

**ATP PROJECT PROPOSAL COVER PAGE TEMPLATE**

**Creation of a Heritage Trail:  
Cultural Assets as Paths toward a Sustainable Future**

**Fairmont State University  
Dr. Maria Rose  
President  
1201 Locust Avenue  
Fairmont  
West Virginia  
26554**

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**Pat Musick  
Interim Director  
Frank & Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center  
719-200-5296  
pmusick@fairmontstate.edu**

**PROJECT FOCUS:** The Frank & Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center’s Fairmont State University students will research, create, propose, and implement cultural heritage experiential educational materials centered on Fairmont’s historical and cultural assets in the form of heritage trails to increase tourism to the downtown historic district.

## **PROJECT DETAILS**

### **Course Number, Name, and Instructor**

FOLK 3399

Appalachian Teaching Project

J. Tyler Chadwell, Pat Musick

### **Community Partner(s)**

- Marion County Historical Society (primary partner)
- 4Fairmont
- Marion County Convention and Visitors Bureau

### **Need**

Need/Challenges:

As elsewhere in Appalachia, Fairmont struggles to reinvent itself as former industries no longer support the economy. Although once considered an innovative community ahead of its time, Fairmont’s downtown is no longer a center of commerce and community. Shopping and dining moved first to malls and then to larger shopping centers in nearby cities. Economic depression has resulted in job uncertainty, lack of civic pride, drug problems, and destruction over the years of many of the fine historic buildings that gave Fairmont an earlier elegance.

Our primary partner, The Marion County Historical Society, works to promote and educate on the history and culture of our community. Their initial desire for this project was to honor two local founding community members, Francis and Julia Pierpont. The Pierponts are significant historical figures in the formation of the State of West Virginia, yet are often missing from regional historical education because of the controversial nature of Governor Pierpont’s allegiance to the Union during the civil war.

Local teachers and community organizations have expressed a need for well-researched, enjoyable tourism activities and classroom-ready teaching materials that provide knowledge of regional cultural and historical assets including historical figures like the Pierponts; inspire curiosity; and create a sense of place and heritage as a means to strengthen the community and attract business and economic development.

## Need/Opportunities:

- A little-known Fairmont historical figure, Francis Pierpont, was Governor of the restored state of Virginia at the time of the Civil War. His leadership and communications with Lincoln led to the breaking away of West Virginia from Virginia and the creation of the State of West Virginia as part of the Union. Pierpont and his wife, Julia, made their home in Fairmont and were major figures in the state's early political and economic development. Christa Pierpont, descendant of Francis and Julia Pierpont, is working with us and our community partners to raise awareness of the Pierponts.
- Many historic events and stories (particularly ghost stories and other folklore) are linked to specific sites in the Fairmont area. These cultural assets lend themselves to creative interpretive materials, virtual and physical walking trails as a means of "place-making," civic pride, and cultural tourism assets.
- The Monongahela River and other rivers that run through Fairmont had major economic and political roles in local and state history. In addition to their historic, economic, and environmental roles, the rivers could serve as an interpretive "trail" of historic downtown Fairmont as seen from the river (kayaks or other watercraft).
- The Fairmont region's music heritage includes such historical figures as Johnny Johnson and Patty Looman; regular old-time and country music jams take place in the area; regional festivals include musical traditions of the wide variety of ethnic groups that came to populate Northern West Virginia. These jam sessions could act as a cultural touchpoint between traditional musicians and young musicians hoping to learn from them.
- Specialized research facilities in the immediate area:
  - --Marion County Historical Society: historical resources, artifacts, and archives.
  - --The extensive collection of state historical archives at West Virginia University (near Fairmont) is available to our students for research.
  - --West Virginia Folklife Center: historical and cultural resources including archives of locally-collected folklore.
- Marion County Convention & Visitors' Bureau, Downtown Fairmont, and 4Fairmont organizations are already working on economic development projects involving local heritage and welcome the time, research, skills, ideas, energy, and finished product(s) our students will contribute.

## **Number and description of planned meetings with the community partner**

### Fall semester, 2016:

Four meetings will take place with the community partner(s):

1. An initial meeting between the community partners, invited representatives from community organizations, and the ATP students will take place in the first weeks of fall semester, 2016. Community representatives will present their vision for the project. Students will share their ideas with the community partners and will then narrow down the focus of this year's project.
2. The class as a whole will visit the Marion County Historical Society early in the semester to gain a deeper understanding of the Marion County Historical Society's mission, assets, and needs. (Individual class members will make subsequent visits to that site and to other community organizations within the first half of the semester for their specific project research and tasks.)
3. Community partners' representatives will meet with the students at the WV Folklife Center late in the semester, as part of the students' preparations for presenting at the ATP gathering in Washington DC. Their review of the students' work will provide an opportunity for final revisions as needed.
4. ATP course faculty will meet one final time with community members to arrange community presentations.

In addition, in spring 2016:

- Several informal meetings between WV Folklife Center faculty and the Director of the Marion County Historical Society
- Two meetings among ATP faculty and community consultants; various formats were proposed for projects drawing on these historic figures and other aspects of Fairmont's heritage.
- Fairmont State University Faculty were present at Marion County Historical Society event to present the initial project projections.

### **Concise overview of the project, including its central focus:**

Student and community utilization of specific cultural / historical assets to increase sense of place and contribute to economic development.

Students will be introduced to concepts of sustainability through regional identity; the work and mission of the Appalachian regional Commission; needs and opportunities in Fairmont for the use of cultural assets in economic development; and the work of local community groups.

