

Appalachian Teaching Project of the Appalachian Regional Commission

**“Where Are They Now?
A Decade of AASIS Scholars, 1996-2006”**

**(Economic and Cultural Impact of AASIS Scholars
As Adults in their Appalachian Communities)**

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Final Report Narrative

Name of Project: Where Are They Now? A Decade of AASIS Scholars, 1996-2006 (Economic and Cultural Impact of AASIS Scholars as Adults in their Appalachian Communities)

Grant Period: February 1, 2009-June 30, 2010

Grantee Name: Radford University

Project Director: Dr. Grace Toney Edwards

Description of Project:

Since 1996 the Appalachian Regional Studies Program has operated the AASIS Program, a partnership with multiple high schools in multiple Appalachian Virginia counties surrounding Radford University. Our goal has been to identify college-able but not necessarily college-bound high school students, to pair them with RU student mentors who will introduce them to the college experience and the values post-secondary education can add to lives, to encourage them to pursue further education in whatever institutional venue best serves their needs, and finally to promote appreciation of their Appalachian cultural heritage. To date, approximately 70% of the AASIS students have pursued some form of higher education, and many of those students are now working adults.

Our **central goal** for this year's project was to find out what work the former AASIS Scholars are doing, where they are doing it, what the economic impact of their education has been for them, and what contributions they are making to the communities they live in. To accomplish this goal, RU students searched for, surveyed, and interviewed as many former AASIS Scholars and community leaders as they could locate. The student researchers then synthesized the information they collected to determine what impact AASIS Scholars are having in their Appalachian communities.

Our **community partners** were seven AASIS schools and the Virginia communities in which they are located. These included Craig County High School in New Castle; Eastern Montgomery High School in Elliston; Floyd County High School in Floyd; Grayson County High School in Independence; Rural Retreat High School in Rural Retreat; Ft. Chiswell High School in Max Meadows; and Rocky Gap High School in Rocky Gap.

Activities:

- Readings and discussion about the Appalachian region, specifically the Virginia portion
- Readings and discussion about the Appalachian Regional Commission and its goals
- Readings and discussion about the Appalachian Teaching Project and its goals
- IRB training and preparation of IRB application
- Field research in 7 schools and communities listed above to locate former AASIS Scholars
- Administration of surveys and selected interviews with Scholars and community leaders
- Synthesis of findings in group discussions and then in individually assigned written segments
- Preparation of report – oral, written, and visual (video on DVD) – showing the findings
- Preparation of poster to accompany the report

- Presentation of video report and poster to invited Radford University personnel in November 2009
- Presentation of video report and poster at the Appalachian Teaching Project Conference in Washington in December 2009
- Presentation of video report and poster at the Appalachian Studies Association in Dahlonega, Georgia, in March 2010
- Presentation of video report and poster at AASIS Teachers' Workshop at Radford University in March 2010
- Participation in all aspects of the Appalachian Teaching Project, including networking at the conferences and beyond

Project Outcomes:

- Students learned the importance of building on established networks and partnerships to conduct their field research project (Networks and Partnerships: Radford University, the AASIS Program, seven high schools and communities in Southwest Virginia, the Appalachian Teaching Project, the Appalachian Regional Commission).
- Students honed their research skills through the field work they carried out and the results they synthesized.
- Students experienced both the challenges and rewards of group work; they learned how to operate within the group dynamic that emerged among their peers.
- Students enhanced their leadership skills through their representation of Radford University in the Appalachian communities they worked in and also in the preparation and presentation of their research findings in four significant venues listed above.
- Students became more knowledgeable about Appalachia, ARC, ATP, and ASA as a result of readings, discussions, field work, and participation in presentations.
- Students taking part in the Appalachian Teaching Project are more informed and more community-conscious individuals who are now better equipped to carry out their own civic responsibilities, whether in Appalachia or elsewhere.
- Administrators of the AASIS Program learned invaluable information about where former AASIS Scholars are and what contributions and impacts they are making in their communities. For full details, see the attached report and Quick Facts sheet.
- Selected examples of the findings follow:
- Of the Scholars who responded, 94% have pursued or are presently pursuing post-secondary education.
- A majority, 69%, have chosen to return to their home communities or other Appalachian communities to live (all in ARC counties).
- 97% are gainfully employed, many in health and human services, others in science and technology, education, government, and business.
- Almost all respondents give back to their communities through volunteer activities and/or charitable contributions.
- Virtually all former Scholars, 97%, proclaimed themselves "Appalachian," and many expressed unsolicited comments about their pride in their culture and their love of their place.
- Our conclusion: AASIS and the Appalachian Teaching Project are making a difference!

Problems Encountered:

- Waiting for IRB approval delayed our start in the field research phase of the project.
- Locating valid contact information for former AASIS Scholars proved more difficult than expected and took a longer time period than anticipated.
- A shortage of time prevented us from following up on promising interview leads. (These came just days before we had to present at the ATP Conference.)
- Overall, the problems were amazingly few, with the biggest one being too little time!

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

The AASIS Program will continue, we hope, into perpetuity. While we have a stable grant funding source, we are currently seeking additional funding to sustain and grow the program. As RU's 2009-2010 ATP project has revealed, AASIS participants are definitely and specifically contributing to their Appalachian communities' sustainability. We expect to continue researching similar information not only to inform and strengthen our AASIS Program but also to inform and strengthen Appalachia.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

- Major Conclusion 1: The AASIS Program is making a difference in Appalachian Virginia and in neighboring Appalachian states that have become home to some of our Scholars.
- Major Conclusion 2: The Appalachian Teaching Project provides incentive to study specific aspects of the AASIS Program and the communities it serves.
- Major Recommendation 1: Keep the Appalachian Teaching Project strong and growing.
- Major Recommendation 2: Encourage the Appalachian Regional Commission to give ATP visibility on its website, in its publications, and in its promotion of programs.

Attachments:

- Script for Video Presentation, "Where Are They Now? A Decade of AASIS Scholars, 1996-2006" (Available as handout at ATP Conference and other venues)
- Quick-Fact Summary of Results for "Where Are They Now? A Decade of AASIS Scholars, 1996-2006" (Available as handout at ATP Conference and other venues)
- DVD: "Where Are They Now? A Decade of AASIS Scholars, 1996-2006"