



Diversity Works

Office of University Partnerships

Minority-Serving Institutions Developing Partnerships, Building Communities

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Community College Partnership Fosters Socially Motivated Organic Farm

“For the Hawaiian community, connection and love of the land is central. It is where everything starts,” said Gary Maunakea-Forth, farm manager at MA’O Organic Farms, a nonprofit, socially motivated enterprise in Wai’anae, Hawaii. However, over the years, Wai’anae residents have witnessed the gradual loss of the sustainable, self-supporting food system of their ancestors. Increased urbanization, historically high poverty, and growing dependence on imported food have eroded the area’s rural values, resulting in a disconnection from the land by native Hawaiian young people and their families—a land that once nurtured a strong and cohesive culture. Wai’anae youth, with their high rates of teen pregnancy, school suspensions, substance abuse, and juvenile arrests, are disproportionately affected by these changes.

The mutual desire of Leeward Community College (LCC) and MA’O Organic Farms to address these critical issues has led to a unique partnership. With the help of a 2002 Office of University Partnerships’ (OUP) Alaska Native/ Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities



Youth Leadership Training workers ready for delivery

(AN/NHIAC) grant, LCC teamed with MA’O to help grow the farm’s business and youth development programs. LCC worked with MA’O to locate land to expand the farm and purchase equipment—such as walk-in refrigerators—to support food processing operations. The college also provides a full-time staff person to support the farm’s Youth Leadership Training program, which offers scholarships to farm interns to attend LCC. Organic farming’s emphasis on growing and selling produce locally provides the platform for reducing dependence on imported food and reconnecting the community, especially youth, to the land.

Expansion

MA’O (short for Mala’ Ai `Opio or “youth food garden”) is a certified organic farm founded in 2001 on 5 acres of leased land by a group of concerned Wai’anae community activists and professionals. It uses natural techniques to promote crop growth and control pests and weeds without chemical pesticides and fertilizers. As the only organic farm in Wai’anae in 2001, it developed outlets for its produce, including starting farmers’ markets and developing relationships with renowned local chefs. In 2007, MA’O’s sales totaled \$144,000 and were expected to reach \$270,000 in 2008.

The farm recently acquired 11 acres adjacent to its current operations, enabling it to better meet the increasing demand for locally grown produce. However, due to cost and availability, securing land proved challenging. “The AN/NHIAC grant was the catalyst for our expansion,” said Maunakea-Forth. It enabled the farm to leverage additional funding sources needed to complete the land deal, including a \$750,000

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HSIAC Grantee Prepares Businesses, Nonprofits, and Youth for Digital Economy

In 1791, the Society for the Establishment of Useful Manufactures was formed in Paterson, New Jersey, to take advantage of the power generated by the Great Falls of the Passaic River and enable the United States to increase its domestic manufacturing capabilities. A natural energy source, the 77-foot-tall, 280-foot-wide waterfall led to the development of numerous textile, firearms, silk, and locomotive manufacturing facilities and mills, making Paterson one of the first industrial centers in the country.

Paterson's industrial boom brought an influx of immigrants from around the world who came to work and make a new life in a country offering endless opportunities. Today, Paterson still attracts immigrants from around the world. In fact, of its more than 145,000 residents, slightly more than 50 percent are Hispanic, coming to the United States from a variety of Central and South American countries.



Participants at technology workshop, fall 2008

While the city is proud of its multicultural heritage, it is its diverse population that presents one of its biggest challenges. Paterson's immigrant community, especially Hispanics, experiences high unemployment, low educational attainment, and low English proficiency, making it particularly difficult for this population to find and keep meaningful employment in a knowledge-based economy. The Passaic County Community College (PCCC) is working in coordination with community partners to change this situation.

With the help of a \$597,035 Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities (HSIAC) program grant, awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of University Partnerships (OUP), PCCC supports its New Skills for

a Digital Economy Program. The program provides low-income Hispanic residents and businesses in Paterson with the technology skills needed to succeed in today's information-based economy. Through its project, PCCC implements:

- Business/technology training for Hispanic businesses and entrepreneurs.
- An afterschool multimedia training program for Hispanic children.
- An English as a Second Language (ESL) and technology skills training program.

