

Diversity Works

Office of University Partnerships

Minority-Serving Institutions Developing Partnerships, Building Communities

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TCUP Grantee Uses OUP Funding to Remain Competitive

Community colleges are in the business of educating people. And like any business that hopes to prosper, community colleges must remain competitive with other institutions of higher education. One way to achieve this is by offering programs that other institutions do not offer. Another way is to offer students and prospective students the resources and amenities that make them want to attend a particular institution.

Since 1978, Fort Peck Community College (FPCC) in Poplar, Montana, has been offering a variety of 2-year Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees, as well as Associate of Applied Science programs of study. To complement these areas of study, the college also offers 1-year certificate programs and various special projects, such as hazardous materials remediation and law enforcement classes. When it comes to offering students the programs they need and want, FPCC has proven to be a solid academic and vocational education competitor.

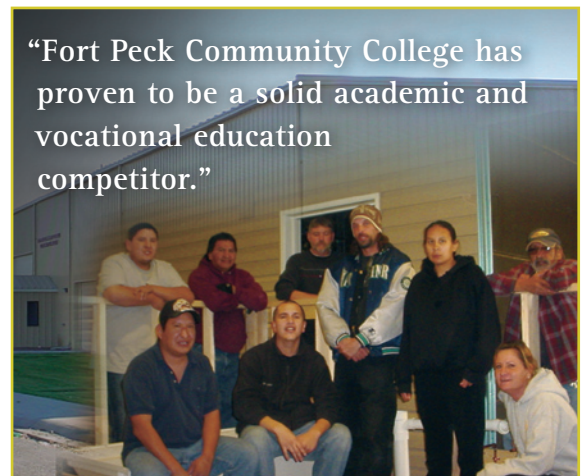
Building for the Future

FPCC has spent the past 3 decades investing in and enhancing its academic and vocational offerings. Now, the college's board of directors and administrators recognize it is time to expand the college's physical facilities and student amenities to attract and accommodate more students from a larger geographic region.

To promote its mission, FPCC employs the elements of strategic planning and critical thinking, from which is formed the basis for addressing the comprehensive institutional development process. "We are continually searching for funding that will allow us to construct needed facilities, which in turn will enable us to broaden our offerings and deliver more services to

more students," stated Warren Means, vice president of the Department of Institutional Development. "In 1993, the college had roughly 30,000 square feet of facilities. Today, we have nearly 118,000 square feet. However, despite this growth in classroom and laboratory facilities, the college has not offered student housing. Without the availability of student housing, the college is at a very distinct disadvantage when recruiting students. Normally, students residing more than 25 miles from a campus will not commute, regardless of the quality of the academic and vocational programs offered. The college really needed to provide student housing. Research was conducted throughout Montana's 2-year community college system, and it was found that 42 percent of its students live in college dormitories or in off-campus rentals. This research concluded that if FPCC is to remain competitive in student recruitment, student housing and dormitories are an essential element."

"Fort Peck Community College has proven to be a solid academic and vocational education competitor."



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Building Community One Block at a Time

Every institution of higher education (IHE) has a mission statement that explains its goals and purpose. One objective common to all of them is to provide quality education to their students. Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge (SUBR), is no different from other IHEs. It provides a high-quality, global education experience for students while helping them engage in scholarly research and creative activities. But SUBR goes a step further. A main focus of its mission is helping students provide meaningful public service to the local community. And its Center for Social Research, led by Dr. Alma Thornton, center director and Building Stronger Communities program administrator, is using funds from a 2006 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of University Partnerships (OUP) Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) program grant to do just that. Through its Building Stronger Communities program, SUBR is helping to renovate homes and promote neighborhood beautification in its surrounding communities.

This renovation and revitalization project is the result of a 2003–2004 needs assessment conducted by Dr. Thornton and the staff of the Center for Social Research in the communities surrounding the university. They conducted door-to-door surveys, town hall meetings, and focus groups and met with the leaders of local community-based and faith-based groups. Through these outreach efforts, Dr. Thornton and her staff identified job-development programs and housing development as two pressing resident needs. However, residents also wanted to establish and organize neighborhood groups to address neighborhood blight. With the Center for Social Research already administering two workforce development programs, the obvious choice was to identify resources and direct efforts to housing development and neighborhood beautification. So, together with residents, members of community-based organizations, and other community partners, SUBR faculty, staff, and students participated as a team in renovating six homes in the Adopt-a-Block beautification program.

