

# COPPC CENTRAL

SPRING 2000



**Engaged Universities Are Central to Strong Communities**

## Serving the Diverse Needs of Immigrant Communities

Our communities are becoming more diverse. By 2050 minorities are expected to make up more than half of the U.S. population. Much of that growth can be attributed to the largest influx of immigrants since the turn of the 20th century. From 1981 to 1996 more than 13 million immigrants settled in the United States. Although immigrant residents find many opportunities here, they also face economic, language, and cultural barriers. In response, public and private partners—including colleges and universities—are pooling their community resources to help ease immigrants' transition to the United States through entrepreneurship and job programs, educational support, housing counseling, social services, and capacity-building efforts.

In many inner cities immigrants are spurring revitalization. Increasing numbers of immigrants are stabilizing the populations of gateway cities as other residents move to the suburbs. Small businesses opened by immigrants have sparked revitalization and economic growth in formerly rundown neighborhoods.

Because discrimination can often impede immigrants' ability to adjust to life in their new country, the Clinton administration is spearheading the One America effort to address that discrimination. This initiative works to break down the walls among ethnic groups and promote equal education, economic opportunity, housing, health care, and justice for all citizens and legal immigrants. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) plays an important part in this initiative. HUD's

fair housing enforcement reduces housing discrimination against immigrants, and its outreach helps non-English-speaking residents to understand their fair housing rights. HUD-supported homeownership programs are also helping legal immigrants achieve the American dream of homeownership, resulting in almost half of all foreign-born households owning their own homes. In addition, federally designated empowerment zones and enterprise communities are helping to revitalize the urban areas where many immigrants live.

Colleges and universities work with their community partners to tap into HUD programs that help revitalize immigrant neighborhoods, recognizing the communities' immigrant heritage

and incorporating the needs of new immigrant residents. Programs are being tailored to meet the needs of this diverse immigrant population, taking into account cultural and religious differences. Successful immigrant business owners serve as mentors to participants in entrepreneurship programs. Support organizations offer translation services staffed by college students, assisting new residents and providing students an opportunity to improve their foreign language skills. Educational and job programs target non-English-speaking immigrants by providing English as second language classes. These efforts recognize that the communities' quality of life and economic health depend on the success of its residents, including its newest members. ■

### IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

- The immigrant population in the United States is diverse, with people increasingly relocating from Latin America and Asia. In 1997 Latin Americans constituted 51 percent and Asians made up 27 percent of the foreign-born population.
- Immigrants are concentrated in California (8.1 million), New York (3.6 million), Florida (2.4 million), Texas (2.2 million), and New Jersey (1.2 million).
- Immigrants account for 12 percent of the 135 million workers in the civilian labor force.
- The unemployment rate for foreign-born labor (6.9 percent) is higher than that for native-born labor (5.4 percent).
- Homeownership for immigrant households is 47 percent, compared with 68 percent for native-born households. ■

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 1997, August 1999.*

## Microenterprise and Job Training Programs Target Immigrant Populations

For many cities, the influx of immigrant groups provides an opportunity to revitalize inner cities. Although neighborhood small businesses opened by immigrants have sparked economic growth in many communities, these newly arrived residents must often overcome language and cultural barriers to start a successful business. COPCs in southern Florida and St. Paul, Minnesota, are working with community partners to help their growing immigrant populations become entrepreneurs.

The immigrant population of Broward County, Florida, is growing—its Hispanic population alone increased from 4.0 percent of the total population in 1980 to 8.6 percent by 1990. For many families arriving from Haiti, the Caribbean Islands, and Central and South America, finding employment is difficult. Florida Atlantic University's COPC—the Center for Urban Redevelopment and Empowerment (CURE)—is working with local community development organizations to develop job and microenterprise training courses that help newly arrived immigrants find jobs and start their own businesses.

The COPC's 120-hour job-training program serves more than 120 clients each year at 3 neighborhood centers. "We see this initiative as a proactive

approach to keeping families off welfare and helping recent immigrants improve their standard of living," says CURE Director Jim Girod.

