

Emory & Henry College

The Appalachian Center for Community Service

Mission Statement and Core Values

As an integral part of the educational process at Emory & Henry College, the Appalachian Center for Community Service practices a relational, place-based approach to service and education joining classroom teaching and learning with persons' lived experiences. In addition to the educational components of this vital, place-based work, it also carries with it the obligation to bring a range of resources to serve people and places locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. The Appalachian Center for Community Service takes seriously the life of each place, providing persons with the intellectual skills, civic tools, and ethical framework necessary for citizenship in their place.

Seven defining values and ideas help to shape the direction of the mission and work of the Appalachian Center for Community Service at Emory & Henry College.

Social Capital. **Social capital** is that understanding that every person has worth and the potential to contribute to the building of strong communities, apart from and independent from their role in the economic structure. Therefore, all persons are intrinsically valuable to the life of a place. If persons can have **social capital**, so too can places. Every place has worth and potential apart from and independent from the values, practices, demands, and assumptions of the global economy. Put another way, **social capital** helps underwrite two guiding principles on which the Center is founded. The first of which is that all persons have within the gifts, talents, graces, vision, compassion, and passion to make a difference in the lives of others and in their places. The second principle states that if this is true of persons, it is also true of places. Every place has the potential and the assets to be a safe, healthy, and good place for all its people. Building from these principles and resonating with Paulo Freire's writing, all of the Center's work is deeply and fundamentally educational. In this educational work, the Center understands that we are all co-educators and co-learners together, each teaching and learning in the social process of education.

Place. Our understanding of **place** begins from the observation that any place is the result of a prolonged interaction and interrelationship between three complex realities. The *natural environment* (topography, landscape, minerals, climate, geology, water table, etc...) helps to determine the type of social relationships and economic systems produced in a specific place. The *built environment* is the human response to and appropriation of the land, climate, and other natural resources for subsistence, profit, and power. Over time, this has constituted the basis for social hierarchies and interactions in a place. *Human culture and history*, the whole way of life of a place, mutually interactive with the natural and built environments, constitutes the third element of place. **Place** is, therefore, a social process, the product of human relationships lived out in a specific landscape, in the context of social and cultural forces that are known in that place as well as in other places formed in analogous processes. In every place, individual identities, family histories, social conflicts, global economics, local culture, social structures, art, politics, and the natural environment are all interwoven and inseparable. Moreover, these

insights make clear that every place is always more complicated, more political, more conflicted than what many people have in mind when referring to community and “sense of place.” Because “**place**” is largely the continuing result of the interaction between human culture and the physical environment, and every human relationship is defined in a series of conflicts both resolved and ongoing, every place is therefore defined in part by deep conflicts of persons, institutions, and processes, both local and global. Therefore, conflict is not unnatural, something to be avoided or denied. Rather, because conflict is part of the very substance of all human relationships, to know and understand a place in all of its complexity is to learn, to acquire the skills and insights necessary, to respond productively to the conflicts in that place, so to become part of the ongoing creative processes of that place.

Social justice. At the core of the Appalachian Center’s mission is the continuing relational process of understanding what **social justice** is, what it means for people and places, and the building coalitions and partnerships for social change to ensure justice for all peoples. While justice must be forged in a place in the crucible of many conflicts on many levels, and while there are many definitions and approaches to **social justice**, the Center’s work for **social justice** depends heavily on Paul Theobald’s ideas of *intradependence*. Theobald defines *intradependence* as the necessary relationships *within* a place. This encompasses relationships with the natural environment, with other individuals, with groups, but also relationships with the history and culture of a place, as well as with the future of a place. These relationships become the standard of justice, making justice *social*. Those ideas, actions, policies, habits, assumptions, politics, processes, decisions, and approaches to leadership that together or individually expand, encourage, enrich, enliven the relationships necessary within a place are just. Those ideas, actions, policies, habits, assumptions, politics, processes, decisions, and approaches to leadership that together or individually discourage, harm, or damage the relationships necessary within a place, are not just.

