**Workshop on Healthy Partnerships for a Thriving Champaign-Urbana: A University-Community Dialogue for Green Jobs and Entrepreneurship**

Champaign-Urbana is home to a world-renowned university, outstanding regional health-care facilities, a community college with strong community programs, and a thriving agricultural economy. Champaign County is the most highly educated county in the state and, in the past 10 years, the number of people earning salaries over $100,000 per year has grown 90%[[1]](#footnote-1).

Despite this perceived wealth, more than 12,500 of our neighbors experience significant food insecurity due to poverty, more than 55% of school children in Champaign and 60% in Urbana qualify for free or reduced lunches based on household income, and the county has the third highest extreme poverty rate in Illinois1. These statistics have serious implications for the long-term health and wellbeing of the entire community.

We propose to open a constructive university-community dialogue to brainstorm creative new approaches to improving the health and wellbeing of our community, including the environment and ecosystems that support us. How can Champaign-Urbana become a model learning laboratory for sustainability and resilience, with the goal of creating green entrepreneurial and job opportunities for all of its citizens?

To begin this dialogue, we held a one-day workshop with Majora Carter, eco-entrepreneur and MacArthur Fellow, to identify new opportunities for university-community partnership. Carter has brought over $34 million to the South Bronx to create green jobs and infrastructure. She founded a non-profit organization, [Sustainable South Bronx](http://ssbx.org/), that provides green jobs training and placement to restore local waste sites, create urban farms, and install green spaces and roofs. Carter’s firm, [Majora Carter Group](http://www.majoracartergroup.com/), is now engaged in helping other communities around the country to learn from South Bronx successes and adapt to local needs.

*Majora Carter transformed a waste dump into a park on the Bronx River.*

The schedule and notes from the workshop on Friday follow.

**Thursday evening, April 19, 2012, 1122 NCSA Building, 1205 W. Clark St., Urbana, IL** (*Overall moderator: Barbara Minsker; Logistics coordination: Stephanie Lage*)

5:30 PM Majora Carter Keynote Address: Home(town) Security (*Moderator: Barbara Minsker*)

6:30 PM **Community Panel Discussion** on Challenges and Opportunities for Green Jobs and Entrepreneurship in Champaign-Urbana (*Moderator: Menah Pratt Clarke*)  
**Moderator:**  
 - Menah Pratt Clarke – Associate Chancellor, Office of the Chancellor  
**Panelists:**  
 - Beverly Lacy – Lord and Lacy Barbeque  
 - Mike Royse – President, One Main Development  
 - Claudia Lennhoff – Executive Director, Champaign County Healthcare   
 Consumers  
 - Zernial Bogan – President, Champaign County Black Chamber of Commerce  
 - <Substitute panel member for Christine Moore needs to go here.>

**Friday, April 20, 2012, Auditorium, 1122 NCSA Building** (*Overall moderators: Valerie McWilliams and Barbara Minsker*; *Logistics coordination: Stephanie Lage*)   
  
8:30-8:45 Introductions and welcome

8:45-10:15 **Barriers to employment** and opportunities to overcome them through green jobs and entrepreneurship: *Panel Discussion*

**Moderator:**  
 - Lynne Dearborn – Professor, Architecture

**Panelists:**  
 - Libby Tyler – Community Development Director, City of Urbana  
 - Minor Jackson – Director of Workforce Development, Parkland College  
 - Paul Faraci – DCEO Regional Outreach  
 - John Dimit – President & CEO, Champaign County Economic Dev. Corp.  
 - Craig Rost – Deputy City Manager, Economic Development, City of

Champaign

- John Ruffin – Coordinator, Neighborhood Services Department, City of Champaign

**Notes:**

There are barriers to creating new jobs and part of it could be because the economic sectors are limited beyond education, medicine, manufacturing, and agriculture. There is not a lot of corporate wealth and power but the community does have a lot of research-based businesses.

Another thing that was discussed is that action service and community organizing should be taught to children at a younger age like middle school. We should teach less about fitting in to an established order and more about creating our own order.

