

In R.I. and Hawaii, institute trains leaders

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From Rhode Island to Hawaii, high school students are learning environmental leadership through programs offered by the Brown Leadership Institute, a pre-college program that teaches high school students interested in global issues to take action in their own communities.

In 2004, the Leadership Institute formed the Brown Environmental Leadership Lab, and has since partnered with a Hawaiian educational center, branching into the Pacific. Students enrolled in the Brown Environmental Leadership Laboratory program in Rhode Island spend two weeks living at the Haffenreffer Estate in Bristol, on the shores of the Narragansett Bay. A faculty comprised of graduate students and professors teach the students about sustainable development through experiential learning, said Robin Rose, associate dean for continuing education and director of leadership programs.

The Leadership Institute also offers a similar program at the Kohala Center in Hawaii in April. Researchers and students use the center to focus on "energy self-reliance, food self-reliance and ecosystem health," said Samantha Birch, a Kohala Center field educator and program leader. Students enrolled in the Hawaii program learn about geology, marine science and Hawaiian culture.

"Environmental leadership is woven into the program," Birch said. "Students learn what it means to be an environmental leader during the program. They learn about sustainability and group dynamics."

The partnership with the Kohala Center came about when Matt Hamabata, the executive director of the center, expressed interest in developing a relationship with Brown. "It became very clear, very quickly that the values that drive the Kohala Center are the same values that drive the Leadership Institute," Rose said.

At the Leadership Institute, each student is required to create an action plan that they can implement in their own community at the end of the course. Past action plans have ranged from students introducing recycling and composting programs in their schools to projects on electronic waste and alternative energy sources. Elizabeth Vasily '13, who participated in the Leadership Institute during high school, created an environmental club at her school and held a fundraiser during which the club sold reusable water bottles and used profits to buy compact fluorescent light bulbs, which they distributed throughout the school.

The Kohala Center currently offers two full scholarships for students from Hawaii to attend the program, though one of these scholarships may be discontinued, Birch said. The center collects the funds, is in charge of the on-island advertising and works with the University to select the students.

"The scholarship students bring a lot to the program," Birch said. "They share their knowledge with the other students and get to meet students from all over the country."

The Leadership Institute's mission is to "help students develop and apply knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with socially responsible leadership," said Lexi Weintraub, assistant director of leadership programs.

The programs help keep people from the University employed over the summer and help students see what it is like to live at Brown, making them more likely to matriculate if accepted, Weintraub said.

"(The program) solidified my interest in Brown," said Olga Rocha '13, a program participant. She later ended up applying early decision.

"Being thrown into an environment where I was completely out of my element was incredibly helpful," she said. "It forces you to

think insightfully about environmental issues."

"It was one of the best experiences I've had thus far," Vasily said. "It transformed my personal passion for nature into action."



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