2020 Appalachian Teaching Project

Projects & Participants

(In Order of Presentation)

Virtual Conference via Zoom

Friday, November 13th and Saturday, November 14th

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Friday, November 13

COVID-19 in Appalachia: Substance Use Disorder and the Health of Our Communities

Indiana University of Pennsylvania, "Opioid Use Disorder and COVID-19: Community Vulnerability and Resiliency in Northern Appalachia"

Description: Indiana University of Pennsylvania students and faculty collaborated with the Armstrong-Indiana Drug and Alcohol Commission to better understand the impact of COVID-19 and its related economic challenges on rates and recovery from Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) in the region. Utilizing a multi-method approach, students engaged in both qualitative and quantitative data to better understand the landscape of the opioid epidemic in their surrounding communities and how it has been impacted by COVID-19. Students utilized ethnographic interviews and participant observation and conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives and staff from recovery services, including residential programs and support groups. They also interviewed both current and former clients of these programs and members of their family or household, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. The overall goal of the project was to collect and assess data related to the landscape of recovery support in the context of COVID-19 and the socioeconomic challenges facing people with OUD, including job disruption, food insecurity, and social seclusion. The research also examined the shifts in use of formal recovery services, how local networks are transformed or challenged by COVID-19, and how the changing economic context is impacting these shifts.

Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College, "Gateways to Employment for Workers with Substance Use Disorder"

Description: Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College's Appalachian Studies students partnered with Mountain Training Network (MTN), a three-year workforce development project funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission. The project area includes Knox, Bell, Harlan, Letcher and Perry County but welcomes participants from across the Central Appalachian region. Kentucky ranked ninth in the nation for opioid-involved overdose deaths per 100,000 people in 2018, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Finding resources for people in recovery to access employment opportunities and job retraining programs can help these individuals avoid relapsing and help support economic development in communities struggling with substance abuse. Students interviewed workforce development trainees and individuals in substance abuse recovery hoping to enter the workforce. The interviews will be used to build a strategic plan that will allow MTN to expand their training offerings to meet the growing needs of workers with substance use disorder. After gathering the oral histories, students compiled a list of recommendations and assisted MTN with developing a strategic plan to meet the needs of workers in recovery. These recommendations and strategic plan will also be shared with other community partners to assist in identifying needed resources and future actions.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, "Recovery during a Crisis: Identifying Recovery Challenges and Opportunities in Southwest Virginia during the COVID-19 Pandemic"

Description: Virginia Tech Students continued the work begun during their 2019 ATP project of examining recovery-to-work for individuals with a substance use disorder. They partnered with peer recovery specialist Bently Wood to conduct research on the challenges and opportunities for substance use disorder recovery in Southwest Virginia during the present on-going COVID-19 pandemic. Students carried out research by conducting at least one semi-structured interview by phone or via video conference, and transcribing audio of the interview, coding the interview, analyzing the coding to develop themes from the interview. They also had the opportunity to share findings with the recovery community via a forum to identify and prioritize recovery resource needs. Research carried out by students in this project will allow their community partner to further understand how future crises could affect persons in recovery. It will also help them to identify which innovative strategies employed out of necessity during this crisis may be valuable in the future. Students gained experience in a variety of community-engaged and cross-disciplinary research methods. In particular, through conducting interviews, students gained an understanding of how the personal narratives of those in recovery are a powerful source of data for determining effective evidence-based practices.

University of Tennessee-Knoxville, "Assessing the Role of Infrastructure in Detecting, Monitoring, and Combatting Epidemiological Threats in Rural Communities"

Description: Students from the University of Tennessee- Knoxville partnered with communities in Lawrence and White Counties in Tennessee to evaluate the role of rural infrastructure, especially waste systems, in monitoring and managing epidemiological threats, such as COVID-19. The role of infrastructure in the current COVID-19 pandemic will likely be the subject of both research and debate in coming months. Potential infrastructure improvements related to economic recovery programs may also be an important part of this debate and, because of the nature of this virus, water and waste systems are of particular concern. Students studied the potential role of community waste systems in spreading diseases like Covid-19. They also examined how waste systems can help officials detect, measure, and manage outbreaks and how such systems can be utilized to estimate the extent of infections at the local level. They identified the potential benefits of these systems, as well as, the ethical and legal questions they may raise if they are used to gather data and/or estimate addiction rates for substances such as opioids or alcohol. Through this project, students attempted to create a better understanding of how infrastructure can be used to monitor and control biological threats to rural communities. They also considered questions such as the long- and short-term costs of these tools, whether they can be adapted to less developed rural areas, and the role of related infrastructure systems, such as broadband access.

