

Sustainable Rural Communities Initiative Learning from Alesa’s Youth



Alesa High School students and teacher Patsy Jones visit OSU. From left to right: Zeb Olsen, Michael Dimock, Patsy Jones, Sam Mann, Peter Little, Joan Gross, Lindsey Schweich, Josh Carlson, Lauren Dimock.

By Peter Little and Sarah Cunningham

OSU’s Sustainable Rural Communities Initiative provides an innovative, rural collaboration opportunity to students of all ages. With an interest in creating a new generation of community leaders and professionals, applied anthropologists in the Department of Anthropology are building partnerships with youth—the newest generation of leaders in any community.

Acting as a liaison between the Department of Anthropology and the Alesa High School, Peter Little, a PhD student in Applied Anthropology, began visiting Alesa in 2007. He worked with students there to explore their perspectives on Alesa, its food system, and their interest in being part of a collaborative ethnographic research team. With the guidance and support of Patsy Jones, Alesa High School English teacher, Alesa students helped focus the project’s study areas, which include local food traditions and recipes, hunting and fishing traditions, and economic development. The results of the students’ research will be published in *The Kingfisher*, a literary project published by Alesa’s 9th and 11th grade English students.

The partnership expanded in 2008 when graduate students taking an Ethnographic Research Methods course taught by Joan Gross, Professor of Anthropology, began to collaborate with Alesa’s high-school student researchers. OSU graduate students led two workshops (one in Alesa and one at OSU) for the high-school students. The workshops focused on ethnographic methods such as participant observation, interviewing, note-taking, transcription, coding, and theme mapping. According to Little, “Each rural community, no matter how much their ‘ruralness’ connects them, is made up of different people, different stakeholders, different youth, different circumstances, struggles, and opportunities. Ethnography is well suited to explore research partnerships focusing on local culture, youth culture, and youth involvement in social-scientific research.”

Together, graduate and high school students practiced ethnographic skills in Alesa. Reflecting on the partnership, one high school student said, “It has broadened my view of different stuff that is out there, like anthropology. Being a part of it is really cool.” Both Little and Sarah Cunningham, the newest PhD student in Applied Anthropology, feel that the partnership is as much about building lasting student-to-student relationships as it is about finding more efficacious and locally-driven approaches to rural community research.

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Letter from the Director

The year 2008 marks the seventh anniversary of the creation of the OSU Rural Studies Program (RSP). Founded by Emery Castle in 2001, RSP has become one of the largest multi-disciplinary concentrations of university faculty in the county focused on the viability of rural communities. Since 2005, the Sustainable Rural Communities Initiative has provided the financial foundation for building a national center of excellence in Rural Studies.

During the past year, the OSU Rural Studies Program built on its unique experiential courses in rural places and created several new courses including an Ethnographic Field School that focused on a remote, rural county. RSP faculty and students have secured external funding to expand their research on issues of concern in rural Oregon (for example land use, food systems, housing, migration, poverty, and food insecurity). With the support of the Ford Family Foundation, RSP faculty and students developed community indicators for tracking the progress of rural communities toward increased social and economic vitality and environmental sustainability.

During the coming year, RSP will focus on three major initiatives. First, we will continue to develop a Long Term Community Research program, an interdisciplinary panel study of rural community dynamics. As a step in the development of this project, RSP faculty are examining the responses of rural counties to changes in Federal shared-revenue policy related to reduced timber harvests on Federal land. Second, in collaboration with the OSU Library, we will develop the Rural Community Explorer, a web-based portal and archive that will allow community residents and leaders to access economic, social, cultural and environmental information specific to their communities. The Explorer will also archive community data for community use. Finally, we will work with internal and external stakeholders to create an institute of rural community studies at OSU that can develop partnerships with rural communities and organizations in Oregon and elsewhere to strengthen the economic and social vitality of these places.

This issue of the newsletter highlights new research partnerships with rural Oregon communities and new educational opportunities in rural studies. It also introduces some of the Rural Studies Program faculty whose work makes the RSP vital and relevant.

Bruce Weber, Director

Oregon State University Rural Studies Program

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Program Coordinator: Rich Sandler



The Rural Studies Program at Oregon State University has developed a statewide, multi-disciplinary program supported by the *Sustainable Rural Communities Initiative*. It includes five colleges and the Extension Service in efforts to develop a new and unique model of University engagement with rural communities. This model involves partners from other universities, governments, and the nonprofit sector in creating new educational opportunities, applied and fundamental research, and outreach that address the needs of rural communities.

