

**ATP Final Report**

***Cultivating Community:  
Helping Rural Libraries Develop Seed and Story Depositories***

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## Final Report Narrative

Title of Project: ***Cultivating Community: Helping rural libraries develop seed and story depositories***

Grant Period: February 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016

Grantee Name: Appalachian Studies Center at University of North Georgia (UNG)

Project Directors: Rosann Kent, Director, Appalachian Studies and  
Dr. Chris Dockery, Dept. of Visual Arts

### Description of Project:

The focus of this 2015-2016 Appalachian Teaching Project at the University of North Georgia was to make local heirloom seeds and the cultural memories of the seed keepers more accessible to Appalachian Georgians. Specifically, students piloted a mechanism to distribute heirloom seeds through rural libraries in northeast Georgia. Our community partner was Chestatee Regional Library System that serves about 54,000 people in Dawson and Lumpkin counties in north Georgia. Like most rural libraries, CRLS has experienced decreased funding and staff, yet is charged with a mission to "offer lifelong learning opportunities, family and local history resources, and recreational materials."

### Activities:

A total of 25 students in five classes over three semesters participated. In summer semester 2015, they built a portable prototype of a seed dispensing machine, created a pattern for seed boxes and planted an heirloom garden. In fall semester 2015, students harvested the garden and kicked off the seed machine's debut with a reader's theater and seed share at both library locations in Lumpkin and Dawson county, GA. In spring semester 2016, students planted a spring garden as well as created and delivered four programs for children and teens as part of the library's Full STEAM Ahead! These discovery-based learning experiences included three activity stations: Make a Seed Bomb, Start a Tomato Plant, and Germinate Rate.

#### a. Activities with community partners (See attached email documentation.)

- **May 2015.** The two faculty mentors – Rosann Kent and Dr. Chris Dockery -- emailed partnership request to Tracey Thomaswick, branch manager of the Chestatee Regional Library System in Lumpkin County and Tracy Walker, youth coordinator for the Dawson-based CRLS.

- **June and July 2015.** Faculty mentors held initial planning meeting with faculty mentors and librarians. The proposal was officially approved by Claudia Gibson, Director, Chestatee Regional Library System.

- **August 2015.** UNG semester begins.

**Aug 11.** Invitation issued to both librarians to attend potluck to meet students.

**Aug. 18.** Partner potluck and briefing: review of ATP Master Planning Document: deadlines, expectations, marketing.

**September 2015.** Students provided program outline to partners and visited librarians to plan for set up. Students created posters and programs. (See attached.)

### **October 2015**

Kick-off event for seed machine (reader's theater and seed share) held at both library locations.

- Sat. Oct 17 in Dawsonville, GA
- Sat. Oct 24 in Dahlonega, GA

**Jan. 2016.** Partnership cycle began for new spring classes.

**Feb. 2016.** Students, in consultation with partner, developed two STEAM programs for two age groups to be presented at two locations with three activity stations: Make a seed bomb, start a tomato plant, and germinate bean seeds. Students created simple curriculum units so activities could be replicable. (See attached).

- Tues. Feb 9 in Dawsonville, GA
- Tues. Feb 17 in Dahlonega, GA
- Tues. Feb 23 in Dahlonega, GA
- Tues. Feb 23 in Dawsonville, GA

**April 19.** Students presented ATP power point to partner librarians, debriefed and planned for continued partnership.

### **b. Required presentations of student research to community groups other than the primary partner.**

**Sept. 12, 2015** Georgia Master Gardener Annual State Conference.

[See program on page 27 of this link.](#) Students and faculty presented two breakout sessions to more than 80 master gardeners from state of Georgia. They also gave out seeds, took members on a tour of demonstration garden and presented on previous ATP work, including readers theater and art from 2012 to 2015. See program for annual state conference on page 27 at [The Scoop by Georgia Master Gardener.](#)

**Mar. 4, 2016.** Presentation and seed sharing for Feed Fannin at the UNG's Blue Ridge Campus in Fannin County. [See article.](#)

**Mar. 8, 2016.** Two events at Northeast Georgia History Center in Gainesville: Monthly Forum and Family Day. [See article.](#)

Apr. 16, 2016. Seed sharing event at Choice Street Open House. [See Facebook Invite.](#)

**c. Links to any videos or social media that show the students interacting with their community partner(s)**

1. [Appalachian Studies News](#). Published in The College of Education Graduate Programs. Page 1. Feb. 24, 2016
2. [UNG's Appalachian Studies makes mark in Blue Ridge](#). Students and faculty shared seeds at **Feed Fannin** and "**What am I supposed to do now?: A Tribute to Helen Lewis**" at the Craddock Center in Blue Ridge, GA
3. For complete project photos of these and other activities, see Saving Appalachian Gardens and Stories' Facebook Album: "2015 ATP Seed Machine" <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.986011108155941.1073741851.461801257243598&type=3>)

**Project Outcomes:**

**a) Goals and activities.** Faculty co-mentors embedded these goals in the class syllabi. Underlying the project's focus was our intention to provide students an opportunity to engage in Southern Appalachia's cultural literacy – the ability to understand and participate fluently in a culture.

