

# New Environmental Stewardship Program Cultivates Action-oriented Leaders



USIE participants with Hawai'i Congressional Representative Mazie Hirono on Capitol Hill.



It takes a calamity for people to learn and change, but we cannot wait for an environmental catastrophe, the time for change is now,” stated Cai Dingyan from Singapore, one of the 20 young scholars who participated in an innovative East-West Center environmental leadership program. For six weeks these emerging leaders from Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji and Papua New Guinea were immersed in a transformative and action-oriented program — The United States Institute on the Environment (USIE) — designed to foster an understanding of the U.S. environmental movement and aid in the development of sustainable pathways to environmental stewardship.

“USIE empowered me to act; inspired me to lead; showed me I can if I want to,” declared Subhashni Raj, a student from Fiji researching coral reef conservation and serving as a consultant for the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission.

During the first four weeks of the program, participants met with leaders in Hawai‘i’s environmental movement including representatives from Hawaiian Electric Company; Waste Management, Inc.; Ma‘o Farm; and Hawai‘i Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism’s Clean Energy Initiative.

“I learned from USIE that environmental stewardship is not a matter of a single generation, but rather how this generation relates to the future generations,” stated Lin Wai Hwa, a student from Malaysia working on a sediment core research project studying heavy metal pollution in the Sulu Sea. “Every action our ancestors made in the past affects all of us today,” said Lin.

During the field study in Washington D.C., following a week meeting with scientists and environmental leaders in the San Francisco area, participants examined how effective policies tested by individual states are then adopted at the national level. While in the capital, participants met with members of U.S. Congress leading environmental committees that create policies, officials who enforce the policies at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and professionals who defend or challenge policies at the Natural Resources Defense Council.



USIE participants look at Hawai‘i’s marine ecology issues first-hand during a deep sea dive.

“We saw the importance of finding a balance between all stakeholder groups,” said Mou Huiting Clara, an analytical chemistry student from Singapore. “Success will not happen overnight and it will definitely not happen with singular and competitive leadership. This is why we have a collective responsibility for the environment, both as individual nations and as international partners.”

According to EWC’s USIE coordinator Christina Monroe, “Participants wanted to know why the U.S. does things a certain way and how they can build upon and improve the model in their respective home countries.” At the completion of the program, participants presented one-year action plans to take their USIE experience to the next level. In her action plan, Mou addressed the “need to balance livelihood and conservation, create public awareness, and build strong conservation-oriented institutions.”

Funded by the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, USIE was organized and administered by the East-West Center in collaboration with more than twenty organizations including the University of Hawai‘i’s Environmental Center, Stanford University’s Woods Institute for the Environment, and the Nature Conservancy. ♦



USIE participants help offset the carbon footprint of their international flights by planting trees at the University of Hawai‘i Environmental Center.