SUBR's major renovation partner is the city of Baton Rouge/East Baton Rouge Parish Office of Community Development (OCD). Through this partnership, SUBR, the city, and the parish provide residents and community-based organizations with the necessary information on how to recommend a home for potential rehabilitation. The OCD collects this information and

works with SUBR to verify income and family-size eligibility. Homes in the target area are then inspected to determine if they can be renovated within city and parish contractual limitations.

“Exterior rehabbing, such as minor exterior siding replacement, paint removal, and repainting, is completed by volunteers with the city and parish providing all supplies, tools, safety equipment, technical assistance, and supervision,” said William Hawn, program manager for SUBR's Building Stronger Communities Program. “Southern University and the community organizations identify residents, students, staff, and faculty to voluntarily work on the home.”

Homes of eligible families requiring large-scale renovation are placed up for bid for city- and parish-certified contractors only. City and parish inspectors verify that all work is completed in accordance with building codes. SUBR, the city of Baton Rouge, and East Baton Rouge Parish work as a team to certify work completion, with SUBR grant funds providing 50 percent of the renovation effort and city and parish governments providing the other 50 percent.

“Three homes have been completed to date, with at least three other homes scheduled or being scheduled for renovation,” said Hawn. “The work improves the appearance of the house and families are pleased with the new look.”

Combating Blight, Building Community

SUBR's primary partners for its Adopt-a-Block program are the Scotlandville Community Development Corporation and the Community Against Drugs and Violence. These organizations started area cleanup projects approximately 10 years ago, but limited resources reduced their efforts to mostly trash pickup and minor beautification efforts.

“The Adopt-a-Block program appeared to be among the best methods to address residents' concerns of



Community Against Drugs and Violence volunteers

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vacant lots and neighborhood blight,” said Hawn. “The primary goal of this program is to train a cadre of volunteers, homeowners, university students, faculty, community leaders, and area businesses to beautify neighborhoods in the targeted community one block at a time. There were a number of community-based development organizations and community-based organizations attempting to create these changes in the areas surrounding the campus.” HBCU grant funds have allowed SUBR to work closely with these organizations and residents through its Building Stronger Communities program to significantly expand this effort.

Sponsored activities are held every 6 months in predetermined areas, and residents, students, staff, and faculty join together to perform the cleanup and beautification. The inclusion of ground care and beautification items such as mulch, trimmers, rakes, shovels, and lawn mowers has expanded the effort from just cleanup to beautification of vacant lots and major entrances to the communities. Volunteers engage in debris and trash removal, high weed cutting, and some stump removal. In addition, community signs have been placed in strategic locations, improving pride and ownership of residents in their own community. More than 15 blocks have been included in the Adopt-a-Block cleanup program.

“The initial focus of the cleanup and beautification activities was community entrances, particularly those with vacant lots,” said Hawn. “A second focus for the cleanup was a vacant, overgrown five-lot area located near subsidized low-income rental houses. The community plan was to create a recreational park on this lot. This five-lot area was cleaned and the majority of ground preparation work completed in anticipation of the recreational area.”

Cleanup and beautification of an existing small community park located in another area was one of the reasons the city chose to demolish an old vacant building located adjacent to the community park. Beautification of a lot at one of the major entrances to the community resulted in its sale, the construction of a new building, and launching of a new business on that site. Similarly, the business next to that lot was cleaned, renovated, and restarted.

Teamwork Makes Dreams Work

Housing renovation has resulted in improved neighborhood appearance. The target neighborhoods continue to grow and improve as a result of the SUBR-community efforts supported by the university’s OUP HBCU grant and from leveraged assistance provided as

in-kind grants. The city-parish government provided heavy equipment and operators to assist in the initial weed cutting and trash removal for some of the vacant lots and provided paint, equipment, lumber, and technical assistance for some minor home renovation and painting. The Corporation for National Service provided living allowances, some insurance benefits, and training for full-time AmeriCorps VISTA members to assist in capacity-building activities. A grant for \$10,000 was received from Allstate Insurance to assist in cleanup and ground preparation for the vacant lot site that will become the community recreational area.