CURE started the course to target residents moving from welfare to work but found that the program could also help the working poor who needed to improve their skills to find better paying jobs, says Girod. The 3-month program offers job-readiness and skills training and assists participants with their job searches. CURE's partners—the City of Dania Beach, the Deerfield Beach Housing Authority, and Mount Bethel Human Services Corporation—provide the instructors and work with area businesses to tailor the training to meet their needs. Participants are placed with local technology and service-based corporations upon course completion.

CURE's 10-week microenterprise course is an important resource for Broward and Palm Beach County residents interested in starting their own businesses. Nineteen courses are offered at seven locations. Along with covering the business basics—filing taxes, business financing, marketing, and business plan development—CURE works to match instructors and guest speakers to meet the diverse needs of participants, many of whom are immigrants. If class participants are primarily

Haitian, a Haitian instructor teaches the course and Haitian business owners talk to the class about their business experiences. Participants are referred to area microlenders such as Working Capital Florida and the Minority Business Development Center for additional technical and business plan assistance. Since

the microenterprise workshops began more than 3 years ago, graduates have started more than 50 businesses.

While CURE is focusing on job training and microenterprise development, efforts with immigrant entrepreneurs in St. Paul, Minnesota, are spurring revitalization in many city neighborhoods. To help newly arrived residents overcome the language and cultural barriers they confront when starting businesses, the Neighborhood Development Center (NDC) and the East Side COPC, which includes Macalester College, Metropolitan State University, and the University of Minnesota at St. Paul, have teamed up to provide microenterprise training to the area's Latino and Hmong (Laotian) populations.

Each partner brings important resources to the table. NDC has experience working with the area's diverse population and each year trains 240 entrepreneurs in 16 St. Paul neighborhoods. The COPC designated \$14,800 of its HUD grant to help pay for the training classes and instructors. Three faculty members at Metropolitan State University have been trained to deliver NDC's business planning course to East Side Latino and Hmong residents. Training classes consist of 16 one-hour sessions. On completion of the course, participants can apply for a small business loan and receive technical, marketing, and legal assistance for their business from NDC.

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*COPC Central* is a free quarterly publication prepared by the University Partnerships Clearinghouse, the information service sponsored by HUD's Office of University Partnerships (OUP). *COPC Central* highlights the contributions of universities and colleges to local community revitalization efforts. You may contact the University Partnerships Clearinghouse at P.O. Box 6091, Rockville, MD 20849, (800) 245-2691, (fax) (301) 519-5767. See the Office of University Partnerships on the World Wide Web at <http://www.oup.org>.

## Massachusetts COPCs Help Recent Immigrants Build Supportive Communities

COPCs on two University of Massachusetts campuses are helping recent immigrants to the United States build communities in this country that will support them both socially and economically. The University of Massachusetts at Lowell (UML) and the University of Massachusetts at Boston (UMB) are working with their growing immigrant populations to build the capacity of these populations and further their economic development goals.

The COPC at UML has collaborated with community partners for more than 2 years on an urban aquaculture project that would give the city's Southeast Asian immigrants access to jobs and a more affordable food supply. Thirty miles away, the Center for Community Economic Development (CCED) at UMB has helped community-based organizations (CBOs) in the city's Chinatown district deal with intense development pressures that threaten to destroy the character of their neighborhoods.

Activities at UMB have helped local CBOs find ways to give residents a voice in the changes that city officials and private developers have in mind for the area in and around Boston's 25-block Chinatown neighborhood. Approximately 30 development

projects, including large hotels and luxury condominiums, are currently planned for the city's downtown financial and retail districts. Because Chinatown is adjacent to both of these districts, it has been especially vulnerable to new development and gentrification.

"It has been very difficult for this community of 5,000 residents to keep up with these different projects and to get the powers-that-be to listen to what they think should happen around these projects," says Michael Liu, a research associate with the university's Institute for Asian American Studies, which administers the COPC grant along with the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy.

