The Chicago South Side Urban Agriculture Initiative: Evaluation of a New Urban Agriculture Curriculum and Innovation Network at an Urban Predominately Black University

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CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Teaching-based university with approximately 5700 students
Serves mainly Chicago’s South Side and southern suburbs
Approximately 74% African-American
Typical student: female in late 20’s, working full-time, with children

From Chicago State’s mission statement: CSU is committed to teaching, research, service and community development including social justice, leadership and entrepreneurship.

THE CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE URBAN AGRICULTURE INITIATIVE

Goal 1: Develop interdisciplinary academic programs designed to increase the number of minority students educated to:
- envision, research and implement urban agriculture in urban settings to produce high quality food
- address societal issues regarding food access, justice and security
- pursue advanced academic degrees in agriculture and agriculture-related disciplines

Goal 2: Create a model urban agriculture network connecting the university to community gardens and for-profit and non-profit farms that can be implemented in a variety of urban settings.

THE CURRICULUM

Concentrations within the existing Biology and Geography programs
Students will major in one program and minor in the opposite program
2 shared interdisciplinary classes
(Food, Urban Agriculture and the Environment, Capstone)
New Gen Ed classes (Food Justice, Urban Ecology)
Focus on internships, service learning

THE ROSELAND/PULLMAN URBAN AGRICULTURE NETWORK

Began in April 2010
Monthly meetings of 8-40 people, from 4-10 community gardens/urban agriculture sites
Centered in area near Chicago State, includes sites across the South Side
Focused on networking, linking to resources
Chances for policy feedback linking to Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council
Seed grants offered to partner organizations through NIFA grant

Evaluation: Strengths

Goal 1: The Curriculum
- Design is Solid
- Classes have involved large amounts of hands-on practice and community engagement
- GenEd courses have successfully run with about 50 students total

• Goal 2: Community Network
- Network has now met regularly for over four years
- Network members have learned both from resources shared at meetings and through partnerships between themselves.

“While five hundred dollars is not a lot of money for a grant, we did increase our growing area; we used some of the money to get access to a tractor to... fill areas which led to more usable space.”
“...I made connections with members and developed relationships with them outside the group.”
- Seed grant recipients

Evaluation: Challenges

Goal 1: The Curriculum
- No majors as of Spring 2014
- Classes are not required for biology or geography
- Few faculty available with related specialties

Goal 2: Community Network
- Seed grants were small
- University took long time to deliver funding, and required staff follow up
- Continuity between meetings can be a problem

CSU AQUAPONICS CENTER

Opened in 2010 through city grant
Goal: To be an innovation hub for aquaponics and urban agriculture on Chicago’s South Side
In former shoe warehouse
Enjoys strong support of CSU president
Focus has been on community engagement, lifelong learning

Evaluations: Strengths

Goal 1: The Curriculum
- CSU is committed to teaching, research, service and community development including social justice, leadership and entrepreneurship.

Evaluations: Challenges

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