Volunteers engage in renovation efforts

“As a result of our functioning cleanup organization, we scheduled and performed a rapid cleanup of the area following Hurricane Gustav in 2008,” said Hawn. “This allowed residents, university and elementary school students, faculty, and staff to join together to rapidly remove debris and clear ditches so children could safely travel to the elementary school and enjoy the school’s playground and exterior areas.”

As more homes are renovated and more neighborhoods are cleaned and beautified, community improvements, larger visibility, new construction, and new businesses and job creation are anticipated.

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Maximizing Grant Dollars and the Learning Experience

To begin construction of its student housing, FPCC applied for and received a \$600,000 Tribal Colleges and Universities Program (TCUP) grant sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of University Partnerships (OUP). As an element of its TCUP application, FPCC implemented a system to maximize grant dollars by assuming the role of general contractor. This allowed the college to exercise its buying power for materials while providing the college's building trades program students with valuable hands-on construction experience.



Building dormitories takes place inside FPCC's construction space

"In 2002, Fort Peck Community College received a \$400,000 TCUP grant from OUP as an integral part of the \$1,500,000 required for constructing a 15,000-square foot Vocational-Technical Education Center," said Means. "The college dedicated 6,000 square feet of this new center to the building trades program, which has the capacity to construct 2,000-square foot modular buildings in the comfort of this new center."

The new facility promotes student learning by providing for both classroom activities and hands-on construction experience throughout the year. The facility has also provided a beneficial and practical means to effectively acquire new facilities for the institution. Building new facilities such as the new student housing takes place inside the Vocational-Technical Education Center's construction space by students in the college's building trades program under the guidance of their instructors. The structures are built in halves. Once the two halves are completed, they are moved from the center to the foundation and connected together. Construction space in the Vocational-Technical Education Center can store an entire building, which is essential given northeastern Montana's winter conditions, when temperatures average a high of 24 degrees and the region receives a monthly average of 6 inches of snow in December and January.

Serving a Larger Community

To date, FPCC has completed one new student dormitory. The building includes 14 student rooms that each accommodates 2 students; a bathroom is shared between 2 rooms. Currently, the facility is housing students from around the region who are participating in special projects classes. "We have created several special projects classes that provide both college credits and continuing education units that attract students from all across this region," explained Means. "For example, the hazardous materials remediation class is always in demand because there is only one other program like it in the state of Montana. However, when people travel to our campus to attend these specialized classes, they require housing, which we can now provide on a limited basis."

The new dormitory facilities will allow FPCC to recruit students from outside of the standard 25-mile commuting service area. This is important if the college wants to continue providing educational opportunities to its average population of approximately 400 students.



The first of FPCC's new dorms

"Fort Peck Community College is located in a county of approximately 12,000 people, of which nearly 60 percent are American Indians," said Means. "Typically, people do not leave the area, so it is a somewhat static population. If we want to keep our enrollment numbers up or grow them, we need to make it possible for students who live outside of the community to attend the college. The new dormitory facilities we have built, and will continue to build, allow us to do this. The TCUP grants from OUP have enabled us to continue to serve the immediate community, as well as those outside of our service area."

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Grantee Revitalization Project — Two Phases, Two Cities, Many Outcomes

Dedication and service to the community are the objectives on which Modesto Junior College (MJC) in Modesto, California, was founded. Simply put, MJC is committed not only to educating its students but to improving its surrounding neighborhoods and communities. And with funds from its 2006 Hispanic-Serving Institutions Assisting Communities (HSIAC) grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), this college of more than 16,000 day and evening students has demonstrated this in a tangible way by successfully implementing a 2-phase housing rehabilitation and neighborhood revitalization project in the cities of Turlock and Modesto.

The idea for the project was developed in 2006 by Judith Monast, then the director of operations for the Community and Economic Development Division at MJC, and Anita Hellam, executive director of Habitat for Humanity Stanislaus County. Monast, a member of Habitat for Humanity's Board of Directors, learned that the organization was undertaking two new ventures. The first was relocating and rehabilitating two homes in Turlock. The second was revitalizing the neighborhood leading into Hope Village, Habitat's 22-unit housing development for low-income families in Modesto. Achieving the goals of both ventures would require tremendous resources, so MJC volunteered to assist Habitat for Humanity in implementing the 2-phase project, called "Turlock Transitions" and "Pathways to Hope."

"MJC had been awarded two previous HSIAC grants and had worked with Habitat on one of them, and the community residents had benefited greatly," said Marla Uliana, MJC's HSIAC project manager. "So the foundation for our partnership had been established. Through this new project, we wanted to invest further in helping people achieve their dreams of homeownership and to help homeowners revitalize their homes."

