

Proposal for

**“Development of Wayside Kiosks for Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail”
in Montgomery and Giles Counties, Virginia: Cultural and Economic
Implications**

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ATP Project Outline

1. PROJECT FOCUS:

Virginia Tech Appalachian Studies Program proposes to engage multiple community stakeholders, music performance groups, and individuals involved in local heritage music in order to research and then design the content for and placement of The Crooked Road (TCR) Wayside kiosks in both Giles and Montgomery Counties, Virginia, so as to stimulate interest among tourists while, at the same time, preserve and sustain the cultural significance of these counties' heritage music.

II. PROJECT DETAILS:

A.Course Number, Name, and Instructor: APS/SOC 4094, Undergraduate Community Research, Dr. Anita Puckett

B.Community Partner: The Crooked Road: Virginia's Music Heritage Trail

C.Need:

“The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail” (TCR) is considered by many to be an economic success story (Jones 2008; Tennis 2012) that should be emulated in declining rural areas in need of economic revitalization and cultural sustainability (Perry 2010). TCR's mission is to support tourism and economic development in Southwest Virginia by celebrating and preserving this Appalachian region's unique musical and cultural heritage” (Big Walker Lookout 2012, para. 5). It is touted as accomplishing this mission well, having generated \$845,312 in taxes and fees and created 226 jobs in 2009, as well as developing a comprehensive educational plan (The Crooked Road 2009, para. 3).

TCR is actually a driving route through southern and southwestern Virginia Counties along U.S. Rte. 58 that links nine major music venues into a set of regular performances that celebrate “heritage” music traditions of a given area (Major Venues 2014). Tourists can travel the “road,” or deviate from it to experience any of the over 60 “Affiliated Venues and Festivals” that occur in nearby counties (Affiliated Venues 2014). In addition, 26 Wayside Exhibit kiosks are located throughout the region and along the trail (Wayside Exhibits 2014) that are targeted towards tourists who may want a general overview of the traditional music contributions in the county represented. Kiosks contain maps, text regarding music history, and, commonly, a playback audio recording of a notable singer or instrumentalist from a given county (see photo below for an example; see Wayside Exhibits 2014 for audio recordings by kiosk). Currently, TCR is examining



Grayson County, Virginia, Wayside Exhibit
<https://www.myswva.org/tcr/venues/waysides>

expanding the actual “Road” to reclassify some Affiliated Venues as Major Venues and to expand its number of Wayside Exhibits (Hinshelwood, personal communication, May 2, 2014).

Included in this discussion about expansion are Giles and Montgomery Counties, Virginia, which currently have no Wayside Exhibits and only Affiliated Venues (four in Montgomery County; two in Giles County). Montgomery County government contributes \$25,000 per year to TCR (Bleakley, Executive Directory of Communication, personal communication, March 22, 2014), while Giles County contributes nothing, despite the fact that it contains two Affiliated Venues. TCR discussions with Giles County are in process to determine if future contributions are possible (Hinshelwood, personal communication, May 2, 2014).

Given TCR potential for community and economic development, Dr. Anita Puckett, Director of the Appalachian Studies Program at Virginia Tech, contacted TCR in May 2013 to discuss a possible collaboration through undergraduate student research in a class dedicated to the Appalachian Teaching Project. TCR Director Jack Hinshelwood indicated that there was a need to obtain more historical and current information on the traditional music history in Giles and Montgomery Counties for their records and to construct an accurate Wayside Exhibit kiosk in each county. Students in the Fall 2013 Appalachian Teaching Project were able to collect some historical materials and much current information on heritage music in these two counties, as well as interview a number of local residents interested in traditional music either as performers or as

community leaders hosting music events. The proposed project for this coming Fall 2014 semester is to complete background research and then design Wayside Exhibit kiosks for both counties as was requested by TCR in 2013 and as reiterated in June 2014 (see Appendix).

