

# Black Diamond Designers Return to OPDD to Mentor the Next Generation of Outdoor Product Creators

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Emmy Noel presenting to Black Diamond

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For students in Utah State University's Outdoor Product Design and Development program, final presentations are more than a class requirement. They are a moment where years of research, sketching, prototyping, testing, and iteration are put in front of the very people shaping the outdoor industry today.

This spring, that audience included a team of designers from [Black Diamond Equipment](#) — including two OPDD alumni who returned to Logan to mentor the next generation of students preparing to enter the field.

Throughout the day, juniors and seniors presented final projects ranging from technical softgoods and apparel systems to climbing, ski, and outdoor equipment concepts. Black Diamond designers reviewed process work, prototypes, material decisions, and storytelling approaches, offering students direct feedback grounded in real-world product development experience.

For many students, the experience represented one of the clearest intersections between the classroom and the industry they hope to join after graduation.

YouTube video player [https://www.youtube.com/embed/KSZQD\\_uSy3w?si=4Mq3i6VBI7Mk5j4j5603150](https://www.youtube.com/embed/KSZQD_uSy3w?si=4Mq3i6VBI7Mk5j4j5603150)

### Returning to the Studio

The visit carried additional significance because several members of the Black Diamond team once sat in the same classrooms and presented in the same end-of-semester reviews themselves.

Now working professionally in outdoor product design, development, and creative roles, the alumni returned not only to critique projects but to share insight into collaboration, communication, manufacturing realities, and the transition from school into industry.

The dynamic reflected one of the defining characteristics of the OPDD program: an emphasis on mentorship and industry accessibility that connects students directly with working professionals.

### Industry Feedback in Real Time

Final reviews are intentionally structured to mirror professional design critiques, where ideas are evaluated not only on creativity but also on usability, manufacturability, sustainability, and market positioning.

Students presented research documentation, prototype iterations, CAD models, sewn samples, renderings, and functional testing processes, while reviewers pushed them to articulate decision-making and defend design choices.

For Black Diamond designers, the visit also offered a chance to see emerging ideas and perspectives coming from the next generation of outdoor product creators.

The exchange created a collaborative environment where critique became conversation — less about grading and more about preparing students for the realities of professional design work.

### Strengthening Industry Connections

Black Diamond has maintained a longstanding relationship with the OPDD program through mentorship, design critiques, recruiting efforts, and engagement with Utah State University's Outdoor Recreation Archive. The company has regularly supported student learning experiences while helping bridge the gap between academic design education and the outdoor industry itself.

Visits like this one reinforce the growing network between OPDD alumni and current students, demonstrating how the program's community continues long after graduation.

For students nearing the completion of their degrees, receiving feedback from alumni now designing products professionally adds another layer of meaning to the review process. It transforms the classroom into something closer to a studio environment — one connected directly to the broader outdoor industry ecosystem.

As presentations wrapped up and prototypes were packed away, the day served as a reminder of how quickly students become peers, collaborators, and future mentors themselves.

### **About Utah State University's Outdoor Product Design and Development Program**

Utah State University's Outdoor Product Design and Development (OPDD) program prepares students for careers designing outdoor gear, apparel, footwear, and equipment through an interdisciplinary curriculum grounded in industrial design, materials, manufacturing, and user-centered innovation. Located in Logan, Utah, the program maintains close partnerships with outdoor industry brands and professionals, giving students hands-on experience and direct industry engagement throughout their education. For more information, visit [opdd.usu.edu](https://opdd.usu.edu).