

The Harlan County Project: Phase Twelve

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Final Report Narrative

Name of Project: The Harlan County Project: Phase 12 Grant Period: February 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013

Grantee Name: Southeast Education Foundation Project Director: Robert Gipe

Description of Project:

As coal production and employment has declined in Harlan County, the county has turned to tourism as an alternative, and created substantial infrastructure. Much of that work has gone on parallel to the work of Appalachian Teaching Project students working on community development projects through the Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College Appalachian Program. ATP students working on projects such as the Higher Ground community theater project and the Crawdad student arts festival, have been part of the SKCTC Appalachian Program's focus on helping local people do things for ourselves, entertain ourselves, make art out of own local history and circumstances, with ourselves as audience. In June 2012, the Higher Ground coalition, the Crawdad youth coalition, and the Appalachian Program at SKCTC received \$273,000 in funding from ArtPlace to take a major step towards bringing together those in our county working to bring people here and those working to keep people here. Our Appalachian Teaching Project work for 2012-2013, much of which is aligned with the work ArtPlace is funding, is designed to demonstrate how art and design can help create the kind of places people want to live. Our **community partners** are 1) the **Higher Ground Coalition**, seventy Harlan County residents from the art, business, education, government, and working class communities who use the arts to create capacity and change what our community sees as possible; and 2) a group of community college students and other youth in the community known as the **Crawdad group**. The **Course numbers, names, and instructors** involved in the Fall of 2012 are: Humanities 202, Survey of Appalachian Studies I, Robert Gipe; and Music 222, History and Sociology of Rock and Roll, Ann Schertz.

Activities

- Students developed leadership skills and awareness of community assets that can foster sustainability.
- Students engaged as active learners and participants in community projects.
- Students engaged in active research to assist communities in creative approaches to sustainability through asset development.

Specifically:

- Students in Humanities 202 recorded twenty-five oral histories with community members.
- Students in Humanities 202 worked with the theater production company Community Performance International and the Higher Ground community coalition to develop an overriding purpose for the story collecting, articulate what the stories mean to them on a personal level, and prepare a report on how the collected stories will be used in the script for the fourth Higher Ground community drama. Humanities 202 students also helped articulate themes for the script.
- Students in Music 222 produced an ATP-student led youth arts event, Crawdadoween 4 on October 27, 2012.

- Students in Music 222 engaged in planning the use of a renovated space in downtown Cumberland to serve as a center for youth-oriented cultural and arts education activity. In this work, Music 222 students collaborated with students from the University of Kentucky College of Design.
- Students in both Humanities 202 and Music 222 met to develop an overriding sense of purpose for their activities, find common threads that connect the two classes' work, and develop a presentation for use at the ATP conference in Washington and at community meetings.
- Students from both classes presented research at a conference in Washington, D.C., on November 30-December 1, 2012.
- Students from both classes collaborated to create a poster for presentation at a poster session in Washington, D.C.
- Students from both classes presented research to participants in the Network of Ensemble Theaters Micro-fest in Harlan in October 2012.

Project Outcomes:

- Research addressed the following goals of the ARC strategic plan: increase job opportunities and per capita income and strengthen the capacity of Appalachian people to compete in the global economy.
- Students and faculty attended a meeting on **November 30 – December 1, 2012**, in Washington, D.C., to share results of the research with each other, Commission administration and staff, and invited guests, including university administrators.
- The first draft of a script for a new Higher Ground community play to be produced in Fall 2013
- Participation on the Network of Ensemble Theaters Micro-fest in Knoxville and Harlan County on October 27, 2012
- Students helped to produce a Crowdad youth arts event in October, 2012
- ATP students contributed to a draft plan for use of a renovated building in downtown Cumberland in collaboration with students at the University of Kentucky College of Design.

Problems Encountered:

- We needed more time to work with the UK College of Design students.
- We had a Higher Ground performance and a Crowdad event on the same day to accommodate the Microfest. It was too much.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

During the spring 2013 semester, Southeast students continued to develop local arts and theater projects. Students in the Spring 2013 Music 222 class used feedback from the Fall 2012 Music 222 class to improve on the Crowdad process, and in April 2013 presented Crowdad XII to the public. Humanities 203 (Survey of Appalachian Studies II students, some of whom were in the Fall 2012 ATP class) created mixed media artworks to be used as part of the Fall 2013 Higher Ground sets, sets which are to travel throughout the county with the Fall 2013 Higher Ground performances. Former ATP students joined community members to work on pulling together student-collected stories into the new Higher Ground script. Former ATP students participated in the Appalachia's Bright Future conference, organized by Kentuckians For The

Commonwealth, and held in the Harlan Civic Center in April 2013. Southeast ATP staff also began work with Harlan County High School to create a high school based Higher Ground project. High School students created their own one act play, Solving for X, during the Spring 2013 semester. And in June, ATP students will join with other Higher Ground cast members to present a selection of songs and scenes from past Higher Ground productions to the Kentucky Community & Technical College System's Board of Regents when they meet in Harlan County.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

At Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College, work on the Appalachian Teaching Project goes on year-round. The fall's work continues in spring courses. ATP students often continue to participate in activities after they complete the fall ATP-designated course, and in many cases, after they complete their studies at SKCTC. For example, one Fall 2011 ATP student worked with a Fall 2012 ATP student and others to create a new series of student performance events, Crawdad Acoustic, during the Spring 2013 semester. Community events are scheduled to overlap with classes. The line between student and community is very blurry in our ATP work. In the past, enrollment in the ATP-designated Fall courses has been a condition for attendance at the Washington conference. I wonder if that doesn't do a disservice to the work, and to the students charged with explaining it to the conference attendees. I wonder if SKCTC's work and the work of ATP wouldn't be better served if we brought some presenters to the DC conference who have a longer history with our community-based work—community members/former students who have participated in the work over time. I also wonder if the definition of what it means to participate in ATP doesn't need to expand. We have always included the work of students in Spring and Summer courses in our ATP reports, and in our definition of what it means to participate in ATP. I think we can maintain the focus that having designated Fall semester classes provides without limiting our audience's idea of what ATP is.

Furthermore, the initial research done by SKCTC students in what was then the ARCTP back in 2001 has led to a body of work that has made a great change in our community. In 2013, we are still responding to the research findings that students came up with in the first years of ATP. In many regards, SKCTC's ATP work is the application of research. We documented needs, developed an approach to meeting those needs, and having been following that approach ever since. Sometimes it is difficult for our students and staff to understand why some of the ATP students at other schools seem always to be diagnosing problems without ever seeming to get around to solving them. Similarly, students at some of the other schools have noted that what SKCTC students do does not seem to be research. We consider our work, on an annual basis, to have a strong research component. That research is participatory, community-based, and action based. It involves constant reflection on the part of student and community members on what we're doing, its efficacy, and ways to improve. All this is to say, I wonder if we as ATP participants wouldn't be better off if we revised our scope of work to include both research and its application.

In any event, we at Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College are very proud to be a part of the Appalachian Teaching Project. We are grateful to the Appalachian Regional Commission, East Tennessee State University, and our partner schools for making it a national model for engaging college students with communities and with each other.

Attachments (in PDF format):

Pictures and posters in separate attachment.