To do so, however, findings from the Fall 2013 project must be incorporated and considered in implementation design. Virginia Tech determined then that TCR was not only a strong positive force in the region, but was also facing major challenges to fulfilling its mission due to a number of factors. Among the most relevant for the Fall 2014 project are

1. Balancing different stakeholders' ideologies towards what TCR purposes and goals should be, leading to potential conflicts between using "heritage music" as an "inalienable possession of place" and as a commodity to generate revenue (Chaney 2013: 1). Put straight-forwardly, what tourists want or expect are often different from why the performances, the music, and the traditions associated with them are culturally important to local residents;
2. Fully representing the diverse music traditions in the region, including African American and Native American music heritages; and
3. How to actually integrate the economic development mission of TCR with the cultural significance of traditional music, especially with respect to the identity significations of its creation, performance, and interpersonal relations.

Discussions with the TCR, the Montgomery County Regional Tourism Office, TCR performers, and Virginia Tech's Appalachian Studies Program in April 2014 resulted in a desire to address point 3. All interested parties agreed that having significant community participation in how TCR was structured, run, and presented to tourists was highly desired, but that balancing the need for stimulating tourist economic contributions along with preserving the cultural value of performances was problematic.

Resulting from the discussions so far is the need for a specific outcome that produces a tangible product that clearly addresses Point 3 and also addresses concerns raised by points 1. and 2. To this purpose, Virginia Tech's Appalachian Teaching Project class will collaborate with its partner, TCR, to design two TCR Wayside Exhibit kiosks, one each in Montgomery and Giles Counties, Virginia. To date, the design and construction of these kiosks has been primarily done by TCR with some input from those hosting venues in a given county or with county administrators. To address the points raised above, the proposed collaboration will involve as many community participants as possible in each of the two counties, including those representing African American music traditions.¹ It will be their input, through the research of the Virginia Tech Appalachian Teaching Project class, in consultation with TCR and its needs to stimulate economic sustainability that will guide what content is most appropriate for the kiosks,

how it should be presented, where the kiosks should be located, and what their architectural design should be.

Therefore, the design of the kiosk and a supporting financial and marketing plan will constitute a visible expression of how to create a culturally sustainable model for TCR integration into the global economic sector via tourism and other transnational modes of marketing “culture” *without substantive loss of the place-based identity meanings constituted by the traditional modes of creating and performing of “heritage” music.*

D.Number and Description of Planned Meetings with the Community Partner:

Meetings with TCR personnel will consist of at least two face-to-face lengthy meetings with Mr. Jack Hinshelwood, TCR Director, to discuss TCR goals, resources, and desired outcomes of the project, and to assist in deciding on the directions the project should take. In addition, bi-weekly updates with TCR via Skype, conference call, or email are planned. TCR headquarters are in Abingdon, Virginia, approximately 113 miles distant from the Virginia Tech campus. Therefore, regular weekly face-to-face meetings are difficult to arrange. In addition, Mr. Hinshelwood’s schedule is extremely complex and includes travel to affiliate and venue sites on a regular basis. Other personnel, such as Mr. Joe Wilson and various TCR Advisory Board members will be included according to Mr. Hinshelwood’s recommendation.

In addition, appropriate county administrators will be consulted as needed to design and market the kiosks. Their input on kiosk placement, generating revenue to pay for construction, and how to market them will be critical. These officials are local and will be expected to come to class or meet with student researchers about three times during the semester for approximately one to two hours. Given the Montgomery County monetary (\$25,000/yr.), labor, and financial investments in TCR, their co-collaboration in the project is significant. Support from the Montgomery County Regional Tourism Director has been given orally.

Finally, data from community residents supporting or affiliated with the TCR organization for kiosk content, design, and location will be obtained by students interviewing key stakeholders (as determined by Fall 2013 research and following Spring 2014 discussions), by focus group interviews of performers and TCR-invested community leaders consisting of invested community members from the different locally-recognized music locales in each county (see Puckett 2014). A total of three focus group meetings, six to 10 interviews, and two or three county administrative meetings for each county is expected.

