

Mountain Heritage Center
Division of Advancement & External Affairs

Administrative Program Review
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Executive Summary

Founded in 1979, the Mountain Heritage Center (MHC) is charged to collect, interpret, and disseminate knowledge about the southern Appalachian region and its people. We accomplish this through concerts, exhibits (at the MHC and at other institutions), in-school programming, radio broadcasts, regularly published newspaper and magazine features, multiple presences on the web, and through the university's largest public event, our annual Mountain Heritage Day festival.

The Center's mission of regional outreach aligns with and strongly supports the goals set forth in the UNC-Tomorrow report. By building on a long tradition of service, the Mountain Heritage Center is able to offer Western Carolina students additional opportunities for regional engagement and applied learning experiences. The MHC has embraced the Quality Enhancement Plan and will be a valuable resource as the university fully implements this plan to better prepare our students for life after graduation. The Center's commitment to the professionalization of all student workers strengthens the educational experience at WCU. With adequate resources, the MHC is poised to increase these opportunities for engaged learning for students from a wide variety of majors.

Described as a “catalyst for collaboration,” the MHC has long valued its work with partners from across campus and throughout the region—including faculty and students from every college and school on campus and with K-12 schools, private businesses, cultural organizations, and local governments from throughout the region. Through our emphasis on collaboration, the MHC effectively minimizes duplication with other units while maximizing our resources. The MHC’s average cost per visitor is well below that of comparable museums in the southeastern U.S., even as attendance is increasing at our events.

The MHC strives to improve its programs and other offerings. Center staff members are active in professional organizations (at the local, state, and national level), contribute to scholarly literature, and are active within the university and community. The MHC is preparing to pursue accreditation with the American Association of Museums—a rigorous process that would place it in the top 5% of museums

nationally. Accreditation will make the MHC more competitive for external funding and would bring additional recognition to WCU. The MHC has modernized its facilities through the addition of a wireless network, improved lighting, and an improved collection management system.

The MHC also benefits the university in other ways. With our location at the institution's front door, Center staff members are frequently the first to assist visitors to WCU. In recognition of this—and to support university efforts to improve recruitment and retention—the MHC recently installed a new exhibit on the university's history. This exhibit highlights Western Carolina's role within the region as an educational institution and introduces newcomers to the school's ongoing commitment to quality and engaged learning.

Reflections from the process

Overall, this has been a useful exercise for the Mountain Heritage Center. We look forward to the Review team's feedback and are interested in their recommendations regarding how to best fulfill our mission during this time of budgetary austerity. We are also eager to hear their recommendations on improving our traveling exhibit program and K-12 outreach.

The current procedure of combining program review with the evaluation of Centers would benefit from integrating these two overlapping processes. Doing so would reduce redundancy and enhance clarity if a new format was developed that combines the questions for Administrative Program Review with the additional questions for Centers and Institutes.

History and description of unit

1. The primary purpose and key functions of the unit. In 1979, Chancellor H. F. Robinson and the WCU Board of Trustees defined the Mountain Heritage Center's purpose and function as follows: "The Center collects, interprets, and disseminates knowledge about the southern Appalachian region and its people. It conducts research and collects and displays artifacts. It interprets the region's natural and cultural heritage through publications, exhibitions, and demonstrations. The Center works with schools in preparing programs for educational enrichment and provides an educational experience for university students through internships. Its essential objective is to promote public awareness of the rich traditions of the mountains." While our means and methods have evolved over the last three decades, the MHC still honors this charge.

2. The top 3-5 goals/priorities of the unit. Our priorities are best summarized by our mission: "We CONNECT people with regional history and culture through a variety of engaged learning experiences; We BUILD bridges between the University and wider community; and We SERVE as a resource for cultural heritage organizations in the region."

