

Embracing the Wild: Experiential Narratives Finding Value in Nature

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PROJECT FOCUS: Provide a one-sentence statement describing the project focus.

Frostburg State University students will document experiences of outdoor engagement in rural Allegany County, MD and develop both digital and stationary exhibits featuring this material.

PROJECT DETAILS:

Course Number, Name, and Instructor:

Fall, SOCI 350: Folklore in Appalachian and Spring, SOC 345: Sociology of the Environment

Community Partner: Home Ground

Home Ground's mission is to increase knowledge of Allegany County's natural assets, inspiring citizens to support sustainable use and conservation of our land and water resources.

Need: Provide a substantive statement regarding the need for this project, as agreed upon by you and the community partner. What problem(s) will you address and what solutions will you implement by working with the community partner?

With less than 25% of Allegany County's total land area dedicated to urban development and agricultural land use, the county encompasses substantial forestland—with over 50% of the county's land area having slopes greater than 25%. Located in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, it is critical to protect the area from erosion. Thus, opportunities for growth based development are limited. However, located only 2.5 hours from substantial population centers in the Baltimore-DC metro area, there exists tremendous potential for the expansion and development of sustainable outdoor recreational opportunities in the county.

Home Ground brings people together to enjoy the outdoors and to appreciate the vital role of nature in our lives and communities. Based in Allegany County — the heart of "Mountain Maryland" — Home Ground provides nature programs and outdoor recreation events for all. The organization wishes the entire community to take pride in the mountains, forests, farms and streams that make western Maryland such a special place.

With an emphasis on "Sustaining Resources while Enriching Community," the organization focuses on improving quality of life for Allegany County residents, by encouraging them to recognize and appreciate the value of the region's natural resources. Home Ground hosts a number of programs and events to achieve this aim. A relatively new organization, Home Ground currently employs no staff and is wholly reliant on the work of volunteers to provide the following positions: event planners, event promoters, bloggers, and photographers.

Home Ground is an apolitical organization. From its inception, it has been concerned with valuing a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. Members come from a variety of backgrounds- common ground is found in their mutual respect for and appreciation of the region's natural resources and the recreational activities such resources offer. Currently, the organization's greatest needs include building a strong volunteer base and raising awareness of the organization's existence and efforts in Allegany County. This in turn, will lead to an increased awareness and recognition of the potential for the development of small businesses featuring environmentally sustainable recreational pursuits in western Maryland.

This teaching project will assist the organization in expanding its audience and building a stronger volunteer base. In essence, "Who is Home Ground?" will be the project's jumping off point, and the project will be designed to increase awareness of the organization's membership and activities in the region. Frostburg State University students will work with Home Ground members to document their outdoors experiences in rural Allegany County, Maryland, and develop both digital and stationary exhibits featuring this material. The material collected will be displayed at Mountain City Traditional Arts on Frostburg's Main Street in Fall 2015 and at FSU's Discovery Center in Spring 2016. Digital shorts of the material will be published on the Appalachian Independent, an online citizen journalist site and shared via social media. Working with these materials, students will develop creative ideas for entrepreneurship opportunities in Allegany County that preserve and sustain the county's natural resources while enriching community and quality of life in the region.

Number and description of planned meetings with the community partner:

Early September- meeting with Home Ground representatives and students enrolled in "Folklore in Appalachia" – Home Ground members will provide students with an overview of the organization and describe volunteer opportunities

September 19 – at the FSU Appalachian Festival, FSU students will meet with Home Ground representatives and sign up to assist with one or more Home Ground events.

October 2- representatives from Home Ground will meet with FSU students to finalize documentation project plans.

November 7- representatives from Home Ground will meet with FSU students to finalize plans for exhibition and reception at Mountain City Traditional Arts.

November 18- Exhibit Opening and Reception at Mountain City Traditional Arts, open to the public and all members of Home Ground.

Early February- Representatives from Home Ground will meet with students enrolled in “Sociology of the Environment” to provide them with an overview of the project and describe volunteer opportunities.

March – FSU students will conduct interviews and develop digital shorts featuring that documentation.

April – Digital shorts will be published on the AppIndie.

April 20- Members of Home Ground and FSU students will present the project at FSU’s Focus Frostburg Event. This event will be open to the public and all members of Home Ground.

Overview of the project, including its central focus:

With Home Ground’s mission of increasing knowledge of Allegany County’s natural assets and inspiring citizens to support sustainable use and conservation of our land and water resources providing the project’s main framework, this teaching project will assist the organization in expanding its audience and building a stronger volunteer base. In essence, the query, “Who is Home Ground?” will be the project’s launch pad and the project will be designed to increase awareness of the organization’s membership and activities in the region. Frostburg State University students will work with Home Ground members to document their experiences of outdoor engagement in rural Allegany County, MD and develop both digital and stationary exhibits featuring this material. Specifically, each student will participate in at least one of the organization’s Fall and Spring events. Moreover, all students involved in the project will conduct two interviews with Home Ground members and local residents documenting outdoor experiences in Allegany County. Collaboratively, students will work with Home Ground’s leadership team to shape and develop exhibition materials and to host a reception featuring the exhibit. The material collected will be displayed at Mountain City Traditional Arts on Frostburg’s Main Street in Fall 2015 and at FSU’s Discovery Center in Spring 2016. Digital shorts of the material will be published on the Appalachian Independent, an online citizen journalist site and shared via social media. Drawing inspiration from this material, in April, 2016, students will share this project at Frostburg State University’s Focus Frostburg event and present their ideas for entrepreneurship opportunities in Allegany County that preserve and sustain the county’s natural resources while enriching community and quality of life in the region.

Goals and Objectives: Please use a bulleted or numbered list and also show how the project addresses one or more goals of the ARC

- Increase job opportunities and per capita income in Appalachia to reach parity with the nation by learning about outdoor recreational opportunities and envisioning sustainable, nature-based entrepreneurship opportunities (ARC Goal)
- Students will be engaged as active learners and participants in community projects
- Students will engage in active research to assist a local organization in increasing awareness and visibility of their efforts in the region
- Students will develop leadership skills and awareness of community assets that can foster sustainability.
- Students will engage in active research to assist communities in creative approaches to sustainability through asset development.

PROJECT OUTCOMES: In bulleted format, list all anticipated activities that meet the goals and objectives, including the poster, the conference presentation in Washington, D.C., and the required community presentation(s). Be sure that you have addressed all required goals, guidelines, and outcomes in the attached scope of work.

- Exhibit and reception at Mountain City Traditional Arts, November 2015.
- Digital shorts from the exhibition published to the AppIndie, www.appindie.org
- Participation in and presentation at the December Appalachian Teaching Project gathering in Washington, DC, December 4-5.
- Development of poster documenting project that will be available at the DC Gathering and will be displayed at Mountain City Traditional Arts (a Frostburg venue) and additional public venues in Allegany County, MD. This poster will be made available to Home Ground at the project's completion.
- Participation in a poster session or panel discussion, or delivery of a formal paper at the Appalachian Studies Association's Annual Conference in March 2016.
- Participation in public program and discussion during Frostburg State University's "Focus Frostburg" sustainability symposium.