Except where noted, this newsletter was written and edited by Carly Johnson and Rich Sandler.

Fall 2008 Course Opportunity

Rural Anthropology with Practicums in Rural Oregon

This fall the OSU Anthropology Department will offer a six-credit, experiential-learning course in Rural Anthropology for graduate and undergraduate students (ANTH 499/599). The course, team-taught by Nancy Rosenberger and Joan Gross, will consist of real-world research in two rural communities and academic reflection on this experience through reading, analysis, discussion, and writing during fall term. The rural practicum will involve OSU students working with the Oregon communities of Lakeview and Alsea. From September 21-27 for undergrad students and from September 14-27 for graduate students, OSU students will live with families in “homestays” in Lakeview, located in south central Oregon. In addition to discussions with civic leaders, students will use ethnographic techniques such as formal and informal interviewing, participant observation, and historical archive research to develop knowledge about one particular aspect of the community. Topics will build on the wealth of material that was collected during the summer of 2007 in Lakeview.

The real-world research will continue during the fall term as the students use field trips to meet with civic leaders from Alsea, Oregon, and to continue a project with Alsea high school students started last year concerning the assets of this rural community. (See cover story for more on Alsea partnership) Through the classroom segment of Rural Anthropology, the significance of all this material will become clearer as students locate their on-the-ground knowledge in the framework of wider reading on rural communities, domestic and international, in the anthropological literature. Students will analyze their data, write it up and present their findings. Results will be delivered back to both communities in the form of posters and achievable material for local libraries.

This is the second year of experiential learning in Lakeview for Anthropology Professors Gross and Rosenberger. Last summer, with a focus on food in rural communities, students practiced participant observation while herding cows, touring the organic gardens of the Lake County prison, barbecuing, and visiting the local watering holes. They honed their interviewing skills with ranchers, shop keepers, newcomers, old timers, pastors, and quilters. At the end of the summer, some students returned to Lakeview to present their findings about various aspects of the Lakeview food system including the role of ranchers, a growing Latino population, restaurants, and the food pantry. This year students in Lakeview will continue research on the food system; the quality of life for the young, elders, Hispanics, and low-income people; and the variant lifestyles of newcomers, government workers, and ranchers.

In addition to tuition, students pay a fee (\$150 for undergraduate students and \$350 for graduate students – scholarships possible) which helps to defray the costs of lodging, meals, and transportation. Please contact Nancy Rosenberger (rosenberger@oregonstate.edu) or Joan Gross (jgross@oregonstate.edu) in the Anthropology Department at Oregon State University for more information.



OSU to Team with Wallowa Resources in Rural Sustainability Partnership

By Mark Floyd

The Rural Studies Program at Oregon State University and the nonprofit group, Wallowa Resources, have teamed up to provide education, research, and outreach activities to Wallowa County. Their goal is to increase the well-being of rural communities in Oregon.

“Rural communities are facing significant challenges, not only economically, but socially, culturally and environmentally,” said Bruce Weber, professor of agricultural and resource economics at OSU and director of the university’s Rural Studies Program. “Though our focus with this partnership is on Wallowa County, the results will have applications and benefits across rural Oregon – and beyond.”

OSU graduate students and faculty will join forces with Wallowa Resources to identify the needs of Wallowa County. Utilizing its local contacts, Wallowa Resources will organize citizen groups that will help identify and refine sustainability indicators, and collect local data. To help keep the public notified, OSU faculty and students will develop a web-based information portal.

“Our history of collaborating with various colleges and faculties at OSU has been productive and this is another major step forward,” Nils Christoffersen, director of Wallowa Resources, said of the partnership. “It is particularly important as it focuses our collaboration on issues important

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New Books from Rural Studies Faculty

Teaching Oregon Native Languages

- Joan Gross, editor



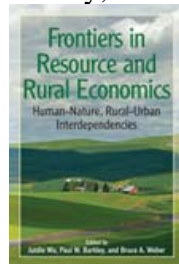
This book tells the story of perseverance and survival against unbelievable odds, using the words of today's speakers and learners of Oregon's languages. Interviews with 52 native speakers provide valuable insights into how languages are lost and how a linguistic heritage can be brought to life.

