From Boom to Bust: Comparing Changes in Appalachian and Midwest Resource Systems

Instructors
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Brief Description of the Travel Learning Program
What happens when commodity markets decline? Tobacco production in the U.S., specifically in Appalachia, has decreased significantly since the 1980s. How have farmers and stakeholders in Appalachia adapted to the loss of a major market? Are there lessons to be learned as the Midwest grapples with the volatilities of the corn and soybean markets? This course will examine these complex natural resource, agriculture, and food systems using an interdisciplinary, systems-based approach designed to understand diverse perspectives in these seemingly different, yet similar agricultural landscapes. This course will not only draw from the diverse perspectives of the people and places during travel, but also build on the diversity of student participants in the course.

This 2-credit course will be offered in spring 2021. Students will participate in 1-credit pre-departure classes designed to introduce topical readings (e.g., Tobacco Harvest: An Elegy, Wendell Berry; Land Ethic, Aldo Leopold; etc.), visit sites and stakeholders in Iowa, and prepare students for observing, questioning, and reflecting about Appalachian and Midwest resource systems. Students will travel to Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina from May 10th-21st to experience Appalachian resource systems, and will engage with site visits, local stakeholders, readings, discussions, and reflections to understand similarities and differences associate with these systems.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)
- Explain the physical and biological interactions within ecosystems including the impacts of human activities in Iowa and Southern Appalachian states;
- Compare and describe farmers’ demographics (including communities of color, women, and underrepresented socioeconomic classes), norms, and values, and their impacts on natural resource, agriculture, and food systems in Iowa and Southern Appalachian states;
- Discuss the ethics of support systems for different stakeholders in the U.S. economic system;
- Observe and question natural resource, agriculture, and food systems’ stakeholders to identify and understand their diverse and multicultural perspectives in Iowa and Southern Appalachian states;
- Practice habits of open mindedness, empathy, and reflection, including participating in new areas of learning outside of the traditional classroom;
- Practice professional and innovative communication through the use of verbal and written communication and reflection (e.g., podcasts, blog posts, social media use, etc.).