

***VOICES at OHIO UNIVERSITY
SPEAK about APPALACHIA***

***Report Three:
Expertise about Appalachia at OU***

**Survey Conducted by the Appalachian Faculty
Learning Community, Spring 2004**

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Expertise about Appalachia at OU

Knowing more about the kinds of expertise associated with Appalachia could be helpful to many of Ohio University's constituents. Although many faculty members have completed scholarship on topics related to the region and many students are interested in studying topics pertaining to the area, no central repository exists to identify the kinds of scholarship and research being conducted. Having easier access to previous research findings pertaining to the region might stimulate others to begin work that suggests areas of distinction fostered at OU. This Appalachian survey was completed, in part, to better grasp the kinds of scholarship that are already occurring.

EXPERTISE ABOUT THE REGION AND ITS PEOPLE

Survey participants provided information about their expertise related to Appalachia. Although many denied any proficiency, the many described some personal knowledge or experience associated with topics pertinent to the region. Many faculty and students described specific areas where they perceived themselves having credible knowledge or life experiences related to the Appalachian region and its people. For example, an education student wrote, "I can see the problems of Appalachia almost daily in my clinical settings. There are many children who live in poverty and abusive homes. Appalachian people are typically a proud people and do not accept help with open arms. We need to find ways to help the people of Appalachia help themselves without being intrusive into their culture and beliefs." A university administrator from a regional campus wrote, "Almost everything I do as a Dean relates to Appalachia, ranging from the students we educate to community committee meetings I attend."

People from the Region

Because many people in the region hold stereotypical views about Appalachia and its people, the diversity found here is often ignored. For example, a local person wrote, "My family was middle to upper middle income Appalachian, my life experiences and opportunities have been different from lower income Appalachian families. Little interest or research in middle and upper income families of Appalachia exists to my knowledge. Because I am Appalachian, my ability to relate to families in a home setting or a social setting gives me a communication advantage. Accepting people for where and who they are presently is a gold standard in Appalachia." Another local participant said, "Being a lifetime resident of this area, I have first hand experience in interacting with the people of our region." A student provided a good bit of wisdom about how to relate to others in the region: "If you are not part of an area, you should always find someone in that area to teach you about it and to have them come up with ways to make it better. The outsider should listen and respect the other and only make suggestions, never tell others what they need." Recognizing ways to interact with people from the region was perceived as a form of expertise.

Asking local people about their expertise is often likely to get a negative response. Being an Appalachian native often translates to not "rising above your raising," an acculturated value that means individuals should not think too highly of self. In other words, it is okay to get an education or to be successful, but when returning home or to communities it is important to

know one's place. Thus, many respondents from the region stated that they were not experts even when they had what appeared to be excellent knowledge of areas closely tied with the Appalachian region and its people. For example, one student wrote: "I would not say that I am an expert although I did show a body of photographic work on Portsmouth, Ohio, at the Portsmouth Bicentennial Celebration, at Shawnee State University, Portsmouth. With this work I won an honorable mention at the national competition, College Photographer of the Year awards." Another student wrote: "I am in no way an expert on Appalachian Issues. I am at best a student, yearning to learn more everyday from anyone who will teach me! While I have learned a great deal, I have much more to learn."

Both faculty members and community residents suggested kinds of local expertise they held. For example, a faculty person said: "My research, music performance, lifetime residence, family history, extensive travel throughout the region, and general interest in the livelihood of the region, while certainly not making me an expert do distinguish me as a genuine Appalachian." While a community person suggested, "I have helped encourage students to stay in college even though odds seemed to be against them." Those from the Appalachian region often have humility about their accomplishments that may not be observed in people living in other areas. Many not only have interests in Appalachia, but are working to develop expertise and talents that can be utilized by local residents and their communities.

People from Outside the Region

Persons from outside the region were interested in making strides towards gaining understanding about the Appalachian region and its people. For example, a student from outside the region said, "I am in no way an expert, but I feel that I know more about the subject and area than most other non-Appalachian students." A faculty member said, "I am working towards having a better understanding of how the Appalachian culture impacts the education of students in this region and the specific needs that teachers will have to address."

