

APPALACHIAN CENTER AND APPALACHIAN STUDIES PROGRAM

IT ALL STARTS HERE

Message from the Directors

All,

Summer is here, and we hope you are taking some time to rest, relax and enjoy your favorite seasonal activities. Jennifer could eat her weight in fresh watermelon, and Kathryn hopes to make a few trips to the lake before the season ends.

Things remain busy at the Appalachian Center as we prepare for our 50th anniversary celebration in 2027. We will share more details in our August newsletter, but for now, know that we have some exciting plans in the works.

If you would like to be involved in planning, fundraising or helping execute anniversary events, please contact us. We would be happy to put you to work.

Happy summer!

Jennifer and Kathryn

Jennifer Cramer, Ph.D.
Appalachian Studies Program Director

Kathryn Engle, Ph.D.
Appalachian Center Director

EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thank you to all who participated in "[Shifting Power in Rural America: Conversations on Just Transitions](#)."

A heartfelt thank you from the Appalachian Center to everyone who attended, participated in and supported the April event, "Shifting Power in Rural America: Conversations on Just Transitions." The event was a tremendous success, featuring thoughtful discussion and meaningful engagement.

In addition to our guest panelists, including Loka Ashwood, John Gaventa, Gabe Schwartzman, Shaunna Scott and Kathryn Engle, we extend special thanks to the UK Food Connection for

creating a beautiful post-panel reception featuring an exceptional selection of locally sourced foods from across the Appalachian region.

Additionally, this event was made possible with support from the [John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation](#), as part of the [Defying Boundaries: MacArthur Fellows at 45](#) and co-sponsored by the UK Appalachian Center and Appalachian Studies Program, Graduate Appalachian Research Community, Department of Sociology, Department of Geography, Committee on Social Theory, the Food Connection, Kentucky Climate Consortium and the Tracy Farmer Institute for Sustainability and the Environment.

For more information about the topics discussed and books referenced at the panel, check out the [event page linked here](#).



Panelists (from left to right): John Gaventa, Gabe Schwartzman, Loka Ashwood, Shaunna Scott and Kathryn Engle.



Appalachian Center Director Kathryn Engle and Sociology Professor emeritus Shaunna Scott signing their co-edited volume: "Toward Just Transitions: Visions for Regenerative Communities in Appalachia."



An array of foods sourced and prepared by The Food Connection. Some of the foods served included soup beans with chow chow, curry chicken salad, chickpea salad, hoe cakes, hominy, salads and dressings with locally sourced ingredients and sorghum cookies.

12 Graduate Students Honored with Appalachian Research Awards

In May, the Appalachian Center announced eight recipients of the 2026 [James S. Brown Graduate Student Award for Research on Appalachia](#), and four students received the [Eller and Billings Student Research Award](#).

These graduate students will have the opportunity to present their research throughout the 2026-2027 academic year as part of the Appalachian Center and Appalachian Studies Program's [Sharing Work on Appalachia in Progress \(SWAP\)](#) series. The SWAP series schedule should be available at the beginning of the Fall 2026 semester.

James S. Brown Graduate Student Award for Research:

Nicole Marks, Department of Anthropology in the College of Arts and Sciences: "And the creek don't rise: Disasters, Climate, and Resiliency in Appalachia"

Kelli Lemaster, Department of Teaching and Learning in the College of Education: "A Sense of Place: Place-Based Inquiry in Appalachian Social Studies Classrooms"

Michelle Rutherford, Department of Music Education in the College of Fine Arts: "Teaching pedagogies and strategies in middle and high school bluegrass music ensembles: A multiple case study of music teacher perspectives in Appalachia"

Julianne Bowling, Department of Psychology in the College of Arts and Sciences: "A Self-Determination Theory Perspective on Academic Disparities in Central Appalachia"

Morgan Gilbert, Department of Arts Administration in the College of Fine Arts: “Contemporary Ancestors: Leadership Evolution and Cultural Capital in Berea College’s Fireside Weaving Student Craft Weaving Program”

Ally Moseley, UK College of Social Work: “Rainbow Roads Aren’t Just for Mario Kart: Visibility, Belonging, and Queer Voices in Kentucky’s SAFE ROADS Debate”

Arshiya Jeelani, Department of History in the College of Arts and Sciences: “Mary Jane in the Mountains: Marijuana Production and Eradication in Eastern Kentucky, 1980-2002”

Courtney Martin, Department of Kinesiology and Health Promotion in the College of Education: “Understanding How Youth Think About Cancer: A Cross-Sectional Analysis Exploring Cancer Knowledge and Risk Perceptions among High School Students in Rural Appalachia”

For additional information about the James S. Brown Award, [click on this link here](#).

UK Appalachian Center Eller and Billings Student Research Award:

Tania Rojas Carbajal, Department of Biology in the College of Arts and Sciences: “Spatiotemporal Effects of Surface Coal Mining on Bird Occupancy in Appalachia”

Holden Dillman, College of Social Work: “We Are Here: National and Appalachian Accounts of Youth-to-Adulthood Mental Health and Well-Being Among Sexual and Gender Minority Emerging and Early Adults”

Tara Littlefield, Department of Forestry and Natural Resources in the Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment: “Linking Population Genetics, Demography, and Restoration to Guide Translocation and Recovery of the White Fringeless Orchid (*Platanthera integrilabia*) in the Appalachian Region”

Emelia Harris, Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences in the College of Arts and Sciences: “Relationships Between Water Quality Indicators and Flooding in Southeastern Kentucky”

For additional information about the Eller and Billings Award, [click on this link here](#).

