Georgia Southern senior

April 13, 2020



When Rebecca Hooper, a senior marketing major at Georgia Southern University, heard there would be no graduation ceremony at Paulson Stadium this year, she decided to build her own.

In Minecraft, that is.

On Tuesday, March 17, during spring break, Georgia Southern announced the cancellation of its in-person Spring 2020 Commencement ceremonies for Statesboro and Savannah. Since that time, the University has announced an online ceremony for graduates on May 8 and 9 and hopes to be able to hold a rescheduled in-person ceremony on or before commencement in December.

As the news broke, Hooper and her friend were playing Minecraft, a “sandbox” video game which allows users to create digital worlds where they can build as many landscapes and structures as they like. As they played the game and chatted online, Hooper had what seemed like a crazy idea.

“I was like, ‘Wouldn’t it be cool if we built the stadium?’ I just said it as a joke at first, but then the next day rolled around and I started on it. And then it kept on going and going and I couldn’t stop,” she said.

Two days later (and more than eight hours of digital construction), Hooper had created Glenn Bryant Field and the home side of the stadium. She also built a commencement stage complete with a jumbotron that said, “Hail Southern! One More Time!” Knowing that no ceremony would be complete without Freedom’s Flight,

Hooper added “Freedom” on the stage. However, the closest thing she could find to the University’s bald eagle mascot was a green parrot, who let out a little squawk and bobbed up and down.

Hooper posted a [flythrough of the stadium on Twitter](#), with a comment that said, “GSU said no graduation in Paulson. I said Minecraft graduation in Paulson [#HailSouthern](#).” The response was immediate and overwhelming.

“We don’t deserve heroes like you,” said one student. “This is amazing! Hail Southern!” said another. WTOC TV responded, too, asking Hooper if they could share her work with their viewers.

“I posted on Twitter and Facebook and both of them blew up,” said Hooper. “On Twitter it has 1,395 likes and 22,000 views. I was not expecting that on my tiny little account.”

Hooper has big plans for her virtual stadium. She’s planning on doing some online tours through Twitch, a video game playthrough app. She’s also invited her friends to help her finish building the stadium, complete with Bishop Fieldhouse, press boxes, sky boxes, and the large parking lot where she hopes to invite people to build their own virtual tailgating structures.

“A tailgate graduation sounds awesome,” she said.

All told, Hooper has put more than 20 hours into the project so far, and plans to keep working on it, inviting people to help or visit, and hosting tours for her fellow graduates. Some of her friends tell her she’s crazy to spend all this time on a pet project, but she says she doesn’t see it that way anymore.

“Yeah, this is what I’m born to do in life,” she said, laughing. “I had a lot of fun doing it. It didn’t seem like a lot of work to me. It was just me completing a service for my fellow seniors.”

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