E.Overview of the Project, Including Its Central Focus:

The project is couched within a senior-level class in Appalachian Studies at Virginia Tech. Students in this class come from a variety of majors and are assigned individual (or small team) research subprojects on the basis of individualized discussion regarding their levels of expertise and interest. All subprojects, however, must contribute to the central focus of the general project, which is to design a culturally-sustaining TCR Wayside Exhibit kiosk in both Montgomery and Giles Counties, Virginia. To complete the project, students will engage in the following data tasks, all in consultation with the project partner:

- Further collection of historical information on traditional music history in both counties through oral history interviews and archival research;
- Interviews with performers, TCR personnel, county officials, local chambers of commerce, and others involved in tourism to determine kiosk site location as described in II. D.;
- Focus group interviews with local residents and those involved in tourism and heritage music performances to collect information on Wayside Exhibit content, location, and ways of marketing without sacrificing cultural value as described in II. D.;
- Consultation with experts and professionals in architecture, landscape architecture, marketing, tourism management, and construction (as identified by instructor Puckett) to determine design possibilities and Wayside costs.
- Engage in traditional classroom learning through analysis of assigned methodological and theoretical texts, exploration of research methods, and discussion of research progress.

The class, then, will consist of students being assigned to engage as individuals or small teams to research and complete one or more of the above tasks. Focus groups will occur as entire class projects, however. Experts in oral history interviewing and on local music will be brought in to the class as guest speakers to augment class instructional materials. Puckett's disciplinary training includes methods in focus group, interview, and survey data collection and analysis.

Analysis of data, consultation information, and traditional classroom learning, as well as material collected by Fall 2013's class, will then result in a Wayside Exhibit kiosk design that can be generalized as a model for how to market highly valued cultural assets to tourists in a manner that promotes economic sustainability with minimal sacrifice of the cultural meanings and functions of heritage music in communities.

F.Goals and Objectives:

1. Since the project focuses on expanding and developing the economic contributions and scope of the Crooked Road, it will address the following ARC goals (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2014, para. 2):
 - Increase job opportunities and per capita income *among local indigenous residents*. Montgomery County is growing, both in terms of per capita income and in population, but this growth is in response to the increase of high tech and medical research/applications economic opportunities that have drawn highly trained professionals from primarily urban and non-Appalachian areas. Yet it still has a strong indigenous base consisting of residents whose families have lived in the area for approximately 250 years. For many of these families, music traditions are still very strong. At the same time, Montgomery County has one of the highest poverty rates in the commonwealth at 24.4%² (The Commonwealth Institute 2012, para.15; US Census Bureau 2014a). Many of these local families are at the low income/poverty level. Giles County, which also has a strong indigenous base, is losing population, and 14.1% is under the poverty line (US Census Bureau 2014b). Residents whose traditions and heritage reflect the foundational and baseline cultural orientations of both of the counties would therefore benefit from music tourism.
 - Strengthen the capacity of Appalachian people to compete in the global economy by assisting in creating a culturally-sensitive tourism market that is international in scope (cf. The Lane Group et al. 2012: 11-12).
2. Objective: To increase student leadership skills and awareness of community assets. These objectives will both be met as a unit through community engagement activities and through partnership with a community organization, TCR. These activities will involve working with diverse constituencies through interviews and focus groups, as well as learning how to collaborate with a non-academic community partner, TCR, which has its own missions, goals, and interests. Therefore, students will be engaged with a wide range of stakeholders and interested citizens that will require them to develop rather sophisticated social interactional, analytic, and project collaboration skills that are central to leading others, as well as mastery of community research data collecting methods.
3. Objective: To engage in active learning. The type of non-traditional learning will promote meeting this objective by requiring students to engage in at least 40 hours of active community engagement during which they will be *doing* tasks with non-students in face-to-face interaction that result in their engagement and control, to some extent, over the learning process rather than being directed or

