



## Making Higher Education More Accessible in Rural Hawai'i

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As the economic landscape of rural communities transitions from historically large-scale agriculture communities to communities of small-scale farming and new economic ventures, so do the social and educational needs within the community. This change presents



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challenges and opportunities for residents in rural communities who face new employment opportunities. Our case study describes the establishment of an education and research center in the rural North Hawai'i region of the Island of Hawai'i. We focused on the activities of the Programming Committee which provided educational and training opportunities for three target groups: 1) individuals interested in pursuing Associate or Bachelor Degrees (Degree Group), 2) individuals who were interested in specialized training and certification (Training Group), and 3) individuals who were interested in one-time classes for personal and professional development (Professional Development Group).

This change presents challenges and opportunities for residents in rural communities who face new employment opportunities.

" As we make progress at the community level by establishing a center for higher education in a rural Hawai'i community, we must also be aware of the need to address challenges and barriers to higher education at the system/organization, family, and individual levels."

### Highlights

**Education Centers in rural communities can serve a vital role as "access points" to higher education.**

**Success in Educational Centers depends on dedicated staffing, partnerships with stakeholders to determine programming, collaborations with higher education in urban centers, and technology infrastructure supporting digital education.**

## Results

- Residents of rural communities face several barriers to college attendance:
  - At the *individual level*, rural community members may be more interested in immediate employment for which a university degree is not required, and/or may lack confidence in their ability to complete a college degree,
  - At the *family level*, parents may not encourage their children to seek higher education as they may need them to work so they can contribute financially to the family,
  - At the *community level*, individuals in rural communities must travel great distances outside of their communities to access college courses in urban centers,
  - At the *system/organizational level*, rural high schools often have fewer resources to prepare students for college.
  
- Factors that influence whether an individual will enroll in a course or certification/training program include:
  - Level of collaboration with key stakeholders and potential students,
  - Targeted recruitment efforts to reach student groups,
  - Tuition costs and availability of financial assistance,
  - Time requirements (e.g. when offered, how much time required),
  - Student motivation,
  - Level of academic preparation and proficiency required.
  
- The success of education centers in rural communities requires:
  - Staffing dedicated to managing the programming of the center,
  - Partnerships with stakeholders of diverse educational needs (e.g. Degree Group, Training Group, Professional Development Group) to determine programming,
  - Collaborations with universities and community colleges in urban centers,
  - Distance education technology, including computer and internet access, which can help to bridge the distance and deliver higher education to rural communities.

### **HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUES, RESULTS, AND IMPLICATIONS?**

The ecological perspective provided a framework for examining issues and understanding the results from multiple levels of analysis.

#### **What Does This Mean For?**

*People Working in Settings Similar to the One that You Studied*— The ecological framework provides a very valuable and essential lens for the successes and failures of community-based initiatives.

#### **For more information:**

Ramos, C.M. (2005). Expanding Higher Education Opportunities in Rural Hawai'i Communities: Lessons Learned in a University-Community Partnership, Journal of Rural Community Psychology, E8 (2), 1-11.