Teaching Oregon Native Languages discusses the role of state and federal language policies, explores how archival collections can be used in language revitalization, and describes strategies for creating a successful teaching environment. A timely and necessary resource, it will educate all readers about the important efforts underway to revitalize Oregon's first languages.

Source: Oregon State University Press

Frontiers in Resource and Rural Economics

- JunJie Wu, Paul W. Barkley, and Bruce A. Weber, editors



Most land in the United States is in rural areas, as are the sources of most of its fresh water and almost all its other natural resources. One of the first books to approach resource economics and rural studies as fundamentally interconnected areas of study, *Frontiers in Resource and Rural Economics* integrates the work of 18 leading scholars in resource economics, rural economics, rural sociology and political science in order to focus on two complex interdependencies - one pertaining to natural resources and human welfare, the other to urban and rural communities and their economies.

The book reviews the past 50 years of scholarship in both natural resource and rural economics. It contrasts their different intellectual and practical approaches and considers how they might be refocused in light of pressing demands on human and natural systems. It then proposes a "new rural economics" that acknowledges the full range of human-ecosystem and urban-rural interdependencies. It explores the relationship between natural resources and economic growth, and considers the prospects for amenity-driven growth that would benefit both new and traditional inhabitants of rural areas. Later chapters explore the politics of place, spatial economics, strategies for reducing rural poverty, and prospects for linking rural and environmental governance. Throughout, the book emphasizes innovative research methods that integrate natural resource, environmental, and rural economics

Source: RFF Press

OSU to Team with Wallowa Resources

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to Wallowa County, including demographic transition and its impact on land use and collaborative resource management strategies, as well as the education and training provided to our youth.

"It also seeks to build additional local capacity for strategic planning and leadership in response to dramatic economic, social and political changes affecting rural communities in Oregon," he added.

Education and outreach activities are two areas that OSU and Wallowa Resources share a partnership. For the past two years, they have combined to offer a three-credit graduate course, Communities and Natural Resources, which explores relationships between natural resources and community well-being in rural Oregon. Future courses and workshops will be designed to engage university students and the general public.

"The changes affecting rural communities are enormous and include changing demographics, a decline in the natural resource base, a suite of cultural and social issues and, of course, the looming loss of federal timber payments," Weber said. "But there are reasons for optimism and paths that local communities can choose to help themselves become sustainable in every sense of the word. Our goal with this partnership is to help them identify those paths."

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RSP Initiates Long Term Community Research Program

A unifying and cutting-edge aspect of the Rural Studies Program is the development of a Long Term Community Research (LTCR) program at Oregon State University. Modeled loosely on the Long Term Ecological Research program, the LTCR will be an interdisciplinary panel study of rural community dynamics that combines 1) long-term tracking and modeling of community social, economic, environmental and institutional indicators; 2) long-term geospatial monitoring of land use, demographic, and economic change; and 3) information from qualitative research and formal interviews of community members that explores both economic and social community dynamics and the real-world impacts of public policy changes.

The LTCR program will be developed over the next three years. The Changing Federal County Payments Policy and Rural Oregon Counties: Impacts and Options project (see *Assessing the Impacts of Federal Land Payments*, p. 7) is the initial phase of the LTCR program. In this project, researchers are focusing on the impacts of the reduction in Federal payments to counties on local services, citizens, and community well-being in four Oregon communities.

As part of the Long Term Community Research project, Rural Studies faculty Brent Steel, Department of Political Science, and Denise Lach, Department of Sociology, will examine the implications and impacts of climate change in rural communities. The project will also include a comparative study of rural communities and climate change in Eastern Europe. The international component builds on a previous National Academies of Science International Research Experience for Undergraduates (INTREU) grant examining natural resource management and environmental policy in Bulgaria.

Rural Studies Program Joins the International Comparative Rural Policy Studies Consortium

Last year, the OSU Rural Studies Program became a member of the International Comparative Rural Policy Studies Consortium (ICRPS). ICRPS brings together Masters and PhD students, faculty and government officials, with an aim to provide a unique opportunity to examine and compare the role of rural development policy in different cultural, political, and administrative contexts in Europe and the Americas. The program, which is designed to augment graduate education, focuses on how rural development policy is formulated, delivered, and assessed at local, regional, national, and trans-national levels.



OSU graduate students Emily Kearney and Melissa Braybrooks attended the 2007 International Comparative Rural Studies Consortium in Spain.

