PARTNERSHIP for ACTION LEARNING in SUSTAINABILITY

The Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability (PALS) at the University of Maryland (UMD) is a new, campus-wide initiative that enlists faculty expertise and student ingenuity to offer fresh solutions to challenges facing Maryland communities. Administered by the National Center for Smart Growth at UMD, the PALS mission is to provide high-quality, low-cost assistance to local governments while creating an active and valuable real-world learning experience for UMD graduate and undergraduate students.

The collaborative partnership created through PALS aims to provide communities with a unique roadmap for creating sustainable, thriving places to live, work and play. Governments gain access to the depth of knowledge and experience of UMD faculty along with the ingenuity and enthusiasm of UMD students. Concurrently, UMD students reap the benefits of engaging with the community while applying course material and critical thinking skills to sustainability-focused projects.

Targeted, customized coursework, created by self-selected faculty across a wide range of disciplines, captures the partner community’s specific issues. The results are innovative ideas and solutions to help Maryland communities secure a more economically, environmentally and socially sustainable future.

How does PALS work?

PALS will collaborate with interested communities to pinpoint challenges and, acting as a campus-wide liaison, help coordinate a series of suitable courses specifically aimed at developing solutions for the partner city. The projects will focus on creating more sustainable, vibrant Maryland communities while University courses adopt the project as case studies or applied exercises. Once a partnership is created, PALS will manage the University side, while the partner jurisdiction coordinates and manages their side under a Memorandum of Understanding. Work is done on campus with field visits as needed.

Who is eligible to participate in PALS?

Any city, town or county can apply to PALS via an annual PALS Request for Proposals. The partnership requires a one-year commitment, assistance with coordination and a modest financial contribution to defray faculty, student and administrative expenses.

What kinds of issues can the PALS help your community address?

- Expanding your job base or attracting new jobs
- Managing your energy supplies efficiently
- Assuring water quality and conservation
- Meeting storm water and land use regulations
- Taking your recycling program to the next level
- Exploring new funding methods for fire and police
- Engaging immigrant and low income communities
- Creating wellness programs
- Using social media effectively
- Anticipating climate change
- Capturing the value of public investment through tax increment financing
- Making targeted investments in transportation
- Promoting tourism as economic development
Piloting PALS

The City of Frederick is the pilot venue for PALS, launching for the Fall 2014 – Spring 2015 academic year. The City and PALS developed a list of 45 candidate projects covering a wide range of issues including planning and development, the environment and social issues. Responding to widespread interest, PALS has successfully paired 24 of these projects with faculty from 9 different programs across campus with the relevant expertise. The partnership will involve approximately 50,000 student hours in this campus-wide effort to promote sustainability in one community.

A beta test of the program was conducted this past spring in Salisbury, Maryland. The project, dubbed “Envision Salisbury,” partnered 50 graduate and undergraduate architecture students with the town’s residents as Salisbury develops a master plan for downtown revitalization. The town is incorporating student designs into its master plan.

The National Center for Smart Growth

The NCSG is a cooperative venture of four schools on the University of Maryland’s College Park campus: Agriculture and Natural Resources; Architecture, Planning and Preservation; Engineering; and Public Policy. Since its inception in 2000, the NCSG has established an international reputation as a source of rigorous and objective research, education and technical assistance.

For more information contact:

Gerrit Knaap, NCSG Executive Director: gknaap@umd.edu
Uri Avin, PALS Director: uavin@umd.edu

City of Frederick, Maryland
2014–2015

Some of the final 28 Courses and Projects include:

Planning and Community Development
Downtown architectural tour guide
Economics of historic preservation
Jefferson Street Corridor revitalization
East Frederick Rising Industrial Redevelopment
Outreach to minority-owned businesses
Development plans for surplus City properties
Mapping neighborhood identities
Promoting Local Businesses
Designing the Shared Use Path

Energy and Environment
Composting and organics recovery
Greenhouse gas inventory
Algae in Carroll Creek
Climate change and the Frederick watershed
Enhancing environmental resilience

Communication and Journalism
Feature writing
Video storytelling
Oral histories in Downtown Frederick

Carroll Creek Park – Frederick, MD