

# *UNCG bridge to provide accessibility and beauty*

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GREENSBORO — To be blunt, when it comes to handicap-accessible ramps, the word architecture doesn't spring to mind.

Ramps tend to be bland and functional, made of concrete or wood. They form zigzagging switchbacks to help those in wheelchairs bypass steps.

UNCG hopes to change that lack of architectural finesse and to do so in a visible place on campus.

The college will begin construction later this month on a nearly 90-foot bridge — not a ramp — from College Avenue to the old Petty Science Building.

Although the bridge is meant for the disabled, anyone can use it. It will be the easiest way to enter the 67-year-old building that stands 8 to 10 feet below College Avenue.

"It's really going to be one of the coolest things on campus," said Fred Patrick, who directs the school's facilities, design and construction.

The idea for the bridge came when Patrick, his staff and Joddy Peer, of Jenkins-Peer Architects of Charlotte, were tossing around ideas to improve accessibility for disabled people at Petty.

Previously, they had to go to the rear of the building instead of entering through the defining two-sided, curved staircase flanked by six columns.

The designers had made sketches, but nothing excited them. Then, architect Peer showed a photo he had taken of a pedestrian bridge he had seen over the Seine River in Paris.

Everyone became excited. After some sketch work, it was decided a bridge similar to the one in Paris would work here.

Many UNCG students found Petty — which is undergoing renovation — a challenge to reach, anyway. They had to descend stairs from the street, walk across an open area and climb one of the twin staircases to the entrance, which is on the second floor.

The new structure will bridge the gulch between street and entrance.

Referring to Petty's below-street-level location, Patrick said Franklin Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration built the structure in 1940 as if it were meant to have a moat around it.

Patrick promises the bridge won't distract from Petty's classical facade. To hold up the bridge, designers have chosen lightweight steel that will look shiny at first but quickly become a dull gray.

The bridge deck will be made of black glass, with lights beneath it. The deck and the steel should provide a light, airy effect, Patrick said.

Although it will be a long bridge, it won't take long to build. Patrick said most of the work will be done in one day with the use of a crane. A few more days will be needed to finish the deck and other details.

The bridge won't be needed until the spring semester, when Petty reopens. The building is being renovated for use as a general classroom and office building.

It has been a science building from the start, named for UNCG's first science teacher, Mary Petty, who arrived in 1893.

The bridge is included in the \$18 million renovation cost.

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