3. History of the unit on campus. The Mountain Heritage Center (MHC) represents the realization of a service mission first articulated in the 1920s when the College began to assemble a collection of artifacts and documents. In the early 1950s, the Western Carolina Folklore Festival celebrated the region's traditional music. In the mid-1970s, the university established Mountain Heritage Day and laid the groundwork for today's Mountain Heritage Center. The MHC opened its doors in the University Administration Building in 1979, where it has three galleries, lobby display areas, an auditorium, workspaces, and collection storage. Our permanent exhibit, *The Migration of the Scotch-Irish People*, is in Gallery A. Rotating exhibits are in galleries B, C, and the lobbies. The MHC fills a need for regional museum services that falls between the narrow focus of local history museums and the more comprehensive work of the state museum. The MHC also provides a variety of engaged learning opportunities, internships, and professional experiences for WCU undergraduate and graduate students and, thus has tremendous potential in student recruitment.

Our successes include the **Smithsonian Institution** selecting our *Coverlets* exhibit to tour national museums from Washington, DC to Oregon in 1989-1990. The **Library of Congress** designated the MHC's recording of Walker Calhoun's *Where the Raven's Roost* as an Outstanding Folk Recording in 1991. In 1997, the **Appalachian Regional Commission** chose our exhibit, *Iron in the Fire*, to travel through a seven-state region. The MHC hosted the international Ulster-American Heritage Symposium in 1988, 1996, and 2010. We have won multiple statewide awards from the North

Carolina Museums Council—most recently in 2009 and 2010. In 2007, we received the Award for Best Print Media for a poster created in collaboration with WCU Art major, Jonathan Buckner.

Last year, over 40,000 people attended our exhibits, demonstrations, concerts, and other events, including Mountain Heritage Day. Now in its 36th year, this annual festival is the university's largest public event and provides a significant boost to the local economy. In June 2008, we launched the Digital Heritage Project. It consists of three closely linked products: a series of one-minute radio spots on the history, culture, and traditions of Southern Appalachia; a print version of the same; and a companion website. To date we have produced over 150 radio moments that are heard daily on four stations whose signals cover 50 counties. The print version appears in a regional magazine (25,000 circulation) and our local newspaper (7,000). The website, DigitalHeritage.org, includes illustrated essays, short documentaries, and video interviews—the majority produced by WCU students. The Digital Heritage Project supports the cultural components of UNC-Tomorrow, while also providing our students with meaningful, hands-on experience in a public showcase and providing support for the tourism industry. Please see Appendix A for a description of the Digital Heritage Project.

4. Describe the structure of the unit and how it is situated organizationally within the institution. All MHC staff report to the MHC director, who reports to the VC of Advancement & External Affairs.

5. Provide an organizational chart of the unit with every employee identified by title and name. Attach a brief (3-4 bullets) list of the primary duties carried out by each employee on the chart. Please see Appendix E MHC positions and Appendix H vitae.

- Director Scott Philyaw.
- Curator Pam Meister.
- Education Associate Peter Koch.
- Office Manager Sona Norton.
- Mountain Heritage Day Coordinator Trina Royar.
- Digital Heritage Project Coordinator Christie Osborne (resigned 12/2010). Funding ends June 2011.
- Curatorial Specialist David Brewin (retired 12/2010). Funding discontinued January 2011.

Alignment with WCU Mission, Vision, Values

1. How does the unit mission align with the university mission with specific reference to support of the QEP, UNC Tomorrow and the academic colleges/schools? The MHC actively

supports WCU's QEP by providing our students with significant applied learning opportunities through internships, class projects, service learning projects, and real professional opportunities. The MHC supports our region through a wide variety of cultural activities and programming (see Appendix B for UNC-Tomorrow Report items 4.4.3, 4.4.4, 4.6.3, 4.7.1, 4.7.4). The MHC provides significant support for K-12 teachers throughout southwestern North Carolina through in-school and in-museum programming, traveling trunks, and online resources. We base all educational programming on the grade-appropriate guidelines found in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. WCU students attend our programming and participate in class projects, service learning, internships, and professional employment at the MHC. Since 2007, we have worked with students from each of WCU's colleges and schools.

