“Using Social Science for Community Development in Southeast Ohio”
in collaboration with the Little Cities of Black Diamonds

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PROJECT FOCUS
Ohio University students will collaborate with the Little Cities of Black Diamonds Council to provide informational content at the annual Little Cities of Black Diamonds Community Day and conduct a series of focus groups with residents of the Little Cities of Black Diamonds in order to identify community assets and interests.

PROJECT DETAILS

**Course Number, Name, and Instructor:** SOC 3090, Sociology of Appalachia, Rachel Terman

**Community Partner(s):** Little Cities of Black Diamonds, John Winnenberg

**Need**
Located in Southeast Ohio, the Little Cities of Black Diamonds (LCBD) is a micro-region within Appalachia. The LCBD is made up of 56 towns built during the coal boom of the late 1800s. Coal production declined significantly in the early 20th century, yet the area remains impacted by the economic, social, and environmental consequences of this industrial development. Athens and Perry Counties are part of the LCBD region and are often listed as economically "distressed" or "at-risk" by the Appalachian Regional Commission from year to year.

The village of Shawnee, Ohio, located in Perry County, will be the main project site. In addition to the economic challenges noted above, Shawnee faces threats to the community including outmigration, deterioration of buildings and businesses on the main street of the village, and other social issues like drug abuse, mental and physical health, aging, and access to education.

In light of or despite these challenges, the community has several assets including a rich history of industry and labor organizing, several historic buildings and unique architecture, and a location adjacent to the Wayne National Forest (Ohio’s only national forest) and the Buckeye Trail (a continuous loop trail circling the entire state). The LCBD Organization began as a way of identifying these assets and then used them as a guide for sustainable community development. The LCBD welcomes students from Ohio University to assist them in continuing this work.

**Overview of the project, including its central focus**
Every year the LCBD plans and executes a community day. The theme for 2018 will be the role of sports in the Little Cities. The purpose of the day is to bring the community together for fellowship and entertainment as well as acknowledging and preserving the history of the community. In addition, the LCBD Council is looking for ways to foster community conversations about new directions in the community.
All students in SOC 3090 will participate in the LCBD Community Day and will work with the LCBD in one of three ways.

1. Giving a “mini TED talk” at the Little Cities of Black Diamonds Community Day in Shawnee Saturday Oct. 13. The purpose of these talks will be to share information and discuss topics related to historical and current issues relevant to the local community. For example, students have researched food security in the LCBD and discussed various challenges and opportunities related to food in the area including distance to grocery stores, restaurants, and gardening. Students will work in groups of three on these presentations, and each group member will have a specific role. The Group Manager will attend a community potluck and planning meeting in Shawnee. This person will gather information about Little Cities Day from the planning meeting to report to group members in order to make a decision about a presentation topic. This person will support the group by providing key planning and help with research and presentation. The Research Specialist will work with the sociology research librarian at OU’s Alden Library to gather information on the presentation topic. This person will support the group by providing key research and help with planning and presentation. The Presentation Leader will help develop the presentation in collaboration with the Group Manager and the Research Specialist and will give the actual presentation at the LCBD Day.

2. Conducting two focus groups in Perry County. Students will work with the LCBD organization to organize and conduct a focus group with 8-10 younger adults (under age 35) in the LCBD region and a focus group with 8-10 older adults (over age 35) in the region. All students will be assigned reading on effective social science methods for focus groups and will participate in an in-class mock focus group before going into the field. Students will be responsible for working with local contacts to recruit participants. They will also work with the LCBD to identify key questions about the assets and needs of the community.

3. Developing a report of findings based on the data collected from the focus groups. Students will analyze the data collected from the focus groups and develop a brief report to share with the LCBD organization including specific themes, important issues, and further questions. The purpose of this report will be to update and identify new community assets and interests in order to guide future projects and programming.

Number and description of planned meetings with the community partner

1. August 2018: Representatives from the LCBD visit the class on the Athens campus to help introduce the project. Students exchange contact information in order to be prepared for organizing presentations and focus groups.