Another barrier is that there are a lack of entry-level work place skills like math and reading. Parkland is trying to address these issues through different programs for job training and, more specifically, green job training.

Collaboration is one answer to overcoming some of these barriers. One of the panelists suggested a regional approach to economic development. There are large numbers of employees that are going to retire and we have to think about how to replace them. There is a need for a change in conversation, especially when it comes to manufacturing, to tell community members that there are well paying jobs in manufacturing. Youths need to know that you can go to Parkland, get a degree from there, and go into good manufacturing jobs, and see that as a potential avenue. It was suggested that here should be more programs between the schools and employers, and also programs that help identify what kids want to do. Ed Morrison’s work was recommended.

What is missing is a clear vision of what this community wants to look like. The community should not settle for the state’s low standards on education. We need to figure out how to close the disconnect between job seekers and employers. There is a difference between policy makers and the people looking for jobs. We need to develop a workforce, but also close the technology gap too. There are three areas that need to be looked at: Education, Employers, and Policy.

Issues that were brought up by the audience: we need to look at how to prepare a workforce, broaden green jobs, create a climate for businesses to flourish, and create policy that will turn into jobs. We have to make sure that we are treating the whole person. It was also mentioned that any job can be a green job and to think about green jobs more broadly. The panelists didn’t mention a summer youth program that is trying to bridge the gap and businesses were encouraged to get involved. The question is again how to prepare a better-trained workforce. Another issue that was brought up is how does one avoid tracking certain groups of students into certain areas if that is not what they want. Also some companies may have safety issues with their workforce and how do we ensure worker safety and that the changing demographic of the city needs to be taken into account. There was a call to not just talk about things but to take action as well.

10:30-12:00 The **role of technology** in fostering green jobs and entrepreneurship: *Panel Discussion*

**Moderator:** - Barbara Minsker – Professor, Civil & Environmental Engineering  
 **Panelists:**  
 - Betty Barrett – Clinical Assistant Professor, Labor & Employee Relations   
 (FabLab), IESE  
 - Danny Powell – Executive Director, National Center for Supercomputing   
 Applications (NCSA)  
 - William Patterson – Professor, Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Relations  
 - Jon Gant – Research Associate Professor, Library & Information Science  
 - Laura Frerichs – Director, UIUC Research Park Complex

**Notes:**

Betty Barrett talked about the Champaign-Urbana Fablab as an interface between people and technology. The problem is that technology changes so fast. The need for cooperation and teamwork was emphasized for this project to work. Technology must work for communities and people, not the other way around. Danny Powell said that we should try to bridge the gap between data and storage. The difference between a scientist and a student was outlined in that the scientist knows exactly what he is coming to and why when coming to the NCSA, but a student doesn’t and that allows for creativity and innovation that can lead to the creation of new jobs. There are a lot of challenging computational issues and people from all sorts of disciplines should tackle them. There are limited resources and we have to learn how to work with that. This starts with people and understanding people and their culture.

William Patterson suggested that mobile media is one way to engage the community. There is also a broadband project in Urbana-Champaign, which will make the community one of the fastest and best-networked in the nation. We should take one of Mr. Patterson’s media vans into neighborhoods and connect with the high-speed broadband to NCSA’s supercomputers and let the youths pursue creative media ideas and businesses.

We need to figure how to collect data, analyze it, and train people to analyze it. The community should be used as a platform. There are a lot of things in the community like start-up businesses and other projects, but most of them hire PhDs and graduate students, so then the issue becomes how to make it accessible to the community. There is also an education gap between underserved communities and jobs and hiring, so then there should also be programs that focus on teaching youth the value of education; also researchers should make themselves more accessible to children and the community.

A micro-lending program in the community was suggested to finance businesses who want to go green but cannot afford to do so. Also instead of just recycling computers for scrap, why not clean them and reuse them in the community to provide more access to technology.

**Breakout group discussion:** *What relevance is “sustainability” when survival is the question of the day? How can Champaign-Urbana leverage its technology strengths to benefit underserved neighborhoods?*

**Breakout group facilitators:**

* Otis Noble III
* Gary Miller
* Lynne Dearborn
* Morgan Johnston

**Notes:**

The first breakout group addressed the issue of brownfields within the underserved areas of Champaign. They discussed the need to support community members in understanding and navigating the brownfields remediation process and then creating and implementing a vision for redeveloping these areas to become an asset to the community. The brownfield at 5th and Hill could be a key area for redesigning into a space for the community and the campus to interact.