Many students who took the time to respond to the Appalachian study described their interests in learning about the region. An undergraduate student said: "I have lived in this area for 5 years and in that time I have spent most of my time in the sheltered life of the OU community. When I spend time with local friends, I gain an increased awareness of the financial, education, and motivational differences." Another student wrote: "I think all you can do is try to learn what you can from the people who live here and keep an open mind. Reading the literature and studying the history gives you a bit, but this is a living culture and you can't learn everything from books." Still another student said, "I have an understanding of some of the values and concerns of this culture, but I have more to learn and always work on awareness of my own biases."

Students have obviously made positive choices to learn more about the region and culture during their college experience. For instance, one student wrote, "I feel that my employment choices reflect my interest in the area. In my undergraduate studies, I was drawn to courses that had a link to this region. I attended the Good Works' Friday Night Supper in an effort to get to know more people from the area." A regional graduate student wrote, "In graduate school my thesis was about the motivation for people of Appalachia to continue their education beyond high school." Another described his experience: "By working with Appalachian-related issues as a

student here at OU, I have been primed to be culturally sensitive in the real-world. I applaud the efforts of faculty who strive to bring that cultural component into the classrooms rather than just ignoring the fact that our university is in Appalachia.” Another student reported about lessons learned while studying at OU, “I have learned to treat everyone with a degree of dignity similar to what I would want reflected toward myself. I have also learned that poverty and financial struggles do not necessarily mean ignorance.”

Expertise of Faculty Members

Some faculty members are quite involved in topics and concerns pertinent to Appalachia. Many faculty members have much experience and knowledge about topics associated with Appalachia and its people. For example, a faculty member reported: “I give a lot of talks, write editorials, write newsletter pieces, attend a lot of meetings and speak up, try to stay informed, publish professional papers, talk to elected officials, teach classes to reach many students, send many of my students into similar local work, and participate in special panels or discussion groups, etc.”

Another faculty member said:

I have done informal study over the last 5-8 years about various health topics pertinent to Appalachia, published several journal articles related to the culture and health issues of Appalachians, and have given many peer and non-peer reviewed presentations. I previously referred to my work experience in hospice where I had the opportunity to work closely with many Appalachian families.

Another wrote:

My entire life has involved me in the struggle of Southeast Ohio. I know the powerless position of those in this region who have no opportunity for gainful employment and are hounded by the jeers of Northern Ohioans who refer to us as white trash. As an artist, I attempt to create a meaningful dialogue on Appalachian issues that goes beyond stereotyping and unfounded assumptions of ‘Appalachianness.’

Faculty members from both the Athens campus as well as regional campuses took time to complete the survey. Across these campuses exists a cadre of faculty members, some of whom are local residents and others who have located to the region for employment. While not all faculty members employed at the University are informed about or would be perceived as experts about Appalachia, many have expertise about the region and culture. However, an even broader number has talent and expertise in a variety of majors and disciplines that could be utilized by the region.

Expertise of Community Members

Although the number of community persons not associated with the University completing the survey was few, many administrative staff and faculty members taking time to answer questions viewed themselves as Appalachian residents. Economic, social, educational, and health disparities found in the region are of great concern to many living in the region. For

instance, several local residents suggested that raising education standards and increasing economic opportunities is an essential need of Appalachia so that residents of the region can have opportunities similar to those in mainstream America. A local resident said:

My lifetime in this area and working through schools and extension service has definitely given me the expertise to offer help in this area. I think many people are unaware that there is no public water; therefore, no indoor plumbing, in many of the homes in the Athens County area. Personal hygiene is a problem; many children from outlying areas will never know anything other than the life style they now have. Whose responsibility is it to help them? Yours and mine, I believe.

This non-critical admonition calls upon those with the greatest knowledge, skills, and resources to lend their expertise to address local needs.