2. September 2018: Students attend the planning meeting/potluck for LCBD Day in Shawnee, OH. This is usually the first time the students have visited.
Shawnee, and they have the opportunity to take notes about the theme and the community’s vision for the day in order to incorporate these ideas into their presentations.

3. October 2018:
   a. Saturday Oct. 13 LCBD Day – All students will attend and help out with last minute set up. Presentation Leaders will present their “mini TED talks.”
   b. Focus Group 1 – Date/time TBD
   c. Focus Group 2 – Date/time TBD

4. November 2018
   a. Students present their findings to the LCBD Council

**Goals/Objectives**

The overall goal of this project is to develop a more robust collaboration between the university and the community by sharing assets and using them toward continued development that benefits all involved. OU students and faculty will share social science skills with the LCBD in order to facilitate progress toward sustainable community-identified development goals, and the LCBD will share their community in order to allow students to practice and apply their skills. In these ways, the project supports ARC goal #4, “Strengthen Appalachia’s community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region’s natural and cultural heritage assets” and ARC goal #5, “Build the capacity and skills of current and next-generation leaders and organizations to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development.” Specific goals and activities are listed below.

1. **Student Learning Goals**
   a. Students will develop an understanding of Appalachia through sociological inquiry by identifying and discussing major sociological issues in Appalachia.
   b. Students will know historical, current, and emerging topics of sociological study in Appalachia.
   c. Students will make connections to Appalachia outside the classroom by applying knowledge and skill in service to the region.
      i. Students will be engaged as active learners and participants in a community-based learning project as part of the ATP course.
      ii. Students will develop leadership skills and awareness of community assets that can foster sustainability.
      iii. Students will assist the community in developing creative approaches to sustainability through asset development.

2. **Service Goals**
   a. The ATP project will
i. Benefit the community as well as the students
ii. Recognize local assets in line with the ARC’s Goal 4
iii. Be sustainable
iv. Respect local wisdom
v. Help identify and solve problems
vi. Take place in new settings outside of campus
vii. Be engaging and provide opportunity to explore
viii. Include research and documentation
ix. Celebrate and recognize the local community
x. Be collaborative in line with the ARC’s Goal 5
xi. Be incremental and in it for the long haul

3. Activities
   a. Help plan and then attend and present at LCBD Day.
   b. Conduct 2 focus groups with community members.
   c. Develop a report based on the data collected from the focus groups and present it to the LCBD Council.
   e. Design and create a poster for presentation during the poster sessions at the Washington conference.
   f. Participate in the poster session at the Appalachian Studies Association Conference March 14-17, 2019 in Asheville, NC.

PROJECT IMPACT
By attending and contributing to the LCBD Day, the students will be supporting the Council’s efforts. Specifically, the students will be contributing to the informative and educational aspect of the Little Cities Day. Given that the LCBD Council is small, the students are able to contribute organizational and educational help as well as content for the event. Through presentations, the students will provide new contextual and analytical perspectives about local history and current issues. For example, students in Fall 2017 gave a presentation on a rural transportation service similar to Uber being developed in the area. This presentation not only provided content for the Little Cities Day theme of transportation but also contributed to conversations about rural transportation issues in the area. In addition, students volunteer to help out with last minute preparations and clean-up on the day of the event.

The focus groups represent a new direction for this service-learning project for 2018-2019. The LCBD Council is particularly interested in fostering conversations about the community with community members across a variety of viewpoints. The LCBD Council has been in existence for over 20 years, and a lot of work was done early on to identify assets and directions for the community. The Council is now especially interested in involving younger people in its work. These focus groups will assist the LCBD with that goal as well as provide data about new directions for the community.
All of these activities provide students an opportunity to practice leadership skills and gain experience working with the community and applying their knowledge. Furthermore, this project will help support continuing efforts to maintain active partnerships between Ohio University and the surrounding community. Finally, our hope is that this project will provide the LCBD with key insights into new directions to take toward their goal of maintaining their community in a sustainable way.

**BUDGET**

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<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel to Shawnee</td>
<td>5 round trips mileage plus one day van rental (2 12-passenger vans)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation to DC</td>
<td>1 8-passenger van plus fuel</td>
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<td>Hotel in DC</td>
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<td>Metro transportation in DC</td>
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