

**Planning Our Future  
The Harlan County Project: Phase 17**

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**Project Director**

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## **PROJECT FOCUS**

Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College Appalachian Studies students will collaborate with the Harlan County Community Foundation to participate in an ongoing strategic planning process funded by the Brushy Fork Institute at Berea College focusing on downtown development in Harlan County.

## **PROJECT DETAILS**

### **Course Number, Name, and Instructor**

Humanities 202: Survey of Appalachian Studies I. Robert Gipe, instructor

### **Community Partner**

Harlan County Community Foundation

### **Need**

The Harlan County Community Foundation received a gift of a former department store building in downtown Harlan. The receipt of that building led to a partnership with the SKCTC Appalachian Program to begin a strategic planning process for the sustainable development of downtown Harlan. The SKCTC Appalachian Program then wrote an ARC Flex-E grant through the Brushy Fork Institute to engage the community and develop a community-based plan for downtown development that incorporates the building. Harlan County is designated as distressed by ARC. The city of Harlan is very quiet most hours of the day and night. There are many empty storefronts, few enticements to draw people downtown, especially after business hours. Few would disagree that it could use a shot of vibrancy—and a strategic plan leading to a more comprehensive plan for sustained and supportable development.

### **Number and description of planned meetings with the community partner**

The Harlan County Community Foundation board meets monthly. Members of the involved Survey of Appalachian Studies class will meet at least twice during the semester with the HCCF board.

### **Overview of the project, including its central focus**

The community planning process will employ consultants from Renaissance Covington, a coalition of community development organizations working in downtown Covington, Kentucky. SKCTC became connected with the group through the Kentucky Rural-Urban Exchange. Renaissance Covington won the 2017 Great American Main Street Award from the National Main Street Center. SKCTC ATP students will be a part of community meetings facilitated by these consultants.

### **Specific Activities the Students will complete**

- Each student in the class will conduct research and receive readings that allow them to explore best practices from other communities in the Appalachian region and beyond.

- Each student will attend 1-2 meetings where the strategic plan for downtown Harlan will be discussed.
- Each student in the class will be responsible for producing their own written analysis of what is going on in downtown Harlan and present their own research-grounded ideas on what might work as a community development strategy.
- Each student's ideas will be reflected in a single strategic planning document produced in collaboration with the community planning consultants, and other community members outside the class.

SKCTC ATP students' work will be incorporated in the final report and plan produced by the community coalition. Some SKCTC ATP students' will be part of the leadership presenting the findings of the group to the larger community. There will be a number of public meetings to gather ideas and present findings back to the larger community. Students will have leadership roles in the creation and execution of these meetings.

### **Specific Project Deliverables**

The primary project deliverable will be a workable strategic plan for developing both the downtown building and the whole of downtown Harlan. This is not an academic exercise. I am getting questions everyday about what we are going to do with that building. Many, many people in Harlan are counting on that building to be the turning point for downtown development and thus the development of the county. I am not sure they are correct, but I will say this: If the building, and in particular the planning process our ATP class is a part of, can become a catalyst for getting everyone together to talk about a larger development plan for downtown and the whole county, something that a broad cross-section of people can get on board with and work off of, then yes, it could be transformational. But the most important specific deliverable is the strategic plan.

### **Student Goals**

- A. Students will develop leadership skills and awareness of community assets that can foster sustainability.
- B. Students will be engaged as active learners and participants in community projects.
- C. Students will engage in active research to assist communities in creative approaches to sustainability through asset development.

### **Student Activities**

- A. Active engagement with the Harlan County Community Foundation and other community organizations working on the strategic plan.

- B. Presentation of research at the ATP conference in Washington, D.C., on December 1-2, 2017.
- C. Creation of a poster for presentation at poster sessions at the Washington, D.C. conference.
- D. Presentation of research to community partner, the Harlan County Community Foundation

### **Goals/Objectives**

1. Student research will focus on Harlan County, an ARC-designated distressed county. Student research will involve direct, active participation and engagement with the community.
2. The project will create opportunities for students, all of whom are Harlan County residents, to experience various parts of the region and the work of the Commission in Washington, D.C.
3. The project will create opportunities for students to share their research activities in the broader professional community of Appalachian Studies scholars and activists in the Appalachian Studies Association.
4. Research will address these goals of the ARC strategic plan:
  - **Goal 1: Economic Opportunities**  
Invest in entrepreneurial and business development strategies that strengthen Appalachia's economy.
  - **Goal 4: Natural and Cultural Assets**  
Strengthen Appalachia's community and economic development potential by leveraging the Region's natural and cultural heritage assets.
  - **Goal 5: Leadership and Community Capacity**  
Build the capacity and skills of current and next-generation leaders and organizations to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development.

### **Outcomes**

- Creation of a strategic plan for development of downtown Harlan, Kentucky.
- Research partnership between Harlan County communities and SKCTC.
- Development of leadership and civic capacity among the students engaged in the project.
- Research, recommendations, and action that lead to sustainability of Appalachian communities in the form of a strategic plan for downtown Harlan.

- Enhancement of student and community awareness of the work of the ARC at all levels.
- SKCTC student participation in the ATP conference in Washington DC, December 1-2, 2017
- SKCTC student creation of a poster for the above-mentioned conference.
- SKCTC student presentation for the board of the Harlan County Community Foundation and other community organizations as part of the strategic planning process.