

The Elk Knob Art and Planning Project

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PROJECT FOCUS

Appalachian State University (ASU) will collaborate with The Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization and other local organizations to develop a sustainability plan that can facilitate independent community development work based on more than a decade of collaboration with ASU. Student researchers will administer a sustainable community planning workshop and implement and update a public art plan to promote local heritage and encourage area tourism in the communities of Meat Camp, Pottertown, and Sutherland, NC.

PROJECT DETAILS

HON 3515, Community Based Art, Tom Hansell

COMMUNITY PARTNER

The Elk Knob Community Heritage Council

NEED

Appalachian State University has engaged with residents of the rural mountain communities surrounding Elk Knob in Ashe and Watauga Counties, North Carolina for over a decade. In the year 2000, these communities faced the potential of radical transformation via the development of a ski slope and/or gated community. With the help of ASU, the Nature Conservancy purchased the land being considered for development. That land is now Elk Knob State Park. The Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization (EKCHO) was founded in 2008 by community members of Meat Camp, Pottertown, and Sutherland, North Carolina to promote the natural and cultural heritage of the communities surrounding Elk Knob State Park. In 2009 ECHKO conducted a needs assessment and identified several areas of concern, including an assault on natural resources and farms by development, loss of community heritage, and lack of a community meeting space. In 2010 ASU's Center for Appalachian Studies worked with EKCHO and the Watauga County Arts Council to develop a five-year public art plan for the EKCHO area that begins to address these critical community issues. Between 2012 and 2014 ASU students helped implement EKCHO's art plan by developing community-based art projects that highlight the area's unique heritage. While the Center for Appalachian Studies will continue working with these communities, this year's ATP project will focus on fostering a stable transition to community-based, community-led planning related to the public art and cultural-environmental heritage assets created through community-university partnerships since 2000.

For 2014 – 2015, the Center for Appalachian Studies will engage students and the local community to identify and help implement a community development plan that enables local, sustainable decision-making; students will also create new collaborative works of art designed to help sustain community life. Connecting these activities, students will also help update the public art plan, which expires in 2015.

PLANNED MEETINGS WITH THE COMMUNITY PARTNER

- July 2014 - Site visit with Elk Knob State Park staff to discuss coordinating local community development planning with park activities, including funding initiatives
- September 2014 - Students introduced to the ECKHO communities through volunteering at Elk Knob Community Day (September 13).
- October 2014 - Student meetings to identify next steps for creating and installing public art pieces; presentation of draft to ECKHO.
- November 2014 - Presentation of public art in community.
- December 2014 - Presentation to the Appalachian Regional Commission's Appalachian Teaching Project in Washington, D.C.

ADDITIONAL PRESENTATIONS

- Presentation of student work on local television (Cable Channel 21 in Watauga County, NC) and/or local radio (WASU 90.5 FM in Boone, NC). Dec 2014-Jan 2015.
- Student-led strategic visioning meeting in ECKHO area to identify community-based priorities, Dec. 2014.
- Presentation at Appalachian Studies Association Conference in Johnson City, TN March 27-29, 2015.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

Dr. Schumann and Mr. Hansell will train students in strategies for facilitating and administering community visioning sessions in rural communities. Students will create discussion questions and develop presentation assets during regular workshop meetings of the ATP course. Mr. Hansell will supervise the Elk Knob Community Based Art Project to facilitate students and community members in collaboration to promote sustainable development of the Elk Knob community, which will be accomplished via the implementation of a public art plan and the solicitation of feedback about future community development planning in the area. Students in HON 3515 will engage in community-based research about the culture, history, and natural world around Elk Knob, including course readings specific to the area and the Appalachian region in general. Students will also gain a global overview of community-based art while working on an arts project with an Appalachian community organization. Dr. Schumann will periodically meet with the class to train students in organizing presentations for different audiences and administering community feedback meetings. The art work(s) created by students will be based on community feedback and student interpretations of sites identified for art installations by the ECKHO art plan.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The 2014-15 project is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Appalachian Regional Commission by virtue of developing the socioeconomic assets of rural Appalachian communities.

ARC Goals:

- *Strengthen the capacity of Appalachian people to compete in the global economy.* Public art installations will add value to the local tourism economy of ECKHO, which is strengthened by the proximity of ECKHO to the larger tourism economies of Ashe and Watagua Counties, NC.
- *Develop and improve the region's infrastructure.* The art installations and the advancement of the community plan will accentuate and identify additional value in the community-based assets of the ECKHO communities.

Project Specific Goals/Objectives:

- Students will build capacity in sustainable community development and help develop community capacity for autonomous action.
- Students will administer a community visioning session to identify consensus on next steps in community development process.
- Students will work with EKCHO to develop and interpret a public art site.
- Students will work with community members in meaningful, responsive ways, including learning about the community through historic site research.
- Students will be responsive to the community's aesthetic requirements, or how the local community wants to visually represent itself.
- Students will develop leadership skills and awareness of community assets that can foster sustainability.
- Students will be engaged as active learners and participants in community projects, starting with Elk Knob Community Day and concluding with the opening of their art project.
- Student will update art plan.

OUTCOMES

Project Outcomes:

- Development of leadership and civic-capacity among the students engaged in the project
- Opportunities for students to experience various parts of the region and the work of the Commission in Washington, D.C
- Increased cooperation and enhanced partnerships between ASU, EKCHO, the Watauga County Arts Council, The Elk Knob State Park, and the Appalachian Regional Commission.
- Enhancement of student and community awareness of rural development work, including the role of federal agencies like the ARC.
- A significant contribution to the community's public art and sustainable development goals
- New plan for next 5 years (including deepening partnerships and increasing fundraising capacity).
- Students build skills in developing professional presentations and community visioning meetings.
- Data collected from community visioning meeting will be turned over to ECKHO and shared with other project partners.
- Presentation of student work at the ATP Conference in Washington, D.C., December 5 and 6, 2014.
- Presentation of student work on local television (Cable Channel 21 in Watauga County, NC) and/or local radio (WASU 90.5 FM in Boone, NC).
- Presentation at Appalachian Studies Association Conference in Johnson City, TN March 27-29, 2015.
- Creation of a poster and other presentation assets for the conference in Washington, D.C. as well as multiple, community-based meetings.
- Identification of actionable steps of collaboration between ASU and EKCHO, including the itemization of potential student internship and training opportunities.
- Presentation of public art in community.