



Spanning the Digital Divide

Impact Statement

The Problem/Issue:

Although the number of Americans connected to the nation's information infrastructure is soaring, many groups still lack access to the information society. Extension provides programming to help citizens who are at risk of exclusion due to a lack of information access, computer training and Internet awareness. Urban and nontraditional programs aimed at enhancing information access and retrieval offer resources and referrals for public access and technological delivery as well as a resource laboratory for state-of-the-art best practices in communications.

What's Been Done:

In keeping with the vision of E-Extension to remove barriers to information access, resources such as Metro News, the WECAN4U job assistance network, the Programacion en Español Web site and the Urban Resource Center Inventory Catalog provide electronic links to Extension's research-based information. These resources facilitate the delivery of urban and nontraditional programs to the larger community and help address objectives aimed at identifying best practices in program design and delivery.

A state-of-the-art communications laboratory housed at AAMU supports the Urban Affairs unit's efforts to deliver quality programs and resources across the state, nation and the world. The laboratory support staff, technicians and unit specialists help make available to the public on-going programs and activities such as:

- A Hispanic Web site (www.aces.edu/urban)
- Live satellite training
- Interactive video conferences
- An online resource directory
- Web-based publications
- A workforce education career assistance network (WECAN4U)
- LifeSmarts (online consumer education programs partnership with the National Consumer League)
- Metro News

Why We Care:

Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the United States. Census data indicates that 12 percent of the population is Hispanic. Extension educators have continued to maintain and upgrade the unit's Spanish Website. The Programacion en Español site has had over 114,000 visits and represents one of Extension's most frequently visited links. The user friendly site services youth and adults offering a wide variety of research-based information to the state's growing Hispanic population. The site currently links to more than 1,200 research-based Spanish publications from a variety of professional and educational sources including links to consulates and embassies for Spanish-speaking countries in Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

Metro News, an online quarterly newsletter written in English and Spanish, is in its second year of publication. The bilingual newsletter can be accessed by the more than 3,000 reviewers directly from Extension's website at www.aces.edu/urban.metronews. Metro News is available in HTML or as a PDF file. There is an online subscriber list, and a hardcopy version is distributed to other constituents.

The Urban Resource Center Inventory Catalog is available through Extension's web page. It was designed to provide easily accessible online resources to educators for implementing programs to targeted urban audiences. Through technological delivery, the resource facilitates communication and collaborations among Extension professionals.

The System's WECAN4U Web site has been accessed more than 5,700 times. Designed through a multistate agreement between Alabama and West Virginia, the site provides 24-hour access to employment information and personal money management strategies. Citizens have saved thousands of dollars in travel expenses alone through this online, one-stop job shop tool. The WECAN4U Web site received national recognition at the Association of Extension Administrators meeting held in June 2003. Website partners for the program received AEA's 2003 "Innovative National Program Award."