Under its COPC grant, CCED worked with the Asian Community Development Corporation, the Chinatown Coalition, and several other CBOs to assess local knowledge of and opinions about the development and to lay the groundwork for a community planning process. An Institute faculty member identified all 30 projects and wrote an easy-to-read development primer, which the CBOs published in English and Chinese and distributed throughout the community. The primer and a subsequent survey of small busi-

ness owners are helping to support ongoing CBO efforts to organize residents and business leaders around development issues. The Institute also worked with local CBOs to develop a database that catalogued information about Chinatown's residential, traffic, land use, economic, demographic, and environmental characteristics. Once the database was completed, a university geography professor trained CBO staff members so they could use mapping software to present the data in planning documents.

COPC funds totaling \$30,000, supplemented by CBO contributions of \$10,000, helped to catalyze Chinatown's planning project. Subsequently, the CBOs were able to win a \$200,000 grant from the Mabel Louise Riley Foundation, which they are currently using to develop a master plan for Chinatown. The plan, which will guide future use of the neighborhood's remaining open space, should be completed in 2001.

In addition to empowering local CBOs and residents, the Chinatown project has given faculty and students in the university's Institute for Asian American Studies a unique opportunity to support a comprehensive community planning effort. As a result of the relationships forged during the project, the Institute and CCED are now seeking additional funds for future technical assistance projects.

"Before this project, we took a project-to-project approach to our work in Chinatown," says Liu. "Now we have more of a long-term perspective on how the university can support these neighborhoods."

While activities at UMB have helped Chinatown residents have an impact on the development in and around their neighborhoods, UML's aquaculture project focuses on increasing local industry. Lowell's Southeast Asian residents, who make up one-quarter of the city's population, typically depend on fish for

### COPCs WORK WITH IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

The COPC at the University of California at San Diego supports several programs to serve the educational needs of the 1,520 Hmong, Somali, Sudanese, and Hispanic students attending the Rosa Parks Elementary School in San Diego's City Heights neighborhood. Using a model developed by the COPC, the school hired a full-time nurse practitioner who works with the university's Mid-City Clinic to provide healthcare services to students and their families. Other efforts include City Moves!, a program that helps students express themselves through dance, and the Looking Glass Neighborhood, an afterschool literacy program. To improve students' health and physical activity, the COPC donated play equipment to the school and trained classroom teachers in the Child and Adolescent Trial for Cardiovascular Health, a physical education curriculum that promotes heart-healthy habits in elementary school children. For additional information, contact Hillary Hahn (hrhahn@ucsd.edu) or see [www.medschool.ucsd.edu/HCOE/COPC](http://www.medschool.ucsd.edu/HCOE/COPC).

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## COPCs Help Prepare Young Immigrants for Success

COPCs at the University of San Diego (USD) and the University of Nebraska-Omaha (UNO) are helping young immigrants from Mexico, Central America, and Laos excel in American schools and make responsible decisions in their lives. They are reaching out to nearby immigrant communities, enlisting existing leaders, and bolstering community assets.

When Hmong families immigrated to U.S. cities from remote mountain villages in northern Laos, most of them had never read a book, seen a car, or shopped in a supermarket. "The cultural trauma these immigrants experienced was greater, perhaps, than for any group that has ever immigrated to the United States," says Dr. Steven Gelb, a professor of education at USD. "The amount of dislocation they experienced is impossible to conceive. Every single thing was new and different for them."

Many of the Hmong immigrants who came to San Diego in the decade following the Vietnam War still have not assimilated into U.S. culture. Instead, says Gelb, they tend to remain isolated within their own ethnic enclaves and dependent on the oral culture they brought with them from Southeast Asia. Hmong youngsters who came to the United States with their parents in the 1980s still struggle with the English language and find themselves ill-equipped to prepare their own children for the rigors of American schools.