An article about the 2026 graduate student awardees also appeared in the May 8, 2026 edition of UKNow which can be found at [this link](#).



Save the Date - Appalachian Center and Appalachian Studies Program Fall Open House

Join us at the Appalachian Center Thursday, September 10 from 4:00-5:30 PM ET to kick off the Fall 2026 semester with food and games. More information coming soon.

[Click here for more information and to check for event updates.](#)

APP Faculty Affiliates in the News

Lauren Cagle, associate professor in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric and Digital Studies and director of the Tracy Farmer Institute for Sustainability & the Environment, is quoted in the Lane Report on the [first cohort of Tracy Farmer Scholars](#).

Frank X Walker, professor in the Department of English, was named 2026-2027 College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor. UK College of Arts and Sciences Dean Ana Franco Watkins shared that "Over nearly three decades, Professor Walker has built an extraordinary record of creative achievement. He has published 13 collections of poetry, along with two anthologies and a children's book, with presses ranging from the University Press of Kentucky to Liveright/W.W. Norton. His most recent collection, *Load in Nine Times*, received the PEN/Voelcker Award for a Poetry Collection and an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Poetry Collection. His influence extends beyond his own publications: he created the term "Affrilachia," and he co-founded the Affrilachian Poets, helping to redefine how the region is understood and represented.

Professor Walker is also widely admired as a teacher and mentor. In classrooms ranging from UK Core courses to advanced workshops, he invites students into the craft of language with generosity, high expectations and deep respect for their voices. Students consistently describe him as approachable, encouraging and deeply attentive to their work, and his impact extends well beyond the classroom through mentoring and creative guidance across many stages of development.

His leadership and service have strengthened the University in meaningful ways. He has served as Director of the MFA in Creative Writing, directed African American & Africana Studies at UK, and founded and edited *PLUCK! The Journal of Affrilachian Arts & Culture*.

Professor Walker's Distinguished Professor lecture will take place in spring 2027."

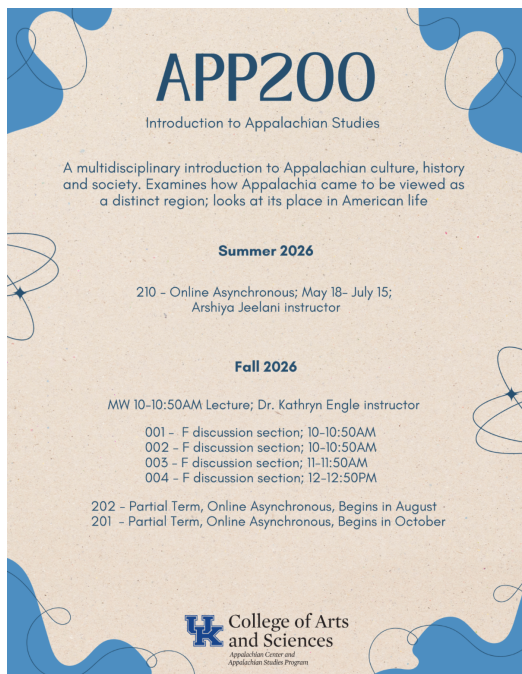
Nathan Vanderford, director of the Appalachian Career Training in Oncology Program and associate professor in the Department of Toxicology and Cancer Biology, was named as a **Chellgren Endowed Professor** for a three-year (2026-2029) appointment. Additionally, Nathan was elected to serve as the **Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees** for a three-year term effective July 1, 2026.

Zada Komara, Lewis Honors College Senior Lecturer, was **honored with the Travis Stimeling Early Career Award for Excellence in Teaching** Appalachian Studies and appointment to the Kentucky Oral History Commission.

Jennifer Cramer, Appalachian Studies Program Director and Professor in the Department of Linguistics, is quoted in The Washington Post article, "**Are regional accents dyin'? Not on Tik Tawk**". Jennifer also appeared on the NPR show "**AirTalk with Larry Mantle**" on **LAist** radio in Los Angeles, talking more about regional dialects on the internet.

Fall 2026 APP Courses

Interested in taking a course in Appalachian Studies? There are several sections of APP 200 for you to choose from this Fall.



Fall 2026 APP 200 Sections include:

MW 10-10:50 AM Lecture (instructor: Dr. Kathryn Engle)

001 - F discussion section 10-10:50 AM
 002 - F discussion section 10-10:50 AM
 003 - F discussion section 11-11:50 AM
 004 - F discussion section 12-12:50 PM

202 - partial term online asynchronous, begins in August
 201 - partial term online asynchronous, begins in October

If you are interested in learning more about an undergraduate minor or certificate or a graduate certificate in Appalachian Studies, go to the Appalachian Studies Program "Academics" webpage [linked here](#). A list of Summer and Fall 2026 courses that may be applied toward the minor/certificates may be found [linked here](#).

CHECK THIS OUT

[AppalTRUST Scholars Program - Now Accepting Applications](#)

Appalachian Center to Celebrate 50 Years



Founded in 1977 with a Rockefeller Foundation grant, the [University of Kentucky Appalachian Center](#) supports the university's land-grant mission by fostering community-university partnerships in research, learning and engagement in Appalachia.

Check out future newsletters and the [UK Appalachian Center and Appalachian Studies website](#) for details about the Spring 2027 event marking the center's 50th anniversary.

CONTACT US



For general questions or inquiries, call us:
859-257-4852

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Make an Impact

Your gift helps us continue to provide transformative experiences for today's Appalachian Center and Appalachian Studies Program students.

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