In order to aid community partners' efforts to increase cultural and heritage tourism to our city and specifically to the historic downtown area, students will research, design, and create one or more heritage trail maps and guides. At least one prototype trail will be produced for use both as a virtual trail on digital devices, and as a physical walking trail with printed and/or live interpretive guides. Students will select, from a list provided by instructors and community partners, one theme on which to focus for the prototype trail. Proposed themes are:

- The Pierponts—A history tour that would be themed around the Peirponts importance regionally and nationally;
- A River history tour that would focus on their economic, political, and cultural impact on the state
- A folklore tour that would highlight ghost stories and folklore associated with specific place names in the Fairmont area;
- A Folk Music tour that would take interested parties to different Folk music jam sessions that highlight local music and musicians: historic figures & sites; current music jams visitors may attend.

Students will conduct research, create a scripted guide for each of the stops along the trail, and produce images for use with the digital version. All students will carry out research in archives; conduct interviews; work under the direction of community partners; write text/script for the trail narrative; locate historic photographs; and visit numerous sites and organizations. Individual students will specialize in aspects of the project particular to their individual skills (for example, producing additional images as needed; first-person historical interpretation; creating reader's theater or other presentation formats).

The completed prototype trail and associated research findings will be provided to various community organizations in an attempt to boost tourism and garner new attention to the downtown historic district.

## **Course Guidelines and Project Goals:**

### 1. Student Goals:

A. Students will develop leadership skills and awareness of community assets that can foster sustainability.

- Students will explore the concepts of “sustainability and community assets” as they relate to the Fairmont area, history, and culture.
- Students will be responsible for:
  - Finding out what cultural tourism/cultural history projects, if any, have been carried out in the Fairmont area in the past or are currently underway;

- Discerning how this project can complement or expand on any currently underway;
  - Establishing connections with similar projects/organizations;
  - Understanding the ARC mission and working toward expanding public knowledge of said mission.
- Working as individuals and in small teams, students will select areas within the general project in which each student will take a leading role (examples: research; interviews/collecting lore; design/layout of trails; liaisons with community organizations; with schools; etc.)
- B. Students will be engaged as active learners and participants in community projects.
- Students will engage in interviews with community partners and community members to understand community needs and vision.
  - Students will contribute volunteer work under the direction of community members.
  - Students will contribute volunteer work under the direction of community members.
- C. Students will engage in active research to assist communities in creative approaches to sustainability through asset development.
- Student research for developing cultural trails:
    - Specific geographic sites in the Fairmont area and nearby that are documented as being the site of particular events in the life of the historical figure, sites where particular ghost stories took place, etc: locate sites, photograph them, research historical photographs to find historic images of the site.
    - Personal interviews with community members, historians, children, student peers, and other groups to gain information and to assess knowledge level and need.
    - Research in primary and secondary written sources.
    - Research the challenges, responses and results that community asset development projects in other areas have encountered.

## 2. Student Activities

- A. Active engagement with at least one community partner

- The Marion County Historical Society will work closely with our students in developing materials suitable to the needs of the Historical Society and the community.
  - Entities from 4Fairmont will engage with students to help them envision a future for Fairmont and their part in it.
  - A representative from the Marion County Convention and Visitors Bureau will meet with students. The Bureau will be the recipient of any final trails project.
- B. Presentation of research
- Students will participate in the ATP conference in Washington, D. C., and December 2-3, 2016. Each student will take an active role in presenting the project.
- C. Poster
- ATP students will work with exhibit professionals from the Folklife Center's Museum Studies program in creating a professional display.
- D. Presentation to community organizations and national conference
- Students will present the work locally to a group of stakeholders made up of interested parties from the Marion County Historical society, members of 4Fairmont, and representatives from the Marion County CVB.
  - Students will present at a poster session and possibly a formal session about the project at the ASA annual conference in March 2017.

### **Project Impact:**

Heritage tourism has been shown to bring major funding to local businesses and shops in historic districts in many cities regionally and across the nation. Increased awareness of Francis and Julia Pierpont will support increased historic interest in Fairmont; the historic downtown, highlighted on the trails created in this project, will benefit from tourist visitation.

### **Research Partnerships:**

- The partnerships formed from our work will strengthen research opportunity and collaboration efforts between our institution and the Marion County Historical Society, 4Fairmont, and the Marion County CVB. Resource networks will be broadened based on this partnership.
- Research materials developed in this project, housed both at The Gabor WV Folklife Center and The Marion County Historical Society, will increase the availability of historical and cultural materials available for future cultural tourism projects.

### **Development of leadership and civic capacity among students:**

- Students' leadership skills, experience, and confidence will be monitored throughout the course, using pre- and post-project assessment tools (both self-assessment and instructors' assessments), individual journals, group discussion activities, and community partners' comments.
- Students will take leadership and civic engagement skills developed during this course into their work in their major fields and careers

Research, recommendations, and action that lead to sustainability of Appalachian communities:

- Research has shown that the raising of cultural awareness increases pride and local interest, potentially leading to retaining more young people in our area and encouraging their own abilities to create a sustainable local economy.
- An increase in downtown business leads to more local businesses returning to our downtown and creating jobs for local workers.
- Educational materials that supplement the trail will be shared with local schools (possible formats: readers' theatre; music curriculum; interactive activity packets). This increase in positive education to the young people of our state could only increase love for one's own sense of place and again may raise future generations of heritage engaged youth.
- The development of additional trails in the future based on this project's prototype design will contribute to building a strong local base for heritage tourism, contributing to the heritage tourism activities in place elsewhere in West Virginia (such as the state's Haunted Trails to which the Folklife Center is already contributing), throughout Appalachia, and nationwide.

Enhancement of student and community awareness of the work of the ARC at all levels:

- Students and community members will seek opportunities to work with the ARC in projects associated with any or all five of the ARC's Strategic Plan goals.
- Community identity and development efforts will be seen as components of and contributors to the wider community of the Appalachian Region and its development.