Many persons associated with Ohio University have focused on technology over the last few years and have been successful in bringing the university and community together. For example, one respondent said he worked with others to, “develop an interactive videoconferencing system to serve the behavioral health system in 10 Appalachian Ohio counties which connects to a statewide and, ultimately, global network.” Other work in the region has been related to increasing opportunities for students to learn about video game design. A faculty member said, “Several of my students and I are working on a video game centered on the Ironton area.” Still another said:

I'm from here, my family is from here, my ancestors are from here. I have worked and grown up here and have had to face the culture bias, and even bias in my own family against getting a good education. I have now made contacts with a fellow instructional technologist who wants to try to help Appalachian children get a good education.

A student who described his valuable learning experience at Institute for Local Government and Rural Development (ILGARD) said, “The GIS team at ILGARD provides technical assistance and training for organizations that want to incorporate the new digital mapping technology into their workplace.” Another faculty member reported:

My experience in learning about the technological gap between the cities and rural Appalachia and helping to craft solutions to this problem has been invaluable in learning about this area. I have met incredible people who are tireless in their quest to make their hometowns viable places to live a good life and earn a decent living.

Local expertise through the Ohio University region is available. Many have already initiated programs and are making progress. A concern seems to be that the lack of a coherent action plan means that many do not know what others are doing.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

Survey participants demonstrated that they had expertise in a wide range of areas. Almost all disciplines and areas of concern were identified in some form. The findings clearly indicate

that the University has many administrative staff persons, faculty members, and students who have great knowledge of aspects of the Appalachian region and its people. Here is an overview of some of the diverse areas of expertise identified by respondents:

Community Development

- Community planning.
- Boards of local organizations charged with improving life experiences in the region
- Work with community groups (e.g., Firefighter, Ecclesiastical service, EMT, scouts)
- Government (including Governor's office, Appalachian Regional Commission, state government)
- Archivist, historian, museum curator
- Safe food handling (e.g., two ATCO employees in the Atrium Cafe bring "service learning" to the students enrolled in our programs through exposure to developmentally disabled people and ways they can impact the workplace in a positive way)
- Law enforcement
- Entrepreneurship (e.g., business development, employee training on specific tasks or concepts, managerial training, board member training)

Economics

- Economic development
- Economic Benefits of a Rail Trail in Vinton and Athens Counties.
- Analytical and comparative perspectives about poverty transferable to the Appalachian region

Agriculture and Environment

- Farming (raise crops and animals)
- Environmental activities (e.g., use of wetlands, treatment of runoff from acid mine drainage, river sedimentation resulting from strip mining, geology, solid waste management, clean coal technology)
- Wildlife recognition and conservation (e.g., identifying plants such as Burdock, Ginseng, Goldenseal; propagation of endangered and near endangered plants)
- Work with the pawpaw fruit as a way to partner with local teachers
- A growing horse industry

Health Issues

- Work with other health professionals in southeast Ohio (e.g., mental health systems, policy. implementation, clinical rotations, chronic disease specialists, tobacco issues, nutrition)

Education

- Teach public speaking
- Classroom teaching (e.g., elementary, high-school, college, work-based programs, rural concerns, counseling, literacy issues, language art skills)
- Teaching and training about Appalachia--from an insider's perspective
- Project on influence of a dedicated music curriculum on pre-reading skills

Science and Technology

- Robotics project to stimulate interest in local impoverished school districts
- Use of technology (videos for Monday Creek, Appalachian films, radio series)
- Gaming development in Appalachia-Adena ventures

Youth and Families

- Working with the local youth sports teams
- Youth programs (e.g., mentoring foster children, teaching job skills, community cleanup)
- Raising money
- Family needs of all kinds (e.g., senior centers, poverty issues, housing, child care, disabilities)
- Work with social organizations (e.g., prison system, Job and Family Services, victim/witness advocate for court system, Head Start, legal assistance)
- Work with Appalachian clients who relocated to Columbus
- Social problems (e.g., domestic violence, pregnant teens)

Arts and Humanities

- Bluegrass music
- Chester-Shade Historical Association (e.g., help educate about ancestors)
- Library resources (e.g., support academic studies and purchase resources faculty need to teach classes related to the arts and Appalachia)
- Little Cities of Black Diamonds Cultural Organization
- Growing number of artists in Nelsonville