The second group recognized how Champaign-Urbana can leverage its technology to aid underprivileged community members. They discussed targeting youth in the K -12 sector with mentoring programs that show students there is job opportunity in the field of sustainability. The team also discussed that a more systematic approach is ideal in providing solutions to creating more green jobs, an example being the UC2B project.

The third group initiated the idea of developing three mini-fabrication laboratories that are centrally located to provide resources for the community as well as a space to spark design ideas and engage creativity amongst the Champaign population. The operation should be run through a “teach to learn-learn to teach” approach, where university and community members can collaborate and learn from each other.

Another issue brought up from the team was recognizing that it is necessary to bridge the communication gap between the university and the Champaign community. A student from the University of Illinois addressed the issue that many students view themselves as only part of the university and not part of the larger Champaign community. Reasons for this are due to their temporary residences and lack of communication with the surrounding community. They emphasized that there needs to be a push toward entities collaborating within the local area. A local community member Christine Moore, the Vice President of Prosperity Gardens, spoke afterward about the history of the university’s relationship with the community including several learner programs. As a youth she participated in these programs provided by the University and hopes that these opportunities are still available to Champaign youth today.

Majora Carter provided concluding thoughts that these ideas will be most successful in how they are planned. She brought forth the questions, “What is the end game, how can these needs be addressed? Can the university and the community can work together to provide safe spaces for people to feel empowered to voice their concerns?”

12:00-1:15 Lunch and student poster session of previous sustainability-related university-community collaborations in lobby area

*Afternoon session:*

1:15-2:45 Creating a community **sustainability learning laboratory** in Champaign-Urbana: Opportunities and challenges. *Panel Discussion*

**Moderator:**  
 - Pradeep Khanna – Associate Chancellor, Acting Director Office of Sustainability

**Panelists:**  
 - Bruce Litchfield – Assistant Dean, Engineering Administration

- Lynne Dearborn – Professor, Architecture

- Barbara Minsker – Professor, Civil & Environmental Engineering  
 - Valerie McWilliams – Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation  
 - Alejandra Coronell – Language Service Supervisor, Provena  
 - Bruce Knight – City Manager, City of Champaign  
 - Robert Myers – Planning Division Manager, City of Urbana

**Notes:**

This discussion started with Prof. Minsker presenting the work she has been doing in prototyping a living laboratory for university-community partnerships on sustainability issues in Champaign-Urbana. She mentioned the critical problem for faculty and students is finding information, contacting the right people, and not just creating short-term projects that are disconnected from the community. She showed us the online system her student is working on enable people to keep track of Champaign-Urbana data and projects across different classes and activities. She proposed transforming the railroad tracks that run through the city into a greenway to connect the community college, parks, downtown Champaign and Urbana, the hospitals, and 5th and Hill site, and the university. This could serve as a hub for mixed-income redevelopment in underserved areas on the north side of Champaign. Robert Myers mentioned that the Champaign County Greenways and Trails Committee has had the idea of a greenway in their plans for some years, and that there is room for a walking/biking path without having to remove the railroad tracks that are still in use.

Alejandra Coronell discussed how she has been trying to develop a language department to serve the non-English speaking through the local hospital. There is an opportunity to engage with the Latino community. The university has the opportunity to reach out toward people who are hoping for engagement. University extension can function as enabling the university to really create something with the community.

Lynne Dearborn discussed ESLARP’s experience at being engaged with a community and how it can lead to better relationships. From her experience, having an ongoing entity that can provide a long-term structure that community members and professors can tap helps build interaction. She notes that projects often take longer than what a student can do during their cycle of time in a class.

Bruce Knight described how Urbana completed a comprehensive plan for developing an infill pattern. From his experience, completing infill strategies are a lot cheaper than building on soybean fields. He also mentioned the upcoming “Growing Greener” Expo on Monday at Champaign Library.