Revitalization in Phases

MJC students, faculty, and staff, and community volunteers worked on both phases of the project. The 8-month "Turlock Transitions" phase began in April 2007 and was completed in December 2007. In this

phase, workers moved two Habitat for Humanity homes to two new inner-city residential neighborhoods, gutted them, and rebuilt them. Workers installed new cabinets, countertops, appliances, carpet, windows, roofing, flooring, and much more, as well as painted and did electrical and plumbing work. "We performed a total rehabilitation," said Uliana. "The new homeowners took possession in January 2008 in a public dedication ceremony."

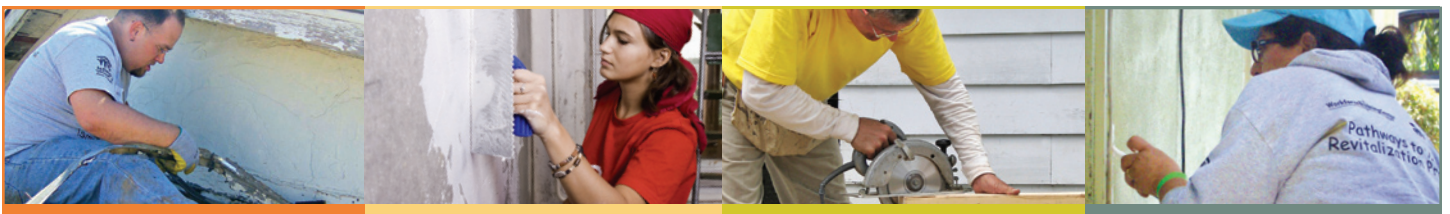
Phase II, the 6-month "Pathways to Hope," took place from June to December 2008. This included revitalization of 10 homes in the neighborhood surrounding Hope Village and providing a truly affordable, safe neighborhood for community residents. Workers introduced themselves to residents by holding a "Brush of Kindness" campaign in which they gave away small do-it-yourself home improvement items, such as mirrors, carpet squares, toilet-paper holders, towel bars, cabinet doors and hinges, pipe insulation, and towel dispensers, to more than 200 residents. Then, based on physical need and through interviews with homeowners, Habitat for Humanity chose the 10 homes for rehabilitation. Activities included painting, roofing, fencing, and indoor and outdoor (security) lighting, as well as installing smoke detectors, windows, doors, countertops, carpeting, flooring, new appliances, heater vents, and patios for each home. They also took care of debris cleanup and wall repair and dabbled in landscaping by planting trees.

"We also built a new utility ramp for a single, older woman in a wheelchair," said Uliana. "Prior to this project, she needed help getting down the steps in order to get out of the house. Building this ramp has given her free access to come and go. We also improved the conditions of two city and school bus stops in the neighborhood, adding benches and cement. And during both phases, MJC provided housing counseling to more than 50 families and trained volunteers in civic engagement."

The Power of Partnerships

Although Habitat for Humanity was MJC's main partner in this project, other agencies were supportive in providing goods and labor. For example, the Modesto

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Grantee Revitalization Project continued from page 5 —————

Fire Department spent 2 days installing 200 new smoke detectors in homes in the neighborhood at no cost to the project. The Modesto Rotary Club contributed to the planting of new trees and plants at 35 homes. Lowe's home improvement center sent skilled, volunteer work crews to join the other volunteers in the revitalization efforts of both phases of the project. Grocery Outlet provided food to stock the shelves for three new homeowners, and the cities of Modesto and Turlock helped in a variety of ways, including reducing barriers to obtaining permits and acquiring land for the phase one relocated homes.

Uliana believes that the proposed outcomes of the project were exceeded in every way.

"The most rewarding outcomes of this project are hearing residents' stories and knowing that, because of this project, we were able to make a difference in their lives," she said. "An example of this is the Porras

family, who had been renting a two-bedroom apartment for their family of five. When they received the keys to a Phase II Modesto home in December 2008, Mrs. Porras cried. She said the home was perfect for her family. Within the first 2 months, the family had planted grass and flowers and met their new neighbors. They all have a sense of community now and look out for each other. Successfully implementing both phases of this project could not have been possible without MJC, our partners, and our community volunteers."

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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.