

Enhancing the Viability/Sustainability of the AAMU Child Development Center

Issue: The Alabama A&M University Child Development Center (CDC) was established in 1947 as a Laboratory Center, housed in what is now Family and Consumer Sciences. The program serves children in the Huntsville community of diverse backgrounds, cultures and socio-economic levels who range from 18 months to four years of age. The CDC operates with a part-time director, two full time instructors, an assistant teacher, and a cook. The operations of the center are partially supported through the collection of weekly fees. These fees generate enough capital to support employment of the assistant teacher and cook, and minimal teaching materials and supplies. Approximately \$25-28,000 is generated to contribute toward the salaries of the faculty and director. Currently, the two full time faculty and the part-time director are paid from the Family and Consumer Sciences budget because the center has traditionally operated as a laboratory. The current economic status of the University has caused the center to come under financial scrutiny. The administration is now urging the center to institute measures to become more self-supporting. The purpose of this project is to develop plans to strengthen the formal structure of the center, increase the revenue base of the center, and to develop plans to document the worth of the center as a University Laboratory contributing to other AAMU programs benefiting from the center at no cost.

What has been done: In 2011, an internal review of the financial patterns and use of the center by other University entities was conducted, as well as an external review of fee structures for CDCs in the surrounding community. MOUs with other University units utilizing the center were developed; a formal Advisory Council was established; and activities to position the CDC for accreditation were begun. Grants currently in existence for the support of the center were renewed, and a pilot proposal was developed and funded which partially paid the CDC Director and faculty during the summer months. The proposal was expanded and funded as a three-year project on fruits and vegetables which will subsidize the CDC salaries minimally.

Impacts/New Partnerships: Faculty in Family and Consumer Sciences are now developing proposals which will benefit the CDC. The ACES Service Learning Network and the TRIO Program on the AAMU campus assisted with providing volunteers for the CDC during the Summer of 2012. These are relationships which are expected to continue. Other University entities have agreed to provide support for CDC programming, but have not yet signed the MOUs to formalize the process.

Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life)

The budget for the CDC was again supported with the charge to continue to become more self-sustaining. Fees for the three and four year old children were increased for the current with no adverse effect on enrollment. New interest in the center has been generated through radio and TV coverage of the wagon gardens of the children growing fruits and vegetables resulting from the new research project. The CDC facilities have been updated and are in line with accreditation standards. The Advisory Board will have its first official meeting in Fall 2012. Board members are anxious and are eagerly providing recommendations/suggestions for continued viability of the center.

How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience?

My FSLI experience has given me the “tool set” and confidence for engaging in conversations with the administration, faculty and stake holders regarding the future of the CDC. Inferences drawn from exposure to the various self-assessments conducted during FSLI have aided me tremendously in understanding how to interact and react in discussions and negotiations throughout the development of this project.

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