

The UCI Garden Project

Department of Planning, Policy & Design

University of California, Irvine

Emanuel Preciado

Introduction

My assignment for the Global Food Initiative fellowship was to help organize the six autonomous urban garden spaces at UC Irvine. Working with my project manager we did outreach and coordinated a design committee tasked with organizing a larger university-wide community visioning and action planning workshop for the urban gardens on campus.



Project Goals

The **purpose** of the Community Visioning and Action Planning (CVAP) workshop was to frame a road map to the creation of a cohesive network with the urban gardens at UCI where we can share resources, boost production, and improve the health and wellness of our community by building skills through education on campus gardens and becoming sustainable, allowing for a smooth transition with each incoming class.

Desired **Outcomes**:

1. Shared sense of community among garden leaders and fellow gardeners
2. Shared understanding of each garden's needs and visions for future development
3. Shared understanding of where our visions overlap, and an action plan for achieving those shared visions

Methods

My project manager and I decided early on that the best strategy would be to do outreach and establish relationships with garden stakeholders. Stakeholders included student and faculty gardeners, community leaders, facilities, planning, and housing staff. Once we built trust we proceeded to organize the first UCI community visioning workshop for the urban gardens on campus. Using Fran Peavey's strategic questioning methods to facilitate the workshop we guided the group through Focus, Vision, Change, and Action exercises.¹

Focus

- The USDA defines food insecurity as households that were uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources for food.²
- Food insecurity is highlighted as one of the top global issues currently facing humanity and it is estimated that 9 billion people will inhabit our planet by 2050.³
- 17.4 million people in the US were food insecure at some time during 2014.⁴
- In 2014, 25.9% of undergraduate students across all UC campuses faced food insecurity, this means they skipped meals to save money.⁵
- The campuses experiencing the highest levels of food insecurity include UC Riverside, UC Merced, and UC Irvine.

Vision

To begin the community visioning portion of the workshop the participants were taken through a guided visualization exercise and group activities. During this portion of the workshop participants were asked to focus on ideas that stood out and what seemed to be missing. Then by identifying patterns some key clusters surfaced regarding the campus gardens. From this, vision statements were collected from everyone in the room and through a voting process was narrowed down to what the group members considered the most important topics to focus on such as:

- Move from individual to shared spaces, encourage openness
- Improved sustainability of the gardens, connecting nature and garden
- Permeable exchange of garden-based knowledge and resources

Out of these exercises a single vision statement was formulated that included all the most important ideas harvested. The statement reads:

Vision Statement

We see UCI gardens fostering permeable exchange of garden based knowledge to support students' holistic growth, collaborate with local community efforts, address food needs, and connect gardeners and gardens to the "eco" where we live.

Change

After establishing a vision statement participants were invited to express what would need to change in order to achieve the vision. The changes identified by the group included developing tools for talking, exchanging information, and overall improved communication amongst the campus gardens. Another change mentioned was that participants want to see increased accessibility to resources such as materials, knowledge, legal, and human resources. One way to accomplish this is by creating a hub for all campus garden stakeholders to convene. In addition, group members thought it would be prudent to reach out to local homeowners and businesses to build relationships and share knowledge. Finally, in the spirit of collaboration the workshop participants thought there should be a co-design and co-ownership focus for future projects in the garden community.



Action

Once the Focus, Vision, and Change portions of the workshop were completed the group was ready to begin listing actions that should be taken in order to accomplish the vision. Participants then prioritized actions for which they were willing to volunteer for and be held accountable. These actions are as follows:

- Formalize agreements (e.g. MOU)
- Develop internal infrastructure
- Network throughout Orange County to research the optimal site where a hub can be created and what purpose it will serve in the county
- Create an opt-in contact list
- Help coordinate seed exchange and seed saving program
- Pollinizers among UCI and surrounding community
- To thoughtfully support and participate in the conversation and help allocate resources as needed
- Connect 'campus as a living lab' with campus researchers and build partnerships
- Host potlucks and tours at each of the gardens to continue our conversation
- Buy compost in bulk
- Find out what gardeners wish they had at their disposal - needs assessment survey
- Figuring out which platform is best for open communication among community members and starting up the conversation
- Have graduate resident gardens be considered "clubs" for liability insurance
- Demonstrate how natives can be used in sustainable agriculture
- Small PV system with battery bank electric power tools instead of gas. \$500 per garden approximately
- Improved irrigation at gardens using drip system - per plot estimate \$20 each
- Continue to organize events like this to begin brainstorming how to create a hub for the UCI Garden community
- Create a regular convening space to keep communicating
- Research what's working at other nonprofits and universities with garden communities and send out findings to the CVAP group
- Provide trained undergraduates through campus as a living lab, to focus on sustainability related research, education and outreach projects that help move the vision forward
- Information systems for sustainable agriculture at the community level
- Request to have a representative for the campus gardens on the UCI Nature committee for planning of future open space needs
- Mentoring students in management or garden skills
- Provide support from campus planning and communication on any proposed physical changes

Conclusion

The Global Sustainability Resource Center (GSRC), together with other members of the campus community involved in the Global Food Initiative will continue leading the work of the UCI Garden Project. The GSRC will act as an organizer, undertaking and delegating accountability and responsibility roles to the stakeholders of the CVAP group.

In addition to the community organizing component of my fellowship I also received hands-on gardening experience as I worked to revitalize the Arroyo Vista community garden. Now the garden's flourishing and we had our first harvest this Spring.

Works Cited

1. <http://www.context.org/iclib/ic40/peavey/>
2. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx#map>
3. <http://www.sciencemag.org/site/special/foodsecurity/>
4. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us>
5. <http://studentsurvey.universityofcalifornia.edu/results/background-situation.html>

Acknowledgements

Fernando Maldonado
Abigail Reyes
Andrea Bell-Wheelans
Diana Lofflin