- controlled by an instructor in a traditional or e-technologies mediated classroom setting.
4. Objective: To develop creative approaches or models to assist the project partner, TCR, and community collaborators in addressing tensions between marketing heritage music and maintaining its cultural functions, significance, and meanings. By producing a Wayside Exhibit design that arranges and displays content in a way that presents heritage music in a manner that, in turn, protects or sequesters the most culturally salient or sacred aspects of heritage music performances and valuation, the project will meet this objective that not only assists TCR and the two counties in how to market heritage music, but also suggests a model for TCR participating counties more generally, and, even more abstractly, how communities can engage in global economies without losing some of the most basic elements of community cultural sustainability: civic space, civil society, and place-based identities;
 5. Objective: To enhance community and Virginia Tech Appalachian Studies Program relationships. This objective can be obtained by presenting a final product that meets the needs and advances the economic and cultural sustainability objectives of both counties and TCR.

III. PROJECT OUTCOMES:

- Conference presentation in Washington, DC, December 5-6, 2014 (meets all goals and objectives);
- Conference poster display at Conference in Washington, DC, December 5-6, 2014 (meets all goals and objectives);
- Presentation to The Crooked Road and close collaborators from Montgomery and Giles County administrations, Spring semester 2015 (meets all goals and objectives);
- Presentation to the Virginia Tech Undergraduate Research Institute (URI) as part of the URI Undergraduate Research Day, April 2015 (meets Objectives 2-4);
- Presentation to the Department of Religion and Culture Undergraduate Research day, April 2015 (meets Objectives 2-4);
- Presentation to civic groups in both counties such as the Giles County Historical Society and the Montgomery and Floyd County Public Libraries community citizens groups. Several other civic organizations are also possible audiences, and presenting to multiple groups at one time is quite likely. Also possible is a radio broadcast on WNRV AM 990 radio as was done in the Fall 2013 ATP class on April 25, 2014 (meets Objectives 2-5).
- Production of a physical or graphic model of desired Wayside Exhibit kiosks for both Montgomery and Giles Counties with explanatory text and graphics (meets all goals and objectives).

- Production of a physical or graphic model of desired Wayside kiosks with explanatory written or graphic materials as well as an oral presentation to TCR personnel (meets Objectives 2-5).
- Production of Final Report by Puckett to ATP administrators by May 31, 2015 (meets Goal 1 and Objective 5).
- Submission of research data, particularly historical archival materials to TCR for their archives. Materials will also be archived in Giles and Montgomery county libraries and historical museums, as well as with the Appalachian Studies Program at Virginia Tech (meets all goals and objectives).
- Students' inclusion of research, presentations, and final reports on their resumes (meets Objectives 2-4).

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V. APPENDIX: EMAIL COMMUNICATION OF SUPPORT FROM PARTNER

(June 13, 2014):

Jack Hinshelwood <jhinshelwood@thecrookedroad.org>

To: Anita Puckett <apuckett@vt.edu>

RE: Support for next year's ATP project

Anita:

I look forward to The Crooked Road collaborating with you on developing a viable wayside kiosk plan for Montgomery and Giles Counties, Virginia. The counties will benefit greatly from using the materials you collected last year and new materials you will be collecting this Fall to design kiosk content and placement, and to obtain financial support for them. The Crooked Road will also be strengthened by having increased community and visitor access to the wealth of musical heritage stories that can be shared with those who wish to understand and engage the incredibly rich musical heritage of this region.

Jack

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¹ No Native American music traditions are known to be extant in these two counties. If research identifies such traditions, they will also be included in the project.

² This percentage is inflated because of the Virginia Tech student population, but the non-university percentage is also high. While exact percentages are unavailable, Prices Fork Elementary, for example, which has very few students who are children of low-income Virginia Tech parents, has a subsidized school lunch rate of 60% for its 300+ students.