Each of these activities is offered at PCCC's technology hub, the Paterson Community Technology Center (PCTC), which offers several computer-equipped classrooms and computer classes.

Technology: The Tool of Every Trade

For most businesses, technology is integral to everyday operations. Computers are used to manage inventory and finances, coordinate marketing, and communicate with colleagues, customers, and vendors. However, according to the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey, most Hispanic-owned businesses do not take advantage of the efficiencies technology offers.

In coordination with their community partners—the William Paterson Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the Union County Economic Development Corporation—PCCC offers a range of workshops each month at PCTC. Offered in English and Spanish, the workshops cover business topics such as incorporation, accounting, and developing a business plan.

Technology is implicit in each workshop, yet content is targeted to meet the needs of novice users. Basic classes teach participants how to use the Internet to access business information. Participants interested in advancing their skills can enroll in Microsoft Word, Excel, and Publisher workshops, as well as a QuickBooks accounting software class.

The response for the business training has surpassed initial expectations. By partnering with the SBDC, PCCC was able to increase the number of business workshops from 12 to 82 during the first part of the grant, helping 69 business owners and 193 entrepreneurs achieve greater efficiency and success.

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PCCC is now beginning the second phase of its business and technology strategy, providing one-on-one targeted technical assistance to business participants who attended 30 hours or more of training. Business and computer information science students will be paired with businesses to help them address identified needs. For example, the owner of a local restaurant recently expressed a desire to increase lunch business by distributing a daily menu by fax to area businesses. To help the owner accomplish this goal, the program will team a computer science student with the owner to design the menu template and assist in creating a faxing database.

Learning the Language and Technology at Once

A needs assessment conducted by PCCC revealed that few nonprofit ESL providers in Paterson incorporate technology into their curricula. To assist providers, PCCC initially held onsite training for ESL trainers at PCTC. However, several providers found it difficult to offer these professional development sessions to their trainers. To overcome this hurdle, PCCC created a DVD that teaches trainers how to incorporate ESL for citizenship and technology into their classes.

“The DVD allows the trainers to learn by watching instead of coming on site,” said Gaby Rinkerman, director of PCTC. “PCCC is also working with the Paterson School District to conduct professional development workshops on integrating technology into the teaching of ESL. Using technology in the teaching of language has many advantages. There is an incredible number of free resources for students on the Internet, and tools, such as e-mail, help students with low English proficiency improve their skills.”

Starting Early

Technology is here to stay, and to achieve greater academic and career success, it is imperative to possess solid technology skills. To equip young people with strong technology skills, PCCC established the Silk City Media Workshop to build area youth’s technology and academic skills by capturing their excitement about technology early on.

The Silk City Media Workshop is open to youth ages 11 to 13 who attend partner afterschool programs. Offered once a week for 10 weeks, the sessions encourage students to develop and produce their own film, music video, or photography projects. During the multimedia classes, students learn how to write their own storyboards, capture and locate film images, create

and add sound to their productions, and edit their mini-films. At the end of a session, students participate in a mini-film festival where each student receives an award. The best films are then honored at a larger ceremony once a year.

To date, 165 youth have participated in PCCC’s multimedia classes. The students’ positive response led PCCC to add other offerings such as Photobus, a program for students taking the bus to capture digital images of the world around them, and Write On Sports, a program that pairs students with a retired sports journalist to develop sports articles and broadcasts.



Youth participate in afterschool program to build technology and academic skills

“The New Skills for a Digital Economy Program intentionally incorporates and teaches technology skills,” said Rinkerman. “All participants, whether enrolled in a business planning session, receiving training for ESL trainers, or directing their own films, have access to the latest technology, equipment, programming, and training. This gives them the means to develop skills they need to better navigate and succeed in today’s digital economy.”

For more information on PCCC’s New Skills for a Digital Economy Program, contact:

Gaby Rinkerman, Director
Paterson Community Technology Center
Passaic County Community College
One College Boulevard
Paterson, NJ 07505
Phone: 973-684-6034
E-mail: mrinkerman@pccc.edu
Web site: www.pccc.edu/pctc

investment grant and business planning assistance from Pierre Omidyar, the founder of eBay, and support from Hawaii's Legacy Lands Conservation Program. OUP funds were then used to outfit space for washing, packaging, and storing produce; purchase tractors and other farm-related equipment; and provide monthly stipends for student interns.