1. As a result of their participation in this project, students will be positioned as emerging leaders, scholars, artists and activists who can foster sustainability in the Appalachian Region.
2. Through place-based pedagogy, students will be engaged as active learners, participants, and community researchers.
3. Using qualitative methodologies (e.g. arts based inquiry) students will engage in promoting self-sufficiency through gardening and seed saving in Lumpkin and Dawson counties.
4. Research will address first goal of the ARC strategic plan: increase job opportunities and per capita income as well as support the White House Rural Council initiative on regional food economies. By learning skills such as public speaking, project management, and leadership, students are prepared for the jobs of tomorrow.

**b) Activities embedded in syllabi and outlined in Master Planning Document**

1. All students will participate in assigned aspect of the project.
2. All students will contribute at least 20 hours of direct service in maintaining and harvesting heirloom seed demonstration garden and/or creating seed packets.

3. All students will attend at least one of the four planned activities with partner.
4. All students will participate in “dress rehearsal” to partner and community.
5. Selected students will attend ATP conference in Washington and Appalachian Studies Association.
6. All students will participate in academic discussion to include lectures and analysis of assigned readings, which include selections from
  - Bill Best's *Saving Seeds/Preserving Taste: Appalachian Seed Savers*
  - Janise Ray's *The Underground Seed Revolution*

With one exception (the second seed machine), students performed these activities over and above our expectations. For example, instead of just attending the required one event for the partner, the majority of the students attended multiple events.

**c) Key to implementation: ATP Master Planning Document** (See attached).

To create continuity among past and present ATP participants as well as maintain a consistent message throughout the classes, faculty co-mentors realized we needed more than a syllabus; we wanted each class to understand how their actions contributed to overall ATP project.

Therefore, an ATP Master Planning Document was created that first explained crucial background concepts including role of ARC, the Consortium of Appalachian Centers, the peer evaluation process at the annual conference, etc.

Next, the document included brief descriptions of past UNG projects from 2012 to 2014: its research questions, community partner, methodology and resulting art work. The complete 2015 proposal was featured.

Finally, the document included in-depth expectations of class collaboration, communication, and assignments. The first week of class, the document was reviewed in all three classes and students were tested the next week. (See attached ATP Master Planning Document.)

**Problems Encountered**

We encountered three major problems: time, prototype and most of all, the legal environment facing seed libraries.

**1) Time.** Students wanted to include the children attending Camp Appalachia, a week-long day camp for gifted children, in planting and delayed the first planting until mid-June. Then, because the heirloom seed demonstration garden is not property fenced, students lost the first two plantings to groundhogs. What should have been a long growing season was truncated and students lost most of the okra seed crop due to mildew caused by fall rains. (They did harvest 10,000 Cherokee

Beans and several jars of heirloom tomato seed, so the garden was by no means a complete loss.) These lessons in timing were valuable learning experiences and, in the students' project evaluations, more than one mentioned this challenge as well as the pride they experienced as first time gardeners.

**2) Prototype.** The first prototype of the seed machine proved difficult for the librarians to load and for the public to retrieve the seed packets smoothly. It jammed often if the seed boxes were not perfectly made. Students discovered that crafting the boxes and inner packet was a key component to the seed machine, and required a precise touch. In an attempt to systematize this difficult process, they created two jigs, laminated diagrams, and made two video tutorials. However, each unit required multiple cuts and folds, and needed to be scored, burnished, stamped, and glued – almost 40 steps in all. Each right angle had to be precise and the weight of the seeds consistent to fall through the machine's hopper correctly. Attempts to teach volunteer groups how to make the boxes failed as the process calls for origami experts.

Although students persisted and created enough boxes to last throughout the year and the machine circulated to several other community events, this method of distribution is not sustainable. Therefore, a second prototype was not created.

**2) Legal environment.** After the seed machine was placed in the second library, we discovered that seed libraries violate Georgia's state commercial seed law. Seeds contributed by amateur gardeners are not tested for noxious weeds, invasive species or germination. Neither are they labeled in accordance with seed law requirements. Depending on whether state law is broad or narrow and how it interprets the word "sale," seed libraries in many states are in violation.

Students turned this roadblock into a learning opportunity. With help from the Sustainable Economies Law Center (SELC), they researched seed laws in the 13 states of the ARC region and incorporated their findings into the ATP presentations. They contributed to SELC's #Saveseedsharing campaign by creating a broadside with action steps on the back. Each ATP student at the conference was given a broadside reproduction. Becoming involved in the democratic process was perhaps the most unintended consequence – and valuable lesson – in this project.

The following chart demonstrates the project's outcomes and also discusses the problems encountered and deviations from the original proposal.