Saturday, November 14

Community Development: Adapting to COVID

East Tennessee State University, "RISE Erwin: Unicoi County's Rise Toward Sustainable Economic Development"

Description: East Tennessee State University continued its multi-year partnership with RISE Erwin, a local community development group, to promote development initiatives in Erwin, Tennessee. Students began their collaboration by helping RISE to document its origin story and gather data on its impact on sustainable economic transformation since its founding in 2015. As part of this research, students interviewed group members to gain insight and perspective on the group's origin, current and future activities and plans, and concerns and opportunities regarding asset building and economic sustainability in a changing economic landscape. Students contextualized the oral histories with economic impact data for Unicoi County and Northeast Tennessee and evaluated RISE Erwin's economic and community impact. ETSU students used a combination of in-person and virtual meetings to engage with community partners during the project. These experiences allowed students a better understanding of the community and the needs described by RISE Erwin members. Students also examined the impact of COVID-19 on the community and evaluated local business and community responses. They will create a report using the SWOT analysis method that will assist RISE in evaluating its history, progress, current challenges, and possible next steps. This project will provide important data for future planning, grant applications, and long-term sustainable economic development initiatives in the community.

Union College, "Business Plan/Marketing Plan Awareness and Development for COVID-19 Stricken Knox County, Laurel County and Whitley County Kentucky Artisans and Their Businesses"

Description: Union College students collaborated with Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation and the Kentucky Arts Council to help market their products and services and to provide opportunities for artisans to develop business and marketing plans. The project continued to build on community relationships established during last year's ATP. They recognized through previous years of study that the three-county region of Knox County, Laurel County and Whitley County have a wealth of cultural resources in their local artisans but often lack business and marketing plans to help make them become economically successful. By partnering with Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation, Union College Students were able to create a bridge between artisans and business leaders. This year's project sought out artisans who had been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to help them build a recovery plan. Students held meetings with artisans via Zoom and recorded their meetings for research purposes. Students were trained on Business/Marketing Plan development so that they might assist artisans in developing a Business/Marketing Plan. The project was designed to enhance economic growth in the communities through expanded marketing and well-thought out business and marketing plans.

Developing Natural and Cultural Assets

University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, "GIS Mapping of Campus Forest Property to Enhance Trail Access and Amenities for the Community of Bradford, PA"

Description: University of Pittsburgh at Bradford students utilized GIS software and hardware to help the assessment and planning of community hiking and biking trails on a 200+ acre parcel of forested land situated between campus and downtown Bradford, Pennsylvania. The city of Bradford was historically an economic center for oil and gas extraction and associated industries, which at one time produced over 80% of the world's oil supply. This legacy has diminished over time, leaving behind an economically challenged region with significant oil field remnants. At the doorstep of the Allegheny National Forest, the city is in a prime location to transition to an economy more built on hospitality and ecotourism, but it presently lacks well defined trail access linking the college and the National Forest. Students in GIS classes worked with members in the Environmental Studies club to create maps of the University owned tract. The maps feature overlapping GIS data towards the planning and establishment of community multi-use recreational trails connecting campus and downtown. Students in the GIS classes created digital maps of the property with existing information from digital and historic sources. Students in capstone studies, or volunteer club members, added ground-truthing, sensor measurement, and drone photography to the mapping efforts. The project concluded with a comprehensive collection of GIS maps to support the planning and construction of recreational trails, as well as procuring funding sources for the planned trail network.

Ohio University, "Local and Virtual Asset Development Along the Winding Road in Southeast Ohio"

Description: Ohio University students collaborated with the Little Cities of Black Diamonds Council to collect data and develop action steps for a rebranding and promotion campaign in alliance with the Winding Road regional tourism initiative. Located in Southeast Ohio, the Little Cities of Black Diamonds (LCBD) is a micro-region of 56 towns built during the coal boom of the late 1800s. Building on last year's ATP project, students collected data focused on rebranding and promoting LCBD as part of the Winding Road regional tourism initiative. Students in this year's project, realizing the challenges of COVID-19 for the community, assisted with social media promotion of LCBD's Community Day. Students created reports of their main findings as well as access to the full data analysis, and provided these to community partners. Students participated in a group discussion with the Council to help create a list of action items and next steps for the organization. This year's project had the unique opportunity to assess interest in virtual regional history tourism programming, which could complement long-term efforts to diversify post-coal economies. The project will help the community partner to identify successful long-term programming to develop the local tourism economy.

Auburn University, "Cultural and Economic Development in Shorter, Alabama"

Description: Auburn University students and faculty continued their partnership with representatives from the Town of Shorter in Macon County, Alabama, performing research related to a new Welcome/Visitor Center and a living, outdoor memorial to local African Americans near a new housing development. Students began this year's project by helping the town identify and organize primary and secondary historical sources related to the town's story. They also helped identify and organize historical and professional photos that will help tell the town's story in an exhibition. Students also helped the community partners locate similar welcome centers in the region and interview the center coordinators, as well as museum professionals, for a comparative study. Students began the process of identifying possible ways to memorialize persons for whom there is a record of burial but no headstone, recording and transcribing oral histories with descendants and performing additional research at local funeral homes. The project identified partners who can scan the cemetery in the future, using ground penetrating radar to determine the burial boundaries and spaces. As an end product, the class developed a master plan for the interpretive space and a prototype panel to present to stakeholders. This year's project will pave the way for the development of the African American Cubahatchee Cemetery as a living memorial, walking trail, and event space.