Expectations and goals continue to run high for the farm. Renovations for its much-needed office and processing facility are underway. And the new land is being prepared for planting in early 2009, allowing the farm to further diversify its crops to include cucumbers, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes and to raise chickens for eggs. By 2011, the farm's sales are expected to account for two-thirds of the nonprofit's budget. Currently, sales support only 40 percent of the organization's youth and community activities. The remainder of the budget is rounded out by grants and other fundraising activities, including an annual epicurean feast that features local chefs preparing MA'O produce.

"The people at MA'O have energy and good business sense that is guided by a genuine and deep-rooted desire to better their community, helping make our partnership a good fit," commented Michael Pecsok, vice chancellor for academic services at LCC.

Planting Seeds of Hope

Burgeoning demand for organic produce is fueling the growth of MA'O's farm operations and youth programming. Youth are involved in all aspects of the certified organic farm's business operations. And those young residents (ages 17 to 24) enrolled in the Youth Leadership Training (YLT) program plant, weed, cultivate, and pack the produce, which is then sold to area restaurants and grocery stores, including the national chain Whole Foods. YLT interns also operate MA'Os farmers' market stands each week, selling more than 25 different kinds of fruits, vegetables, and herbs cultivated on the farm, including mangoes, lemons, parsley, basil, arugula, baby Romaine lettuce, Swiss chard, and beets.

"We are teaching the interns how to work hard in the field and at school while reconnecting them with their culture," said Maunakea-Forth. During their 2-year internships, youth attend workshops on topics such as study habits, communication, financial literacy, and appreciation of native Hawaiian culture. In return for their hard work, this year's 26 interns receive a \$500 to \$600 monthly stipend with OUP grant funds and full scholarships to LCC.

"MA'O's emphasis on Hawaiian culture and values makes working with MA'O very attractive," Pecsok said. The program provides the remedial bridge and support many young adults require to be successful college students. The YLT program has grown from a noncredit workforce development student resource at LCC into students receiving associates' degrees with certification in Community Food Systems from the college. A full-time LCC employee serves as a MA'O staff member, supporting student recruitment and the program's educational workshops.

The lessons of the land are important for all of Wai'anae's youth. MA'O's Ka'aionua program provides high school students with hands-on organic gardening experience that emphasizes Hawaiian culture. Each spring, students can also intern at MA'O farm. At Wai'anae's intermediate school, seventh graders are introduced to organic gardening during a social studies curriculum on Pacific Island culture, which includes growing a half-acre garden.



For more information about MA'O Organic Farms, please contact:

Gary Maunakea-Forth, Farm Manager
MA'O Organic Farms
Wai'anae Community Re-Development Corporation
P.O. Box 441
Wai'anae, HI 96792
Phone: 808-696-5569
E-mail: waianaorganic@hawaii.rr.com

Michael Pecsok
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Leeward Community College
96-045 Ala'Ike
Pearl City, HI 96782-3393
Phone: 808-455-0269
E-mail: mpecsok@hawaii.edu



HBCU: A Valuable Community Resource

For the predominantly low-income, African-American residents of West Tuscaloosa, Alabama, the C.A. Fredd Campus of Shelton State Community College is an important resource. Residents turn to the Unity Center, an on-campus community outreach facility, to access job- and business-skills training, family strengthening workshops, computers, and other resources. A 2006 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is helping the college further assist the community by addressing concerns such as community revitalization, homeownership, job skills development, and recreational opportunities for neighborhood youth. The campus' close proximity to the neighborhood recreation center, schools, churches, and several public housing developments provides the college opportunities to serve and work with area residents.

