“Identifying Social Issues and Income Disparities in the Creative Economic, Building Toward a Positive Future for Appalachia”

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February 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012

May 1, 2012

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Final Report Narrative

Name of Project: Identifying Social Issues and Income Disparities in the Creative Economic, Building Toward a Positive Future for Appalachia

Grant Period: February 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012

Grantee Name: Emory & Henry College  Project Director: Talmage A. Stanley, Ph.D.

Description of Project:

In response to requests from Washington County civic leaders for help in moving toward developing wider community support for nonprofits in addressing the systemic issues facing this community and offering opportunities to raise the consciousness of leaders and citizens in this county to the integration and complexity of questions of poverty, income disparity, and the need for holistic community-focused approaches to economic development, students in the Public Policy and Community Service Senior Practicum Seminar (PPCS 400) examined the ways that the creative economy is and is not providing the foundation for more a more sustainable, positive future for this Appalachian county.

In order to gain a broader view of the effect or lack of effect of the creative economy on the issues of poverty and income disparity, students will examined six agencies and/or organizations: the Washington County Regional Jail, Feeding America Second Harvest Food Bank, Washington County Habitat for Humanity, a privately owned for-profit long-term care facility, the County's Department of Social Services, and a center working with women who are victims of domestic violence. Although Washington County is not necessarily a “distressed county,” according to ARC guidelines, this work focused on the distressed populations of Washington County: people of poverty, the chronically unemployed, the under-educated, the elderly and children, those unable to secure health insurance or access to quality healthcare. Students worked in the context of thirty-year demographic and economic trends in Washington County and provided analysis of those historic trends and the current situations. Based on this contextualized analysis students offered recommendations for a coordinated, holistic, systemic focus on poverty among nonprofits and government agencies, drawing on the resources of a creative economy but joined to other tools and means, and how community leaders can help to foster and support such long-term work.

Activities:

1. Students developed an informed and substantive analysis of historic trends and current situations of poverty and income disparity in Washington County with projections on the ability of the creative economy to address those systemic issues.
2. Students proposed strategies, based on research of similar creative economy initiatives in the United States, and their ability to address the systemic issues of poverty and income disparity.

3. Students propose plans and ideas for a more coordinated, holistic approach among Washington County nonprofits and governmental agencies in addressing the issues of poverty and income disparity.

**Project Outcomes:**

1. Report to the community partners collaborating on this project.
   - Results of the student research have been made available to community partners.

2. Research/report that will help leverage funds for the continued development of the civic infrastructure
   - The report is now being used in grant applications for planning funds for the development of a value-added food processing facility, creamery, and agricultural entrepreneurial activities in Meadowview, Glade Spring, and Fries, Virginia

3. Research/report that can focus the capacity building strategies for local nonprofits and government agencies
   - Results of this report are informing and being utilized in an ongoing effort to build a coalition of places, groups, and organizations to build on the creative economy to make its benefits and opportunities more inclusive of distressed populations

4. Develop a poster highlighting the research process and results for presentation at the ATP
   - Students attended the ATP meeting, December 1-3, 2011 and had a poster for review.

   - Students presented their work at the ATP conference

6. Students will further develop leadership, research, and assessment skills focused on building sustainable communities
   - This project enabled students to expand on four years of place-based work and study, allowing them to integrate that into a major action-research initiative. They undertook research that no organization or individual in Southwest Virginia is now doing.

7. Students will continue to develop oral presentations proficiencies, proficiencies necessary for effective leadership
   - This course satisfied the College’s oral proficiency requirements for these students.

8. Students will further develop skills for effective place-based civic engagement
   - The research and analysis accomplished in this project were entirely place-based, growing from the three-part interaction that defines this place, returning to the conflicts that shape its public life in the twenty-first century.

**Problems Encountered:**

Owing to capacity limitations with the place-based partners outlined in Emory & Henry College’s original ATP 2011 proposal, that proposal could not go forward. This project represented a revision of the original proposal, but maintained that proposal’s attention to and consideration of questions of systemic poverty and income disparities and the effectiveness of approaches to economic development based on the creative economy in addressing those questions and issues.
Program Continuation and Sustainability:

Through the work of the Appalachian Center for Community Service at Emory & Henry, and the Department of Public Policy and Community Service, there is an infrastructure to support further work in assessing the economic impact of the Heartwood Center and collateral creative economy. Through the 2012 ATP program, students and resources will be applied to further research and development of a value-added processing facility in Meadowview and building a larger consortium of Southwest Virginia Farmers Markets, designed to make more inclusive the creative economy.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The Heartwood Center and the Southwest Virginia creative economy for which it is a gateway, bear witness to the wisdom of ARC decisions years ago to focus more attention on asset-based community and economic development. However, early research makes clear that for those policies decisions to be fully effective for the majority of people living in Southwest Virginia, considerable work needs to be done to broaden the scope of that creative economy. Such work will necessarily involve other economic sectors as well a place-based and grassroots groups and alliances, social services, and local, state, and federal government entities.