

## Ethnography as “Experience-Near”

Having one of the highest infection rates in the world, every community in the U.S. has been affected by COVID and the virus has laid bare the striking health and economic inequalities in the U.S., including those in rural areas. Overwhelmingly, research on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic has focused on urban areas. If rural people are left out of these studies, what does this mean for rural recovery policies? Applied anthropology provides a unique set of tools to investigate the impacts of the pandemic on rural communities across dimensions of social class, ethnicity, generation, and gender. In IUP's 2021 Appalachian Teaching Project, anthropologists with expertise in medical and environmental anthropology will guide student-researchers to design and conduct original research on rural resiliency and vulnerability in our Northern Appalachian community.

**Ethnography** captures the attitudes, values, and heart of a culture through humanistic research centered on the voices of the members of that culture.



## Our Community Partner: The Task Force

The Indiana County Sustainable Economic Development Task Force began in 2017 and was created following the Sustainable Economy Summit, appointed by the County Commissioners. The Task Force is focused on sustainable economic development in businesses, economics, social, and environmental pillars. Their main sectors are sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, sustainable building, and environmental restoration and stewardship. More information about the Task Force can be found at <http://sustainableindianacounty.org/>.



# RURAL RESILIENCE AND VULNERABILITY

Participating Students: Levi Donaldson, Olivia Dove, Abe Fruhwirth, Kaylee Long, Ava Pinkham, Caroline Towne, and Brynn Wigard,

Faculty Advisors: Dr. Abigail Adams and Dr. Amanda Poole

## Research Abstract

**The Rural Resiliency and Vulnerability Project (RRVP)** is a multi-method approach building upon our previous research for the 2020-2021 grant cycle that engages qualitative data collection to better understand the landscape of the COVID pandemic. Select students from Dr. Adams' *Medical Anthropology* (ANTH 444) and Dr. Poole's *Applied Anthropology* (ANTH 457) courses utilized the anthropological methods of ethnographic interviews and participant observation to understand the nature of Indiana County's response to the COVID pandemic in our county. Our qualitative investigation analyzes the ways in which the health disaster of COVID has impacted people's economic participation, food security, social distancing practices, vaccine willingness, and social integration.

**Resilience:** *How did the community respond in the face of tragedy?*  
**Vulnerability:** *What prior factors put some groups at higher risk?*

## Food Insecurity

Elderly face food insecurity more often due to a multitude of factors  
COVID caused more insecurity and decreased access to food programs.  
Focuses:

- . Meals and Nutrition
- . Networks
- . Employment
- . Daily Life
- . Local Impacts & Resilience

Harvesting  
Resilience:  
“Plants Bring  
People Together”



## Regenerating Agriculture

Regenerating Agriculture explores sustainable agriculture through local farms, food system, community, and environment to expand upon the importance of local farming which provides employment and positively impacts human health and soil health.

Regenerative agriculture focuses on soil health, animal welfare, and social fairness.

Focuses:

- Sustainable farming practices
- Incorporation of hemp varieties
- Challenges and successes during the pandemic
- Food access and security



## Work Loss and Retraining Programs

- Industry workers are resilient and hardworking, but we must not overlook their emotional needs and the mental health effects when a job is eliminated.
- Coal culture region and the concept of “hard work.” and sacrifice:



“When Coal Was King” is a mural painted in downtown Indiana PA in 2020