

Engaging the Community

Newbern, Virginia

Students in Dr. Mary LaLone's Fall 2015 SC-SOCY 486 class are learning and practicing Community-Based Research (CBR) principles and methods as they work collaboratively with the Wilderness Road Regional Museum (WRRM) in Newbern, VA.

The RU-WRRM partnership was formed in 2012 by **Dr. LaLone** and **Dr. Carolyn Mathews**, President of the New River Historical Society and RU professor, to provide opportunities for RU students to engage in service-learning and apply CBR skills as they assist in museum development activities. In Spring 2013, the Sociology Department and Scholar-Citizen Initiative jointly sponsored the first SC-SOCY 486 "Engaging the Community" class. Students in that first class worked collaboratively with the museum to develop a four-phase development plan and prepare a consulting report with initial ideas for funding opportunities, educational programs, archival preservation, and media, promotion and advertising. Many of the ideas were developed further through RU internships and independent study projects over the next two years.



Now, three years later, students in the Fall 2015 SC-SOCY "Engaging the Community" class are involved in the next stage of the partnership. In CBR style, the community partner identified a topic of concern that it asked the RU class to address as a CBR consulting team. This year's topic is "Involving the Community in the Museum." The class goal is to help the museum identify its community constituents, and to develop museum outreach tools and ideas that the museum might use to enhance its interaction with the community. Eight students form the

class research team – **Lauren Bailey, Bianca Billings, Catherine Costello, Victoria Curtis, Stephanie Prusa, Allanah Rocha, Blake, Sholes, and Rolphine Vales** – with Drs. LaLone and Mathews serving as the co-directors, and RU alumna **Kasey Campbell** (who now works for the WRRM) serving as a museum facilitator.

After learning CBR principles in the classroom setting, the team set to work to apply their training during an all-day collaborative brainstorming session with museum volunteers and historical society members. Over the next weeks they conducted investigative research on museum "best practices" for community outreach, and developed a survey for the museum to use to gain community input from festival participants during this year's Newbern Fall Festival. They are working to define the museum's community, create educational events, broaden the museum's reach through various media outlets, expand volunteer programs, identify fundraising and grant opportunities, and develop recommendations for museum interpretation of African-American experiences. Their results and recommendations will be written as a formal consulting report, which they will deliver to the museum on December 14, 2015 during a presentation on their work for the New River Historical Society's Board of Directors and museum volunteers. The class recently gave a presentation on its community-based work for the RU Scholar-Citizen Symposium on October 23, 2015.