The Appalachian Cluster
Ferrum College

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Appalachian Cluster? It is a group of classes in the fall semester that examines modernization in Appalachia from several points of view: English, sociology, and science. Each student in the cluster takes all the classes so that faculty and students form a unique learning community.

Suppose I like the learning community idea but don’t really want to spend a whole semester studying Appalachia? You will learn much about Appalachia, but this is not an Appalachian Studies curriculum. Our focus is that of general education in liberal arts core classes, teaching basic concepts of science, sociology, and English; learning about the Appalachian region is a tool for getting there. The region is close at hand and rich in opportunity. So we do site visits to locations we have been studying, learning our subject matter partially through original research into areas that have been overlooked or misinterpreted. Experience with film, literature, music, and folklore is woven into the three courses.

If you are in the honors program, one of these courses (your choice) will earn HONORS credit.

Will I be able to fit two or three additional classes into my fall schedule? Yes.

How do these classes help me meet graduation requirements? All of these classes meet liberal arts core requirements. Together that amounts to 10 hours:
SOC 101 or 391—3 hours / ENG 101 or 207—3 hours / ESC 102 & the lab—4 hours

Where do we go on field trips?

We’ve been known to show up at a professor’s house, a train museum, a sustainable farm, and an assembly of fourth graders. The big field trip (a Thursday or Friday through Sunday) takes us to coal and timber country around Hurley, Virginia to visit a community center; then we head to St. Paul, Virginia to work with high school students who are restoring their wetlands. On the way we may go into a coal mine, get a look at mountaintop removal, view some incredible brick sculptures, and visit a town famous for feuds and mine wars, or a town with ties to prehistoric mammals, Native Americans, Civil War battles and environmental disasters. You never know where the Appalachian Cluster may show up!

How can I learn more about the Appalachian Cluster? E-mail Dr. Susan Mead (smead@ferrum.edu), Dr. Carolyn Thomas (cthomas@ferrum.edu), Dr. Delia Heck (dheck@ferrum.edu), or Dr. Tina Hanlon (thanlon@ferrum.edu), the Appalachian Cluster professors, and they will answer your questions. Talk to your advisor. Whatever way you do it, take the opportunity to find out more about this great learning experience. There is nothing else quite like it!

Join the Facebook group called Appalachian Cluster at Ferrum College.