Service. **Service** is of two kinds, both equally important and critical to the life of a place. First, service is meeting the immediate needs of persons. The hungry must be fed, the homeless sheltered, the ill comforted, the troubled eased, the stranger welcomed. Working in food pantries, serving as a tutor in the public schools, care giving for a sick and aging relative or neighbor, participation in community clean-up days, making apple butter to raise money for a community group—are all examples of this first aspect of service. Second, **service** is also working for the long-term systemic changes necessary to prevent hunger, homelessness, abuse, lack of healthcare, and a host of other issues; it is not enough to address the immediate needs of persons in trouble, we must work to change the conditions that have resulted in the troubles. Public policy, public service, civic leadership, mobilizing for social change, and community organizing are all aspects of this second aspect of service; collaboratively working from a variety of perspectives to identify the root causes of the troubles around us and then working to address those root causes. Regardless of the focus of service, in all of its various forms, service has a number of common elements. Central to this is that service is not charity. **Service** examines critically the ways that power is made, shared or not shared, exercised, and defined. **Service** questions power; charity does not. **Service** broadens our vision, our self-understanding, and our understanding of the larger issues at work in a place. **Service** makes that critical step from victim blaming, interpreting individual and group troubles as the results of their own choosing to

the larger public issues and questions—identifying systemic, root causes. Charity does not. We learn from **service**. **Service** is intricately and inextricably educational; charity is not. **Service** involves empathy, sympathy, and critical self-examination, values clarification, and ethical thinking. Charity does not. **Service** looks for a different ordering of relationships; charity does not. **Service** is a reciprocal relationship, making co-educators and co-learners of us all—as we receive and learn from those whom we seek to serve; charity is not reciprocal. **Service** expands and builds **social capital**; charity limits and destroys social capital. Service experiences expand the understanding of what it means to be a citizen and at the same time is a full expression of citizenship in a place.

Citizenship. Among the Appalachian Center’s outcomes and goals, the teaching of citizenship and the providing of civic skills are central. **Citizenship** is less one’s legal status in a state or nation, and more closely related to what Wendell Berry describes as membership in a place. **Citizenship** entails full participation in and responsibility toward that range of relationships that constitute a place’s life, involving the natural environment, human community, the history of that place from the foundations of the earth, and the long-term future of a place. Empathy, sympathy, service in both of its aspects, are components of **citizenship**. In some times and places, for some persons, this **citizenship** involves struggles with global entities bent on acquiring a place’s resources. For other times and places, for other persons, this **citizenship** can mean a pound cake offered to a grieving neighbor. Both are expressions of a membership that is more than legal status. Just as citizenship in a place involves stewardship of the natural environment, honoring of the place’s long history and cultural heritage, empathy with others, service, and learning, citizenship, membership, also means to acquire those skills and tools to deal creatively with conflict, building from it for the common good.

Sustainability. The Appalachian Center is committed to the precept that it is the abiding obligation of the citizens of place, the membership of a place, to work collaboratively and effectively to build a durable, inhabitable, and democratic future in their place. As a part of a place’s membership, a citizen is responsible for its care and durability, but also working to ensure that it is a safe, healthy, and good place for all people, both now and long years in the future. **Sustainability** is much more than an environmental concern; like place itself, **sustainability** is concerned with the prolonged and enduring intersection of all the elements of a place. As an example, **sustainability** implies that economic development is more than job creation or road building. To be **sustainable**, durable, economic development must also involve substantive support for public education, healthcare for all persons, and meaningful investment in those policies and infrastructures that will enhance the quality of life for all the people of a place. All of this must be done with a commitment to not only stopping the destruction the place’s environment preserving it for the future, but also enhancing and strengthening the place’s natural environment, becoming a positive creative force in the long, long history of the place. Informing this understanding of the convergence of citizenship, membership, and **sustainability** is the old Kenyan proverb, calling persons to care for the earth not because our parents gave it to us, but because the children have loaned it to us.

Honesty. This vision for citizen education and place-based education and service requires of its practitioners a rare and courageous **honesty**. Because all places, all learning, all service, and all citizenship is fundamentally relational, mutual **honesty** is essential if the relationships are to be enduring and transformative. The Appalachian Center is committed the practicing of an **honest** citizenship, lived out in the **honesty** of daily relationships with students, the people of the places with which there are partnerships, that wider and expanding circle of people around the globe, and within its staff. Moreover, the Center endeavors, by both precept and example, to teach that honesty, making clear that honesty is the first step for a true and vital membership in a place.