With support from OSU's Master in Public Policy (MPP) program, Melissa Braybrooks and Emily Kearney attended the 2007 ICRPS summer course in Solsona, Spain. During the two-week course, Braybrooks and Kearney attended daily lectures from a variety of policy professionals, participated in on-site visits with local stakeholders engaged in different spheres of rural policy, and worked in internationally diverse groups to conduct a holistic development plan for a particular rural region. Each summer course is attended by new and returning students. Braybrooks, a first-year student, said that seeing presentations from second-year students was extremely beneficial. "Not only did it provide ideas of how to present and formulate my areas of interest, but the feedback session really enabled me to envision where my current framework had holes or was missing major conceptualizations of the larger picture."

This summer the course will be hosted by the University of Missouri-Columbia from July 5th to July 19th. Students will examine various approaches to rural policy including federalism and the role of local government, agricultural policy, environmental and conservation policy, and economic development policy. Fifteen faculty members from nine universities will be facilitating the summer course including Bruce Weber and Brent Steel from OSU.

New SRC Initiative Faculty on Campus

The Sustainable Rural Communities Initiative welcomed several new faculty members to Oregon State University in 2006. The Initiative, which is funded by the Provost's Office, brings together researchers from a variety of disciplines including Monica Fisher from the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Lena Etuk from the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences.



Monica Fisher – From Rural Malawi to Rural Oregon

Monica Fisher completed her Ph.D. in agricultural economics from Purdue University in 2002, but she is no stranger to OSU. She received a MA in agricultural economics here in 1996 and completed her post-doc work with Bruce Weber in the Rural Poverty Research Center from 2003 to 2005. Fisher's research focuses on economic development, rural poverty, and tropical deforestation.

As a Fulbright scholar, Fisher interviewed residents of farm families in Malawi from 1999 to 2000. Fisher recently received a grant from the National Science Foundation Human and Social Dynamics Program, which will allow her to further her research in Malawi. *The Co-Production of Land Use and Livelihood Change in Rural Malawi* is an interdisciplinary research project that integrates household surveys, economic household models, geographic information systems, and historical analysis to analyze the concept of co-production as a feature of livelihood and land use systems in southern Malawi. Fisher is also working on a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project, *Natural Capital and Poverty Alleviation*, which will focus on Malawi and Uganda.

In the US, Fisher is working on an *Education, Migration, and Poverty* project with Bruce Weber. The project, which is funded by the Economic Research Service, explores the role of education and labor markets in outmigration of rural adults to urban areas and how education and migration affect eventual poverty status.



Lena Etuk – Exploring Rural Oregon

Lena Etuk (MS, University of Wisconsin) joined the Sustainable Rural Communities Initiative/Rural Studies Program as a Social Demographer in OSU's Extension Family & Community Development Program in the summer of 2006. As an applied social demographer, Etuk analyzes population statistics and translates them into meaningful information that can be readily used by various audiences.

Last year, Etuk worked with Hannah Gosnell (Department of Geosciences) and two graduate students to design and offer a course to a class of Chiloquin High School seniors. Students were introduced to geographic and demographic tools for analysis, and applied these tools to explore the concept of sustainability by assessing the impacts of dam removal in their community. That same year, Etuk worked with Bruce Weber (Director of the Rural Studies Program) and faculty at the OSU Valley Library to secure funding from the Ford Family Foundation to partner and develop the Oregon Rural Communities Explorer (RCE) using Library technologies and existing Oregon Explorer frameworks.

When this RCE portal is launched at the end of July this year, it will provide access to economic, social, and environmental information for rural communities across Oregon. The RCE will offer county- and community-specific data, stories about Oregon's rural communities, a visual model of community vitality, and archived research about rural places and issues, among other resources. The portal is uniquely designed to provide a forum for all types of rural community leaders to learn about, explore, and engage with their own and other rural communities across the state.

Etuk will continue developing the Oregon Rural Communities Explorer in 2008. She will also work with three rural communities in Oregon to make the RCE a more community-based and community-relevant tool for community action. "The portal will transform from simply providing information collected by agencies external to rural Oregon to a venue that also provides information collected by rural Oregonians related to issues important to them," says Etuk. The plethora of data housed on the RCE should contribute valuable information to organizations, agencies, and community members serving rural communities.