Robert Myers mentioned that people can improve their lives by the physical design of the community, and city planning is about defining what the public interest is and designing what is best for the community as a whole.

Valerie McWilliams from Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation talked about her work in the civil services department and as a legal professional. She brought up the question, “Is there something we can do as a community that can really make a deep impact?”

Strategic planning is done to uncover the most important issues for the community. During the discussion of what would a sustainable learning laboratory be that can develop in our community, Bruce Knight said the campus area transportation project and the UC2B project are models for intergovernmental activities, and the first thing to think about are who are the players.

Bruce Litchfield mentioned that there needs be a physical place to meet, where community members can come with concerns and students and faculty can collaborate with them. This place need to be a physical space that is staffed, open, and off campus. But there should be ways to promote projects that could cross-benefit a lot of goals, such as promoting minority entrepreneurs through farmers’ markets and agricultural tourism.

Valerie McWilliams suggested bringing together all kinds of different departments, which allows everyone to share knowledge, and it can be enriched by students from the University of Illinois. She also mentioned that we need a clearinghouse that can support bottoms-up grassroots, where the community will feel free to go toward the university to help with their problems.

Alejandra Coronell mentioned the community will not like to be in a place called a "lab”. Also some of the Latino agricultural workers should be seen as an asset because they can show people how to sustain themselves. This could also be good for youth to teach them about labor, instead of video games.

During the question and answer session, Libby Tyler mentioned that the interaction between the university and the community is a problem. As an example, she pointed out that the Beckman Center has its building’s back turned to the community, which has been a symbolic sore point since it was built. Bruce Knight said that the Board of Trustees of the university has little to no communication with the community. Majora commented that how people use things, like design, can be utilized to create pathways for engagement, and there may be physical spaces that come out of the project.

3:00 – 4:00 **Breakout group:** **Brainstorming ideas** for creating better university-community partnership. *Why can’t we all just get along? Navigating cross-cultural divides required for meaningful university-community engagement.*

**Notes:**

In this second breakout group, the issue of how the community issues need to be addressed was examined. The most important issue seemed to be communication. There seems to be a disconnect between the community and the university and this is something that needs to be solved. A new way of thinking about these issues and achieving goals needs to occur through a respectful mode of communication, focusing on a solution that can be achieved together. The barriers that are currently present between the community and university need to be broken and a way that this can happen is through a uniting factor such as food. There are currently a lot of resources and tools that are associated with food and individuals throughout the community and campus can relate to food.

Learning labs was another reoccurring topic in this breakout session. It was mentioned that while the learning labs are a virtual and physical space in which individuals can compile and organize research, they are not always effective because they are too general and they tend to only look at the big picture. A better way to solve community problems could be to use working groups to implement ideas for the community, with the learning lab concept providing long-term virtual and physical infrastructure support.

It was also mentioned that a community help/resource book could be used to assist community members in starting and achieving goals. Students at the university can be engaged by working community projects into curriculum. This should be done so that students can be more involved and aware of problems in the community. A concern that was brought up regarding this idea is that in the past, this was put into place but always seemed to die down and if it were to be tried again, some longer-term framework should be put into place so that it will not fail again. Social media can be used because it is powerful and something that the community should take advantage of. A Web and mobile-phone app of some sort could also be put into place to allow for easy, organized access for community members to share and implement ideas that they may have. Starting a community-training center to train individuals in the community would be very useful. Focusing on the youth is important because the youth are the future. Programs should be put in place for high-risk youths and possibly connect with the college for a day program which allows youths to experience college in order to provide more motivation to continue in school.

It was mentioned that looking at other university models would be useful and helpful in developing successful programs. One of the fears that comes with working with the university on projects is the fear that the university is either going to take over the project, without regard to the community members, or they would help briefly, and then just let it go. Also, there is a lot of bureaucracy involved in working with the university, something that is discouraging to community members and activists.

The key idea that seems to reoccur throughout the whole event is the importance of communication. There needs to be a dialogue with the community and educators and if this happens then sustainability has a good chance of occurring. Overall, this breakout session and brainstorm was successful in putting many good ideas forth. Further discussions are needed to figure out how they can be implemented.