## Project Outcomes

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Not Met</b>	<b>Notes</b>
All students will serve on at least one leadership team, which is student-selected and governed.	x		See pages 8 to 15 of the ATP Master Planning Document for team coordination and specific assignments.
All students will participate in formal and informal discussions with partner.	x		For the first time, partners met with the students on the first day of class and reviewed the ATP Master Planning Document together.
Students and community volunteers will build two portable prototypes of seed dispensing machines.		x	This outcome was partially met: Only one seed machine was created.
Together with the faculty mentors, students will develop a system to rotate, maintain, and publicize the seed distribution machine.		x	This outcome was partially met because of the potential legalities surrounding seed libraries in Georgia. We were not aware of these issues when the project began. The students and faculty mentors worked with the SELC to interpret seed laws in each Appalachian State and to change public policy.
Students will interview selected seedkeepers and create readers theater script based on ethnocultural memories.	x		Students used a readers theater script that had been developed and published based on the 2013 ATP interviews. See attached publication.
Students and partners will explore the model of the Cleveland Seed Bank, a partnership with the Cleveland Public Library.		x	This outcome was partially met. Librarians decided that, given the legal environment and the library's budget and reduced staffing, a seed bank was not feasible at this time.
Students will promote the partner's seed launch on UNG campus and the Farmers Market.	x		The students developed a PR strategy in consultation with a community volunteer and the librarians. See page 15 of ATP Master Planning Document.
Students will plan and staff 2 seed launches and 4 STEAM workshops.	x		The programs were well received and attended.

Students will exhibit elements of the arts based research from the past three ATP projects (communograph, garden flags, and broadsides) during library events.	x		Using the performance and visual art produced from previous ATP years, leveraged our collective efforts. This strategy will be continued in the future.
Students will learn to present and publish their undergraduate research at academic conferences.	x		In their evaluations, every student mentioned improvement in public speaking and gratitude for opportunity to master this skill.

**Program Continuation and Sustainability:**

**a. Short-term impact**

Despite challenges, students make excellent progress in creating relationships and providing programming for rural libraries in northeast Georgia. For example, in addition to the Chestatee Regional Library, we also furnished these non-profits and/or libraries with a stocked seed machine and programs.

- 1. Fannin County Library
- 2. Craddock Center
- 3. Northeast Georgia History Center

**b. Long-term impact**

In his program evaluations, Steve Bordanaro, our ATP community volunteer, pointed out need for positive programing for families and the mutual benefits for students. “Parents in the community are hungry for programs that expose their children to activities that take them away from the TV or video games. Some of our students were definitely out of their comfort zone with presenting in public. It is most difficult for those who have been conditioned to sit in a class, take notes, write a paper, and take a test for a grade. ATP mandates they learn new skills and gave them a chance to practice. Public speaking or presenting are LIFE SKILLS.” Publicity generated for this year’s ATP results in these commitments for 2016 to 2017.

- 1. **Fannin County Library** has developed the only seed library in north Georgia. We will continue to furnish seeds from our heirloom demonstration garden.

2. **Hall County Library System** in Murrayville, GA and the **White County Library** has requested a series of programs.

3. The **Foxfire Project** in Rabun Co, GA has also requested the seed machine as well as the ATP visual and performance art as part of its 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary celebration.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations:**

ATP activities are no mere class exercise. Each ATP cycle is part of a larger community engagement initiative at the Appalachian Studies Center called **Saving Appalachian Gardens and Stories (SAGAS)** in which community members help UNG students, faculty and staff collect, bank, grow and share heirloom seeds and related ethnocultural memories from families who have been living for many generations in the mountainous areas of Southern Appalachia, i.e, north Alabama and north Georgia, western North Carolina and South Carolina, and south Tennessee. SAGAS has no fulfillment system or distribution method for its heirloom seeds, other than local festivals and special presentations for local non-profits and no budget to create one.

Faculty, students, and community volunteers will continue to build partnerships both inside and outside Appalachia and explore ways to make heirloom seeds and stories free and accessible to residents of Appalachian Georgia. This year's project resulted in two new resources that will greatly leverage our local efforts.

- Rosann Kent, Director of Appalachian Studies, now serves on an international committee for seed libraries.

- Seed Savers Exchange requested a meeting to discuss our role in regional seed networks and providing technical assistance for SAGAS' seed bank.

### **Attachments (in PDF format):**

Include such items as the following:

- Minutes of meetings with community partners
  - (See attached sample of emails)
- Flyers, text for PSA announcements, etc.
  - (See poster and program)
- Photographs showing students in action
  - See album in Facebook group called ATP 2015: Seed Machine
  - <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.986011108155941.1073741851.461801257243598&type=3>
- PR such as newspaper articles, documentation of TV and radio spots, etc.
  - See <http://blog.ung.edu/coegrads/?p=240>
- Correspondence with community partners
  - (See attached sample of emails)