Improving Quality of Life

West Tuscaloosa is an area that has been neglected for decades. But change is coming. The city is adding new street lights and sidewalks to 15th Street, a major community corridor. McKenzie Court, a public housing development, is being rebuilt with HUD HOPE VI funds. Two new schools—a middle and a high school—were recently built in the community. “Revitalization is on the minds of residents, but they aren’t always sure what this means for them beyond the big projects,” said Carolyn Edwards, director of the Unity Center. For the college, spurring revitalization means improving residents’ quality of life even in small ways, such as by offering housing rehabilitation assistance to community seniors and disabled veterans. For one recently returned disabled Iraq War veteran, receiving rehabilitation assistance means he can remain in his home with dignity after the installation of a wheelchair ramp and concrete path.

The C.A. Fredd Campus of Shelton State is also working to improve residents’ quality of life by promoting homeownership. The college plans to develop two affordable homes in the surrounding neighborhood for first-time homebuyers. Even though the project has been delayed due to difficulty in buying suitable land for construction, the college’s first-time homebuyer’s workshop was well attended. To date, 98 participants have taken part in the 12-week course, which covers topics such as home maintenance, improving credit, managing a budget, and buying insurance. And eight

families have bought homes through the West Side Community Development Corporation, a valuable college partner. These families are still in their homes and doing well and have joined their local neighborhood watch organization.

In a resident survey, community safety was identified as a high priority and a barrier to community revitalization. To address community concerns, the Unity Center assisted in the formation of a task force of neighborhood leaders. The task force decided to focus on crime prevention, specifically neighborhood watch programs. The first step was holding a 3-day training program delivered by the Tuscaloosa Police Department and hosted at the Unity Center. Workshop participants learned methods to improve community safety and ways to educate and organize their neighbors. Now, the task force and neighborhood leaders are working to establish new and reactivate old neighborhood watch programs while educating the community about staying safe and helping neighbors.

Opportunities for Youth

“In talking with residents, there was a real concern that our young people didn’t have enough opportunities and were turning to gangs,” Edwards commented. Working with four community churches and the nonprofit organization A Few United Men, a network of youth programs was developed to provide tutorial and recreational opportunities for youth ages 5 to 17. With proceeds from the grant, the churches and the nonprofit organization offer recreational programs, such as baseball, basketball, swimming, and art, while emphasizing the importance of education. Students receive academic help and must show progress in order to participate in recreational programs. Currently, more than 200 young people are enrolled in the 5 partner programs.

“We are seeing a lot of good out of the program,” said Edwards. “The instructors are dedicated and want to see the kids achieve. And the kids have the opportunity to participate in recreational and academic programs that they may not have been able to otherwise.”

Reaching Out to Residents

By connecting with residents and community leaders, the C.A. Fredd Campus of Shelton State Community

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U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of University Partnerships
451 Seventh Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410-3000

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College is helping residents tap into existing community resources. Residents come to the Unity Center to access job skills programs such as Ready to Work and enroll in Fast Track, an adult education GED program. Many participants learn about the job skills program through word of mouth mostly because of past graduates' success. "Several local businesses, including JVC and Phifer Wire, recruit for technical jobs only from this program," Edwards noted. Graduates have also moved on to postsecondary classes at the college.

Edwards credits regular community outreach for success in Unity Center programs. Edwards regularly talks to a variety of community groups such as the Tuscaloosa Ministerial Alliance, an interdenominational clergy alliance. Program fliers are often distributed through member churches to their congregants.

College representatives are guest speakers for the various church organizations and Alliance meetings. Partnerships with such organizations provide the C.A. Fredd Campus of Shelton State Community College with an opportunity to learn about neighborhood concerns while helping coordinate the college's resources to better address issues facing local residents.

For more information, contact:

Carolyn Edwards
Unity Center
C.A. Fredd Campus
Shelton State Community College
3401 Martin Luther King, Jr., Blvd.
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401
Phone: 205-391-2648
E-mail: cedwards@sheltonstate.edu

HUD's Office of University Partnerships (OUP) provides grants to institutions of higher education to assist them and their partners with the implementation of a broad range of community development activities, including neighborhood revitalization, housing, and economic development. This newsletter, *Diversity Works*, highlights the efforts of grantees in OUP's Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities grant programs and includes a variety of interesting projects, compelling grantee profiles, and other valuable resources for minority-serving institutions.