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE RELATED TO APPALACHIA

Many are not aware of the kinds of research and scholarly activities related to Appalachia occurring at Ohio University and its branch campuses. The types of academic and scholarly focus by faculty, students, and others associated with the university vary widely and cover a large extended range of disciplines and interests. For instance, a student wrote: "I have intensely studied differences between the rural (Appalachian) residents of Holmes and Wayne Counties and the ways they differ in social function, especially related to deviant behaviors with their more progressive, 'modern' counterparts, even within the same communities." Several faculty members are authors who have published texts about aspects of the region or culture of the people. Some faculty employed at the University are gaining state, regional, and national

reputations for their work related to Appalachia in their given fields of study. For example, one faculty member reported:

I have written a few articles on the region which have gotten some attention, including a comparison of Central Appalachia now and when Michael Harrington wrote about it in *The Other America*. Our program has developed internships in the region, developed curriculum and learning resources about the region and our faculty participate in community groups that serve the region.

Survey respondents provided valuable insight into the diversity of faculty and student activities being completed at Ohio University. Although these findings are not viewed as comprehensive of all the scholarly work being done, it is clear that many are addressing issues of the Appalachian region and its people. Reported areas of scholarship and research expertise are grouped under the topics of health related activities, economic and community development, Appalachian topics and issues, education, as well as technology, mining, and environment.

Health Related Activities

- Rates of depression in patients with type 2 diabetes (Focus group discussions about cultural elements in diabetes self-care are part of the study protocol)
- Role of Appalachian cultural components associated with medical and psychosocial outcomes of cardiac rehabilitation participants examined by a doctoral student
- Families' perceptions of mental health services and the impact these perceptions have on their utilization of services and adapting evidence-based practices
- Access to and acceptance of quality mental health services for rural Appalachian children and families
- Appalachian Rural Health Institute (AHRI) activities
- Cardiovascular disease risk factor screenings for 5th grade children in Wood County WV (biochemical, clinical, and survey data was obtained)
- Economic and healthcare statistics
- Teen Pregnancy Studies for Athens and Fairfield Counties
- Health, mental health and human services
- Conceptualization of family health in Appalachian families
- Health literacy and diabetes
- Abuse and violence
- Alcohol use
- Family health routines in type 2 diabetics
- Kids on Campus (health indicators for families and children)
- Food safety
- Medicaid managed care
- Hunger and food security
- Dental access
- Tobacco use and cessation research
- RAFT: a grant-funded program to develop two assessment forms of wellness (adult and child forms)

Economic and Community Development

- Entrepreneurship as an economic development tool in Appalachian Ohio
- Zoning and village incorporation
- Projects and studies associated with community development

Appalachian Topics and Issues

- Appalachian identity.
- Work ethic.
- Crime and deviance
- Dissertation completed spring 2004: “Asylum and Community: Connections between the Village of Athens and the Athens Lunatic Asylum 1867-1893”
- Impacts of welfare reform on rural Appalachian communities
- Entrepreneurial development and policy
- Gays and lesbians in Appalachia
- Family ties in the Appalachian family: mother/daughter pairs
- Documentary on Passion Works
- A study of ethical practices at newspapers across the country, including Appalachian states
- Three month photo documentary on Portsmouth, Ohio
- Study of connections between early sexual encounters and delinquency
- Poverty and unemployment in Appalachia
- Major archive of dialect field research materials done in this area in the 1960s and ‘70s (housed in Alden Library); being used to train graduate students to enter the files in a database which will be part of a national archive maintained at the University of Georgia when completed will constitute a history of speech in this region dating back about 150 years
- Quilting in the local area
- Oral histories of Appalachian (Kentucky) women during the Depression
- Paw paws
- Music and film
- Homeless shelters/temporary living communities
- Low-income families and their well-being in the context of welfare reform (national longitudinal study that is tracking family well-being among the rural poor/seven rural communities in Appalachia included)
- Photographs of local counties to understand why people choose to live where they do (a tool to teach others about the region)
- Dissertation: single, low income mother-adolescent daughter communication
- Oral History of Ora Anderson related to his involvement with the beginning of the Wayne National Forest (early preservation efforts in Ohio by The Nature Conservancy and later involvement in WNF management planning meetings)