To support these families, USD established Parents as Teachers (PAT), a national school-readiness program, in 1998. Through PAT, 2 home visitors make monthly visits to 14 Hmong families who have children ranging in age from infancy to 3 years. The home visitors, one of whom is a nurse, answer parent questions about child development and health issues, conduct developmental screenings, make referrals to area service providers, and teach parents how to play games and carry out other literacy activities with their children.

PAT, which has an annual program budget of \$20,000, received a total of \$19,000 from the USD COPC over its first 2 years, an amount that was matched by the university. Gelb, who directs PAT at USD, says that the program has recently joined a consortium of 12 other PAT programs that plan to work together to raise future operating funds. Once long-term funding is secured, the consortium hopes to adopt uniform standards by which to evaluate PAT programs, pool data on families who are served by consortium members, and then quantify PAT's impact on those families.

While USD, through PAT, is serving the educational and health care needs of the Hmong community, the UNO is linking Latino families to a broad array of educational, social, health, and government services. Dr. Theresa Barron-McKeagney, a professor in UNO's School of Social Work and Family Mentoring Project (FMP) coordinator, reports that the majority of South Omaha, Nebraska, families participating in FMP are not categorized as being at risk. Generally, the families do not experience domestic violence, and their children do not take drugs or hang out with the gangs that are beginning to surface in the city. The program's goal, says Barron-McKeagney, is simply to help families maintain their stability.

Forty Latino families, eight of whom are recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America, participate in FMP. The families were attracted to Omaha by its moderate cost of living and relatively safe living environment, according to Barron-McKeagney. However, they soon realized that not even Omaha is immune to violence and other influences that can sidetrack their children and get them into trouble.

"We are trying to help these young people lead healthy, safe, and productive lives," says Barron-McKeagney. "Families agree to participate in our program because they want to do all they can do for their children."

Established in 1996 by UNO's School of Social Work and the Chicano Awareness Center, FMP received a \$100,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to fund its first 2 years of operation. The project now receives an annual contribution of \$60,000 from UNO's COPC in addition to grants and contributions from local organizations. FMP uses the funds to pay its full-time community coordinator and to organize activities for parents and their 10- to 12-year-old children. The activities help adults hone their parenting skills and provide children with a social network that encourages them to make responsible choices. Key links in that network are the 34 UNO students and local professionals who volunteer 6 to 8 hours a month to mentor young program participants.

When families join the UNO project, they meet with the community coordinator who assesses their needs, provides information, and refers them, as appropriate, to local service providers. The coordinator, and a social work graduate student who is completing a degree-required practicum, become more involved with families who are experiencing problems and may arrange counseling or treatment for the troubled families or choose other interventions.

Surveys of participants have produced glowing evaluations of both the USD and UNO programs. However, Gelb and Barron-McKeagney suggest that Hmong and Latino families would never have accepted PAT or FMP if those programs had not been firmly rooted in their local communities. Barron-McKeagney says her program succeeded largely because she had already gained the community's trust while working for and serving on the board of the Chicano Awareness Center. Similarly, Gelb reports that PAT made little headway in attracting program participants until its staff enlisted the support of Hmong clan elders, who make all the community's decisions.

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## Massachusetts COPCs

most of their dietary protein. Unfortunately, most immigrants can't afford the high-priced fish and seafood sold in local markets. Many catch their own fish in Lowell's polluted canals and streams, and ignore signs warning them that this practice could be hazardous to their health.

Concerned about fish-borne pollutants and anxious to help immigrants carve out their own economic niche in the Lowell marketplace, the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA) and UML's COPC began meeting in early 1997 to discuss the possibility of establishing a fish-farming industry in Lowell that could eventually be operated solely by immigrants. Those talks bore fruit in October 1997 when the COPC received a 2-year, \$5,000 aquaculture fellowship from the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE).

