

## HEALTHY UNIVERSITY 2005



Annette Gardner, MPH

Natalie stepped off TheLightrail, pleasantly surprised at the lack of traffic on University Avenue. All the moped parking was now filled with bicycles. Ever since the gas crisis of '99, when gas wasn't delivered to the Islands for 3 months, people had shifted to alternative forms of transportation. Or, they worked and learned at home. Natalie hadn't stepped foot on campus since 1995, and wondered what other changes she might anticipate. Typically she participated in her classes through the extensive distance education program. Using the latest in holographic technology Natalie continued to acquire various degrees, certificates as well as facilitate courses. However, she wanted to attend the award ceremony for Healthiest University in the United Pacific, and hear why the University of Hawaii had garnered this prestigious award.

It was 2005 and things had changed. First, Natalie noticed a number of buildings have been torn down and replaced with extensive gardens, ponds and open-air buildings. With the decreased need to attend classes at the Manoa Campus, more space was devoted to creating environmentally sound ecosystems to preserve endangered species from all over the world. This was now the norm throughout the state as the environmental movement of the 1990s gained momentum and legislative support.

The ceremony was held in the University planetarium, enabling the speaker to use three-dimensional visuals to describe how the University had won the award. First, there was the championing of individual wellness in the early 1990s by a committed group of faculty, staff and students. Even in the face of budget cutbacks, and apathy, the Wellness Council developed a vision and a plan for far-reaching activities. The Council understood the value of collaboration and took advantage of the emerging models for community-based health promotion. It was a tough sell to people who thought health was getting a prescription and wellness was a throw-back to the 1970s, but the Council persevered.

Now in 2005 the campus has evolved into a model for other campus communities. The efforts and results are impressive:

- \* Research on the effects of environmental changes on the physiological, social and intellectual status of individuals and groups contributed to a vastly different campus environment. Students and faculty rose up in the late 1990s to protest enclosed, over-air conditioned buildings. Tearing down buildings became more profitable than constructing new buildings. Non-allergenic shade plants were planted as allergies and skin cancer increased among students, staff and faculty.

- \* Health risk behaviors such as smoking, drinking, overeating, etc. have been replaced by information overdose, time mismanagement, and issues related to one's upbringing. There are still problems with substance abuse and AIDS, but the interventions are quick and long-lasting, and can be applied earlier through more effective screening tests. University members self-diagnose their high-risk behaviors, as well as other chronic/acute disorders. Research found that self-examination resulted in less denial and greater control over the healing process. Mental disorders are still a problem as people grapple with too many choices and too many pressing environmental and economic issues.

\* Students, staff and faculty were evaluated on their ability to improve their personal health status, as well as that of others. Incentives such as state-of-the art computer technology or visits to the neighbor islands were implemented throughout the University system. Many classes started with a few Tai Chi movements or meditation.

\* The University organizational structure was totally revised when outcome measures were implemented to determine efficacy of faculty, administrative and student performance. Health services had to result in improved health status of both the individual and the community. Interestingly, when improvements occurred in teaching practices, so was there an improvement in student and faculty ability to deal with stress, and ultimately an improvement in physical fitness. People finally came to understand the interconnected nature of health, the environment and the University culture.

\* The University built on its partnerships with health care providers, medical researchers, public health, community development, business, etc. to improve the quality of services delivered on the campus, while creating new models of health promotion. The community was involved in these partnerships every step of the way, enhancing the leadership quality of many students. In 2000, Hawaii become the first Wellness State due to these collaborative partnerships.

\* All campus members feel a sense of membership and kindred spirit with at least 10 other members. Community Connection Groups were created to address the problems of cultural disinterest, apathy and self-destructive behavior. These Groups reflect on the influence the University has on their lives, while thinking strategically about how to change the University to better address their needs. One result of these support groups was the gap between faculty and student diminished to where all class participants function as "facilitators," challenging each other to constantly expand their thinking. The groups also have a responsibility to decide on key campus issues. All members vote on salaries, course offerings, admissions policy, facility changes, etc.

Basically, the University had evolved the wellness concepts of the 1990s well past the conventional delivery of services and provision of information. The result was a dynamic, involved community that was now considered one of the foremost learning centers in the United Pacific. Health was now infused into all disciplines and vice versa. One couldn't talk about the economic situation of a country without discussing the ramifications on the health status of the community, family and individual. Mind and body were united physically, spiritually and intellectually.

More importantly, the University made a commitment to the health of its members and the members made a commitment to the health of the University. The result was that the University's health activities went well beyond the School's geographic boundaries. Graduates, visiting faculty, international students applied their experiences and applied them to other communities and settings around the world.

While Natalie was very impressed by the 3-D description of the Schools efforts, she was more impressed by the crowd around her. There was a certain warmth and interest in the story being told. And the story wasn't over. The Award would enable the University to expand its new "WellComm" program into home computer systems and wristwatch monitors. Participants would be able to verbally ask the program to provide visual images, text, and other interested individuals to help them understand life changes and social dynamics. Basically, the new system would provide instantaneous access to assistance at any time, and in any place.

Natalie left the ceremony, reflecting on how much change had happened over the last 10 years, and the significant influence it was having on improving the wellbeing of University constituents. As she walked back to TheLightrail, it started to rain. Natalie had to smile...some things never change.

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