Technology

- Innovative ways to improve the IT infrastructure
- The digital divide

- Online literacy customized for children in Appalachia
- Feasibility of broadband service for the 29 counties of Appalachian Ohio for a Governor's Office of Appalachia project "Access Appalachia"

Mining and Environment

- Effects of acid mine drainage on reservoirs
- Acid mine drainage
- Flooding
- Land subsidence
- Mine hydrology
- Coal mining history
- Mining landscapes and photographic interpretation
- Ecological wastewater treatment technologies for Appalachia
- Photo documentary on the Hocking River
- Geology of rocks of the Appalachian basin
- Limnology of reservoirs in southeast Ohio
- Use of wetlands to treat runoff from acid mine drainage
- Thesis: Insect that is killing hemlock trees in the Eastern US in the Great Smoky Mountains
- Relocated petroglyphs and other Native American sites
- Vegetation growth rates on utility right of ways in the southeastern Ohio and Northern West Virginia panhandle
- Geography of Virginia (Appalachian Virginia)
- Underground coal mines, coal spoils and surface mining
- Solid waste management
- Brick industry history

Education

- Literacy issues
- Educational policies and practices
- Thesis: Examined factors related to parenting (e.g., discipline style, stress, involvement in treatment) and relationship to treatment outcomes for children receiving services through the elementary school.
- Communication apprehension among first generation college students (OUZ)
- Role of dialect interference in reading and writing problems among students (college and secondary) in this region
- Comparing Appalachian novels with the classics in high school
- Literacy and literature
- Dissertation: A qualitative study on the organizational culture of a rural elementary school
- Multiple identities: Comparison of student home life at home and in the college environment

CONCLUSIONS

Although much is already being done in scholarly work about issues pertinent to Appalachia at Ohio University, more research is still warranted to gain even better understandings about the region. Respondents noted some problems with doing research at OU. For instance, a faculty member wrote, “One problem we have found is a severe limit of scholarly material on all but historic information about the region.” Others expressed concern about researchers’ sensitivity to the people and culture. For example, another faculty member cautioned: “Keep in mind that these are real people and real people’s lives- studying about Appalachia is a good thing, but one must never forget the individuals in the community.” Another warned that “as an outsider, it will be difficult to impossible to truly understand many things.” Studying culture is a very subjective experience.

A student said, “I would caution that the Appalachian culture is not the same throughout the Appalachian mountain region. For instance, the culture in southern West Virginia is much different from the culture of eastern Kentucky.” A large interest in research and scholarly work seems to be underway at Ohio University already, work that can provide a strong foundation for others to build upon.

Unfortunately, at the present time, a central place where one can easily learn about scholarly pursuits, interests, and research activities to expand knowledge about Appalachia does not exist at Ohio University. Those located at the main campus are often unaware of expertise of faculty at regional campuses and have limited knowledge about issues beyond Athens County. In fact, many at Ohio University have little knowledge about the concerns of the other 28 Appalachian Ohio counties. However, faculty and students located at regional campuses are often well-connected to other communities and can offer knowledge and expertise about these other locations.

Although many sources of information about Appalachia can be found, locating work especially tied to southeast Ohio may be especially difficult to find. In order to learn about scholarly work related to the area – much of which is unpublished, one must contact persons at regional campuses, individual colleges, and schools within colleges to seek faculty members who are conducting research about Appalachia. A repository for locating information and connecting with others sharing similar interests would be an asset to faculty and students trying to complete scholarship and research about the region and its people. Many might find it helpful if the resources of Ohio University libraries pertaining to the Appalachian region were catalogued in ways that made them easily accessible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Build on the expert strengths of those at the six campuses of OU and in the communities of southeastern Ohio.
- Identify ways for faculty members with like interests to collaborate with one another.
- Utilize the expertise of interdisciplinary faculty teams to engage students in learning around finding solutions to real local problems.

- Create a central directory to locate information about work occurring in southeast Ohio that faculty members, administrative staff, students, and community members might gain or offer expertise.
- Explore new avenues for university-community partnerships that extend across southeast Ohio and include all six OU campuses to use scholarship and research to tackle issues of universal concern.