UMD “PALS” Program to Partner with Anne Arundel County, City of Annapolis

New partnership puts university assets to work for a more sustainable Maryland

COLLEGE PARK, Md.—The University of Maryland’s Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability Program (PALS) has announced its fourth community partnership, this time with Anne Arundel County and the City of Annapolis, Md. Set to launch in August, the yearlong collaboration will match coursework across a variety of disciplines on UMD’s College Park campus with economic, environmental and social challenges prioritized by county and city governments, as they look to improve quality of life for those who work and live in the Chesapeake Bay Region.

"The University of Maryland's PALS program is exactly the type of innovative partnership that can help address the critical issues facing our County,” said County Executive Steve Schuh. "Our administration is excited to team up with students to provide data-driven solutions that will make our County the best place to live, work and start a business in Maryland."

"This program will help the City of Annapolis leverage resources and gather information necessary to be successful when planning various initiatives including transportation, economic development and historic preservation," Mayor Pantilides said. "Along with the University of Maryland, I am thrilled to partner with the county again in an effort to help us address the current need for information that will help us complete critical projects benefiting both the city and county."

Developed by the university’s National Center for Smart Growth, PALS pairs faculty expertise with student ingenuity to tackle sustainability issues facing Maryland communities. PALS partners with one or two communities each academic year, matching customized coursework with the specific challenges described by the partner community to deliver research and recommendations on a host of sustainability challenges. Offering on-the-ground civic engagement, PALS coursework also provides a living case study for students, offering a rewarding community experience that best mirrors future professional interactions within their disciplines.

Building on Results
PALS initiated its first partnership with The City of Frederick, Md. in September of 2014, adding a second, smaller collaboration with College Park in January 2015 and launching its third
partnership with Howard County, Md. and the Columbia Association (CA) last September, which is currently underway. Since its inception, PALS has engaged nearly 900 students, 12 campus schools and colleges, and provided over 100,000 hours of work directed towards tackling social, economic and environmental challenges throughout the state; the work done in The City of Frederick alone is worth about one million dollars in consultant costs. The partnership with Howard County and CA, which spans 33 courses, makes PALS the largest action-learning program in the country.

“I was so impressed with the level of work,” said The City of Frederick Alderman Michael O’Connor. “If we can do ten percent, five percent, even one percent of what they brought forward, then this partnership has been worth it for The City of Frederick.”

**Enhancing Quality of Life on the Bay**
The new partnership with Anne Arundel County and Annapolis is the first time PALS will be partnering with both a city and county concurrently, a nod to newly elected County Executive Steve Shuh and Annapolis Mayor Mike Pantelides’ continued efforts to collaborate for stronger, more sustainable communities. The combined jurisdiction, over half a million people, is nearly double the size of PALS’ latest efforts in Howard County; the size and scope of work will allow the program to target a wide range of topics for both undergraduate and graduate school courses as well as a potential collaboration with the county’s community college.

“We are very excited about joining forces with Anne Arundel County and Annapolis,” says Uri Avin, Director of the PALS program. “Because of the diversity of the area, which includes rural and urban settings, and the Chesapeake bay, this partnership will expand the breadth of projects from previous years and really take advantage of the whole of the university’s assets.”

**Sustainable Communities remain at partnership core**
The mission of PALS is to help communities improve their quality of life through the vast resources available at the university. PALS was initiated by Dr. Gerrit Jan-Knaap, director of the university’s National Center for Smart Growth, in response to two very distinct—yet interconnected—issues: a lack of “real world” experiential opportunities for students to practice classroom skills, and the contemporary struggle local governments face with dwindling budgets, overburdened staff and mounting sustainability issues. Through interdisciplinary and cross-community collaboration, the PALS program represents an integral part of the university’s land grant mission to create a more sustainable Maryland.

“PALS offers a platform for communities and the university to work together to solve some of our state’s most pressing issues in sustainability,” said Knaap. “We are very excited to be working in Anne Arundel and Annapolis this year and I am eager to see the partnership results—both in the community and in the classroom.”

*Learn more about PALS [here.]*

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