

**Clinch River Valley Initiative (CRVI)
Local, State, Regional, and National Partnerships to Build Community Capacity
and Diversify Coalfield Economies in Southwest Virginia**

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Final Report Narrative

Title of Project: Clinch River Valley Initiative (CRVI): Local, State, Regional, and National Partnerships to Build Community Capacity and Diversify Coalfield Economies in Southwest Virginia

Grant Period: August 2017 - April 2018

Grantee Name: Radford University

Project Director: Theresa L. Burriss

Description of Project

Radford University (RU) students enrolled in APST495: Research in Appalachia collaborated with the Clinch River Valley Initiative (CRVI), a multi-member grassroots organization made up of several Southwest Virginia counties, to collect oral histories from individuals who have grown up in communities along or near the Clinch River.

Activities

Given the geographical distance between Radford and the Clinch River Valley, the RU students communicated through email with community members in Dante, one of CRVI's newly designated "Hometowns on the Clinch," at the start of the fall semester. The lack of reliable internet connection in the town unfortunately precluded any virtual meetings through web-based platforms. However, the email contacts allowed students to gather some biographical details on the community members they would be interviewing, and this knowledge enabled students to prepare for the interviews more specifically.

Later, the students made three physical trips to Dante, Virginia, with the first occurring on October 21 and the remaining two on October 28 and November 11. On these three Saturdays, the students engaged in oral history collecting and conducted a total of 18 interviews.

At the Appalachian Teaching Project conference in December 2017, the students gave a 15-minute oral and visual presentation, as well as displayed a poster on their project. They provided the same oral presentation at the Appalachian Studies Association conference, held in Cincinnati in April of 2018.

For photos of the students in action, please see attachments.

Project Outcomes

- Based on CRVI's expressed goals for RU's ATP students, the students began the process of collecting, recording, and transcribing stories from older residents in Dante about living in a formerly booming coal mining town, with 18 collected to date. The raw transcriptions, along with the audio, are being collected in a Google Drive folder that has been shared with our CRVI partners and Dante Community Association for ease of access to all involved.
- Not only did the students acquire a greater appreciation for the ecological, economic, and social diversity in Southwest Virginia by traveling outside the New River Valley, where Radford is located, they witnessed firsthand the benefits of university and community partnerships.
- The students bolstered their public speaking skills, their research skills, and their ability to interact across a broad generational spectrum. One student plans to continue her work in Dante as her undergraduate capstone project. Another is currently reworking her journals of this experience to submit to an academic publication.
- CRVI and the Dante Community Association will be delivered what the members asked of the RU ATP students, namely oral histories of life in Dante.
- RU ATP students contributed to CRVI's mission to showcase and celebrate the richness of the Clinch River Valley.

Problems Encountered

The only problem we encountered was the lack of internet connectivity in Dante. This made it impossible to meet our community partners "virtually" through Skype or any other video conferencing platform. We worked around this using email, but ideally students would meet the partners before their first working day there.

Program Continuation and Sustainability

Radford University's ATP class will continue the collaboration with CRVI in the upcoming 2018-19 academic year, working again with Dante residents. Lou Wallace, a CRVI member and Russell County Board of Supervisors member, has been very supportive of our work there and is spearheading the printing and organizing of transcripts.

Working in the same town for two consecutive years allows both the ATP students and Dante residents to produce an end product built upon previous classes' efforts. This year's ATP project will include collecting oral histories, as well as the editing process for an eventual book publication. We are also widening our focus from past years to include creating a digital story map for Dante, VA, as yet another way to catalog and promote the region's cultural and natural assets

Conclusions and Recommendations: "What changes did you hope would occur in the community as a result of the project?"

We anticipated that the collection of stories about growing up in a coal mining town would contribute to the existing strong pride in the region, which we believe they did and will even more so once they're published in a book to be sold at venues in the Clinch River Valley and online. Fortunately, we did have opportunities to highlight the work in different settings and with different audiences.

Finally, inspired by Dr. Burriss' interest in Rebecca Solnit's atlas books (multi-genre endeavors that showcase different urban environments) the Fall 2018 ATP class plans to partner with the GIS Department at RU to create an online story map of Dante to be included on CRVI's tourism website.

Attachments (in PDF format)

Please see attached.



Lunch with Community Members



Student collecting oral history



Post-interview photo



Presenting at ATP Conference