Assessing the Impact of Reduced Federal Land Payments

Since 2000, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (Public Law 106-393) has helped counties make ends meet by offsetting the effects of decreased revenues from declining timber harvests on Federal lands. However, in 2006 Congress failed to renew the Act, which means Oregon governments are struggling with serious budgetary shortfalls in 2007-2008.

In 2007, the Rural Studies Program began an 18-month project, *Changing Federal County Payments Policy and Rural Oregon Counties: Impacts and Options*, to analyze the impacts of the reduced Federal land payments. Researchers are examining how this lost revenue impacts citizens, businesses, institutions (e.g., schools), and services provided by Oregon county government. Researchers are examining several county government options for managing these impacts as well as state and federal government options for reducing the negative impacts. The study is funded by the Ford Family Foundation, the Association of Oregon Counties, and the Eastern Oregon Rural Alliance.

During the fall of 2007, researchers established a baseline description of the historical relationships between the Federal Government and local governments in Oregon from 1908-2007. During winter and spring of 2008, RSP is surveying each of the 36 Oregon counties to determine what steps they may have taken to prepare for the termination of the Secure Rural Schools Act (SRS) allocations and what alternative revenue enhancement and spending reduction options they are considering. Using this information, faculty and students will assess the impacts of several alternative scenarios for local fiscal responses and federal payment policies. Two dimensions of each scenario will be analyzed: fiscal impact on county revenues and services and the economic impact on county economies.

This summer researchers will compare how particular policies work in four Oregon counties: Lane and Josephine in Western Oregon, and Wallowa and Grant east of the Cascades. In a collaborative effort, county residents, local business owners, department managers, and OSU faculty and students will learn about the selected counties, federal land management policies, and how those policies play out.

Finally, in the fall of 2008, a panel of county leaders will meet with Rural Studies Program faculty to discuss how the selected policies are affecting life and work in their counties. This panel's goal will be to identify possible ways of improving the positive impact – or reduce the negative impact – of policy on counties.

“I don't believe it is widely understood how significant federal timber payments are to Oregon counties or the implications for those of us who live in counties that are not heavily dependent on these payments,” says Bruce Weber, co-PI on the project. For the six counties in southwest Oregon, SRS payments represent over half of their county general fund. For almost half of all counties, SRS payments equal 30 percent or more of county road funds. Because the state and counties share the financing for many important services, such as public safety and health, the loss of federal payments to counties may lead to reallocation of the state budget and reductions in these and other public services. Weber hopes this project will clarify both the impacts of the federal funding decision on Oregonians and the options of federal, state, and local governments for dealing with the impacts.

Sustainable Rural Communities Initiative Learning from Alsea's Youth

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Most importantly, the partnership empowers youth through training and involves them in participatory-action research and reciprocal knowledge sharing. For Cunningham, “Involving youth in rural community research can foster a sense of community ownership among youth and encourage sustainable, positive community outcomes.”

Scholars of university-community partnerships have addressed problems of over-romanticizing these partnerships. Jones, who was skeptical about the project's feasibility at first, said, “I think it is so valuable to see the rural high school kids collaborating with the grad students. The grads have been so respectful of the teens, showing that they appreciate their insights into the culture and community. I know this helps the teens see themselves as capable of fitting into that university student role.”

OSU's Anthropology Department will continue to work with and learn from rural youth this fall during the Ethnographic Field School in Lakeview, Oregon. To find out more about this and other rural partnerships, contact Joan Gross (jgross@oregonstate.edu) or Nancy Rosenberger (nrosenberger@oregonstate.edu) in the Anthropology Department at Oregon State University.



Alsea students working hard (and goofing off) at the second ethnographic workshop, held at the Department of Anthropology in February 2008.

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Master of Public Policy
Rural Policy Concentration

This program offers interdisciplinary graduate education in new and innovative approaches to policy analysis and economic development in rural communities. Students are prepared for leadership or professional work in rural communities through exposure to rural economic and social issues and policy options. The program includes courses from Political Science, Sociology, Economics, and Agricultural and Resource Economics. It is one of the first rural policy concentrations in the United States.

For more information, contact Brent Steel, MPP
Director at (541) 737-2811 or
bsteel@oregonstate.edu.

MA/Ph.D. Program
in Applied Anthropology

This program of study trains anthropologists to work closely with local communities as they interface with key societal institutions domestically and internationally. Educated to analyze and negotiate problems from multiple perspectives, graduates will advocate for and with communities and aid institutions in developing actions that are sensitive to the changing human and natural environment.

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