**4:00 – 4:30 Next steps for creating a university-community partnership: Working groups and volunteers** *(Facilitator: Barbara Minsker)*

* Join Champaign County food policy council (Contact Pattsi Petrie <pattsi@illinois.edu>)
* Sustainability project and expert web-site/handshake match (Morgan Johnston <mbjohnst@illinois.edu>, Cassie Carroll <[casandcarroll@gmail.com](mailto:casandcarroll@gmail.com)>)
* Community training center - charette (Patsy Petrie <pattsi@illinois.edu>, Morgan Johnston <mbjohnst@illinois.edu>, Minor Jackson <mjackson@parkland.edu>, Otis Noble III <onoble@illinois.edu>, Laura Weiss <e-mail?>?, Eric Benson [fallenmitten@gmail.com](mailto:fallenmitten@gmail.com), Liz McMillen <lizmcmillen@gmail.com>)
* Sustainability partnership/Long-term structure development. Connect with community-visioning update (Big Small All). Gary Miller <gdmiller@illinois.edu>
  + Physical space on north side of town, near campus (Libby Tyler <ehtyler@urbanaillinois.us>).
  + Service learning, enterprise hubs.
  + Infrastructure - Fab lab, IT, gallery spaces
  + Programs for high-risk youth (Maria Jones <mjones10@illinois.edu>, including connect with college for a day.
  + Microfinance, grant writing support (Regional Planning Committee can help with this).
  + Look at other university models for staffing, space, programs (Lynne Dearborn <dearborn@illinois.edu>, Otis Noble III <onoble@illinois.edu>).
* Mobile technology center, including fab lab (Minor Jackson <mjackson@parkland.edu>, Will Patterson [wmpatter@illinois.com](mailto:wmpatter@illinois.com)?, Betty Barrett [bb1@illinois.edu](mailto:bb1@illinois.edu)>?, Danny Powell <[dpowell@illinois.edu](mailto:dpowell@illinois.edu)>?).
* Local carbon offset program (Gary Miller <gdmiller@illinois.edu> )
* Greenway with mixed-use development next to railroad tracks (Libby Tyler <ehtyler@urbanaillinois.us>, Lynne Dearborn [dearborn@illinois.edu](mailto:dearborn@illinois.edu), Mike Royse <[mike@1-main.com](mailto:mike@1-main.com)>?, Don Schlorff <[donald.schlorff@busey.com](mailto:donald.schlorff@busey.com)>?)
* Brownfields remediation and redevelopment (Maria Jones [mjones10@illinois.edu](mailto:mjones10@illinois.edu), Claudia Lennhoff <claudia@shout.net>)

**Planning Committee:**Pradeep Khanna – Associate Chancellor, Acting Director Office of Sustainability  
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Amy Rosenbery – Office Manager, Office of Sustainability  
Barbara Minsker – Professor, Civil & Environmental Engineering  
Lynne Dearborn – Professor, Architecture  
Valerie McWilliams – Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation  
Steve Taylor – Biologist, State Natural History Survey  
Otis Noble III – Campus & Community Affairs Specialist, Equal Opportunity and Access  
Gary Miller – Associate Executive Director, Prairie Research Institute  
Vicki Eddings - Assistant Program Administration, Action Research Illinois

**Sponsors:** University of Illinois Academy for Entrepreneurial Leadership, College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences, School of Architecture, College of Business, Center for Advanced Study, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Institute for Computing in the Humanities, Arts, and Sciences, School of Earth Science and the Environment, College of Engineering, Office of Equal Opportunity and Advancement, I-TOPP project, Department of Geography, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, National Center for Supercomputing Applications, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, Prairie Research Institute, Office of the Provost, Social Dimension of Environmental Policy Initiative in the Beckman Institute, Students for Environmental Concerns (SECS), Student Organization Resource Fee (SORF), Office of Sustainability, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research; Action Research Illinois; Center for the Advancement of Sustainability Innovations, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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1. 2011 Community Report, United Way of Champaign County. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)