Through the fellowship, COPC Project Manager Cheryl West and one CMAA employee received intensive aquaculture training and gained access to a host of experts whom West says she still calls periodically for advice and support. As an added benefit, NEBHE also donated a 745-gallon fish tank and growing system, which CMAA placed in the basement of its new headquarters, a 90,000-square-foot mill building. The project will harvest its first crop of 100 tilapia this spring.



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## COPCs WORK WITH IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

In 1998 **New Hampshire College** began recruiting community leaders from the Manchester Enterprise Community's (EC) immigrant population to serve on the COPC advisory board. The EC's immigrant population consists of Vietnamese, Bosnians, and people from various Spanish-speaking countries. The COPC's multicultural board has enabled it to fulfill some of its long-term goals and create a connection between the COPC board members, their constituents, and Manchester nonprofit organizations. Recently, the COPC worked with Manchester's Neighborhood Housing Services to sponsor five housing trainings for EC residents, with each session targeted to a separate immigrant group and coordinated by the COPC board member who represents that group. For additional information, contact Anthony Poore (apoore@minerva.nhc.edu) and Teruhisa Iwasaki-Oi (nerusuke@earthlink.net) at (603) 641-3024 or (603) 668-2211, ext. 3002, or visit <http://merlin.nhc.edu/ced/outreach>.

The Citizenship and Service Education program links students from **Rutgers University** with immigrants from Hispanic, Chinese, Indian, and Southeast Asian communities. The program connects undergraduate students with service-learning placements that are linked to their academic courses. Approximately 80 undergraduate students provide 40 hours of community service each semester, applying classroom lessons to real-world situations. At the Hispanic Community Development Corporation, bilingual students work in the reception area and mentor children of new immigrants. At the Multidisciplinary Center, students work in outreach programs for immigrants who have been displaced by the construction of a stadium in their neighborhood. Other placements include providing research on domestic violence laws or planning children's activities at a women's shelter. For additional information, contact Melina Aquilar at (elektra@andromeda.rutgers.edu) (973) 353-1946. ■

CMAA and the COPC have provided in-kind donations of staff time and space to the aquaculture project. A CMAA employee cares for the fish daily.

UML faculty and students have been heavily involved in helping the aquaculture project succeed. Engineering students, working on class projects, have been trying to resolve design problems with the fish tank's waste management, filtration, and heating systems. Students in the College of Health are testing new forms of fish feed that they hope will increase the tilapia's nutritional value and help consumers fight cardiovascular disease. Students will use the

project's second crop of tilapia to test their system designs and conduct nutrition research trials. At the same time, CMAA and the COPC will work together to refine the program's scale-up plans.

"When the community is ready to scale up and actually do a commercial-level growing operation, our goal is to have these issues ironed out," says West.

For more information, contact Claudia Green, Director of the Center for Community Economic Development (CCED) at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, at (617) 287-5796 (claudia.green@umb.edu); and Cheryl West, COPC Project Manager at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, at (508) 934-4683 (Cheryl\_West@uml.edu). ■

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## COPCs Prepare Immigrants

The program's popularity soared when a clan elder agreed to sit on PAT's board and a member of one elder's family began working as a home visitor.

Gelb and Barron-McKeagney agree that being rooted in the community has helped bring university resources to bear on local concerns. It also has enriched both universities by allowing them to fulfill their missions of service to the community.

"The university is no longer [perceived as] an absentee landlord," says Barron-McKeagney. "We are from the community and we are in the community. We are not using the community for our research and then walking away. Instead, we are committed to creating programs that benefit both our worlds and that bring those worlds closer together."

For more information contact Dr. Theresa Barron-McKeagney, coordinator of the University of Nebraska-Omaha Family Mentoring Project, at (402) 554-2898 ([theresa\\_barron-mckeagney@unomaha.edu](mailto:theresa_barron-mckeagney@unomaha.edu)); or Dr. Steven Gelb, director of the Parents as Teachers Program at the University of San Diego, at (619) 260-4893 ([sgelb@pwa.acusd.edu](mailto:sgelb@pwa.acusd.edu)). ■

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