

ATP Final Report

**“Appalachian ‘Truth Tours’: Experiential Education Opportunities
In the Coalfields of West Virginia”**

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**ATP Grant Period
August 30 – December 13, 2011**

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Final Report Narrative

Name of Project: Appalachian 'Truth Tours': Experiential Education Opportunities

In the Coalfields of West Virginia Grant Period: January 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011

Grantee Name: Radford University Project Director: Theresa L. Burriss

Description of Project:

APST498 and APST598 are undergraduate and graduate (respectively) independent study courses, which Dr. Theresa Burriss, Chair of Appalachian Studies, supervised. Through the use of Appalachian literature, including poetry and prose, along with nonfiction, documentaries, music, dance, and art, students studied both the history and present practices of coalmining. Fieldtrips to historical labor sites and current active mines in West Virginia provided an experiential component to the curriculum. The students partnered with community members in Gay, Cabin Creek, and Kayford Mountain, West Virginia, to create an interdisciplinary, place-based curriculum focused on coalmining in Central Appalachia. The students' collaboration with citizens enabled the students to draw from the intrinsic educational wealth of the people and area and to celebrate the often uncelebrated knowledge of community members. In essence, the students lived the curriculum as they created it.

Activities:

In addition to the course readings and journal writing, the students met with the project director throughout the semester to discuss issues with and ideas generated from the readings. Of particular importance, the students accompanied the project director to West Virginia where they engaged in a truth tour, visiting important labor sites, Kayford Mountain (which is surrounded by a once-active mountaintop removal operation), and the Whipple Company Store.

Project Outcomes:

- Students created a poster that documents their activities related to creating this place-based curriculum and shared the poster at the presentation before the Appalachian Regional Commission in Washington, D.C. in December 2010.
- Students conducted an oral presentation at the Appalachian Teaching Project conference in December 2010.

- Students gave a brief overview of their curriculum development work to the Appalachian Arts & Studies in the Schools (AASIS) teachers from seven regional high schools when the teachers visited Radford University in February 2011.

Problems Encountered:

Although the Washington, D.C., trip went smoothly and the students presented their research professionally and within the allotted timeframe, we encountered problems for the Appalachian Studies Conference. One of the two students unexpectedly found herself dealing with an unforeseeable personal issue that prevented her from attending the ASA Conference. And she was the driver for the second student. Therefore, the students were not able to present at ASA, although the project director covered their session. In fact, the first student had to drop out of the university later in the spring semester due to personal circumstances, which prevented the students from presenting to the College of Education and Human Development faculty. Obviously, such a crisis wouldn't affect a larger class; but because only two students were participating, the crisis directly impacted the outcomes.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

Because of RU's AASIS program, and the Appalachian Studies program's impending move to the College of Education and Human Development, place-based education will remain a central initiative for the Appalachian Rural Regional Studies Center. The next step needs to involve direct contact with the Virginia Department of Education and advocacy for place-based education.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

For the past several years, RU has struggled with enrollment in the ATP class and this year was no different. The project director plans to revise marketing strategies this summer to increase participation and to encourage a broader student audience. As we experienced this year, too few students can lead to a susceptibility over which we have no control.

Attachments:

Please see attached PowerPoint presentation and Word documents related to project.