Fairmont State University, "Voicing History: Enhancing Cultural Tourism through Story"

Description: Fairmont State University students partnered with Marion County Parks and Recreation Commission and the Marion County Convention and Visitors Bureau to collect stories from the "Four States" community region for the purpose of creating multimedia content and cultural/historical signage for the Marion County, West Virginia portion of the recreational "Rail Trail." The oral histories conducted by students will also be included in a pilot episode of an oral history podcast, and in the creation of a short digital story about the community, for the purpose of enhancing and supporting tourism efforts in Marion County. Like many West Virginia coal mining towns, the Four States' now defunct coal mine has left behind only traces of a once vibrant community; this project will help bring the stories of these communities to life. Students received training from oral historians before embarking on their own oral history collection from retired miners and community members. Following training from a media consultant who specializes in podcasts and digital stories, students then were able to turn these stories into multimedia products. This project will provide important content for the continued development of the Rail Trail and the community's natural and cultural assets to encourage economic growth. Students will present their findings to community partners and the campus community at the Frank and Jane Gabor WV Folklife Center.

Heritage Tourism and Asset-Based Development

Alfred State College, "Leveraging Historic Transportation Networks to Promote Heritage Tourism and Community Connectivity: A Vision for Sustainability and Growth in Caneadea, New York"

Description: Alfred State College students partnered with the town of Caneadea, in Allegany County, New York to complete a community visualization study to help stakeholders envision potential strategies for asset-based development through revitalizing and connecting three existing hamlets in the county into a vibrant public realm. This will be the first year of a two-year project working with the Allegany County Department of Planning. Students first completed a *Neighborhood Development Analysis* of the existing community. Students then participated in a *Community Design Workshop* that allowed community members to elaborate and expand on previous goals and objectives, re-imagining Caneadea and its hamlets as destinations for both residents and visitors. The information generated during the project will be used as a point of departure to illustrate a positive vision for sustainability and growth. The overall goal of engaging the community was to develop an inclusive *Community Visualization Study* that includes a series of design interventions based on the recommendations of the recently adopted *Town of Caneadea Comprehensive Plan*. This project is designed to help stakeholders envision livelier, more social, vibrant, and healthy hamlets that retain their connections to the past along with a strong sense of community heritage. One potential design will be chosen for a detailed evaluation to illustrate potential construction costs for full implementation, helping the community begin to identify potential funding sources.

Frostburg State, "Appalachian Maryland Agriculture: Lessons from the Past"

Description: Frostburg State students collaborated this semester with the Evergreen Heritage Center to research the history, folklore, and traditions of life on a western Maryland farm and develop projects and activities featuring that material. This project is part of a larger project aimed at immersing visitors in the world of the farmer in Appalachian Maryland. As part of the established partnership between Frostburg State and the Evergreen Heritage Center, students utilized the center's archives to study Appalachian Foodways and develop historically accurate programming for the center's newly constructed outdoor Appalachian kitchen. Student efforts this fall also focused on the production of a podcast series on regional foods and food preservation that can be utilized for future promotion of programs. At the conclusion of the project, students will present preliminary plans for projects and activities based upon their research and findings of life on an 1869 Maryland farm. Additionally, each student team will submit a podcast, project, or activity to the community partner for feedback, which will then be revised and finalized. The materials developed by the FSU students will be used to enhance the visitor experience at the site. Evergreen Heritage Center board members hope that the research done during their collaboration with Frostburg State, and the additional emphasis on regional heritage and history, will allow the organization to expand its audience and outreach opportunities, contributing to continued economic development in the community.

University of North Georgia, "Year 2: Mount Hope Cemetery Preservation Project Leveraging a cultural asset to strengthen community and economic development"

Description: The University of North Georgia will continue its collaboration with the city of Dahlonega to extend the tourism appeal of Main Street by leveraging an overlooked cultural heritage asset: an antebellum cemetery at the edge of town. Dahlonega, Georgia is located in Lumpkin County, an ARC transitional county that is one of the fastest growing in the United States. It was created in 1833 after America's first major gold rush brought thousands of miners to Cherokee lands. A Branch Mint of the U.S. was constructed to produce gold coins. The university's administration building stands on the foundation of the mint, and the courthouse, one of the oldest is Georgia, is now a state historic site. However, just six blocks from the public square on the west end of Main Street is an overlooked cultural asset, Mount Hope Cemetery. The first known burial was 1833. In addition to town founders and formerly enslaved men and women, veterans from every American war are interred there. Students will work towards the preservation of this important component of the community's cultural heritage by creating a design plan for identifying and mapping unmarked graves through ground-penetrating radar or LIDAR; digitizing data and images; identifying an appropriate platform for holding and sharing the data; and helping to develop a long-term preservation plan. The information the students acquire through this research will be imperative for future community planning and Historic Cemetery Preservation Plan grant funding and enable to site to support continued growth in cultural heritage tourism, which is a vital part of the community's economy.