2. How has the purpose of the unit changed in the past 5 years? The MHC has assumed responsibility for coordinating projects initiated by other units including: the Digital Heritage Project (transferred from the Institute for the Economy of the Future, 2006); Mountain Heritage Day (Advancement & External Affairs, 2007); and the Adventure of the American Mind (College of Education & Allied Professions, 2008). The MHC had been involved with each of these programs for many years. To support these projects, the Provost's office funded a Digital Heritage Coordinator position (2008-11), while the position of Mountain Heritage Day Coordinator was increased from a part-time, hourly position, to .75 time. These projects fit within the scope of the MHC's activities and support our regional outreach.

The MHC revised its mission to better align with the university's mission and regional needs. We have significantly increased our work with WCU students. In addition to providing more tours and programs for classes, we have increased student involvement in research projects, exhibits, and publications. We revised our guidelines and procedures for student workers and interns. We have also increased our collaboration with a variety of community partners (heritage organizations, businesses, local governments, and state museums) for exhibits, programming, and other outreach activities. Please see Appendix D for a description of our exhibits, including collaborations with WCU classes and other heritage organizations.

We have also increased our outreach through traveling exhibits. Within the last two years, our exhibits and displays have appeared in museums, public libraries, and public schools throughout western North Carolina. Our exhibit, *Our State Dog: North Carolina's Plott Hound*, appeared at state museums in Elizabeth City and Old Fort. It will be at the state Museum of History in Raleigh for a full year beginning in September 2011.

Following a grant-funded assessment of the Digital Heritage Project, we initiated several changes to improve the program for its main user groups—WCU students, K-12 teachers, and the public (See Appendix C). These include the formation of a faculty advisory group, a redesign of the site's layout, and revising our procedures for communicating with students.

3. How do you expect the purpose to change in the next 5 years? The MHC actively supports the university's mission, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), and the objectives of UNC-Tomorrow. We provide an increasing number of engaged-learning opportunities for WCU students and treat all student workers as pre-professionals. We will be presenting on "Engaged Student Learning in a Museum Setting" at the 2011 Southeastern Museums Conference.

Attendance at our events is increasing and we have experienced a modest increase in non-state funding, such as sponsorships, grants, and donations. We have begun the process of revitalizing Mountain Heritage Day. Our traveling exhibits are increasingly popular. Our next step is to consolidate these gains and fine-tune existing initiatives as needed. The loss of two vacant positions—representing one-third of the MHC's staff—will make that task more difficult. (Note: These two positions were ended as part of the university's priority to avoid layoffs in response to state budget cuts.) The MHC is also actively exploring and soliciting external funding options, as our vision will only be realized with adequate human and financial resources.

Demand for the program

1. Who are the key users/participants of the unit's programs or services? The MHC's programs and services fall into four broad categories:

- Gallery tours, programs, festivals, concerts, and presentations—these are attended by the public, the university community, and K-12 educators and their students. Within the university, our primary users are a variety of first year classes (Art, English, History, the USI 130 program, and others). Participation by upper level classes is more closely linked to specific exhibits and programs. Other university users include student organizations (such as the Porch Club), Alumni Affairs, and other departments. Regional users include community members, tourists, and heritage organizations.
- Engaged Learning opportunities—this broad category includes student research projects, Service Learning projects, internships, and all student workers. As we reviewed and revised our interactions with students, we found that these categories—while separate in terms of structure and reporting—are becoming more similar as they increase engaged learning opportunities. We now include questions about a student's career goals and specific objectives in working with us in

all MHC student job interviews. With faculty members, we always discuss their learning goals in designing an activity. We offer support and instruction to students in consultation with the instructor. In all cases, we match the goals of faculty and students with MHC needs. We prefer projects that result in a tangible product that can range from creating an exhibit or film, updating our disaster preparedness plan, or the design and installation of a new workstation and storage system. We have created engaged learning for students from the departments of Anthropology & Sociology, Communications, Computer Information Systems, Construction Management, Elementary & Middle Grades Education, English, Entrepreneurship, History, Hospitality & Tourism Management, Nutrition, Stage & Screen, Leadership program, and student organizations. On occasion, we also work with students from other universities and high schools.

- K-12 educator resources (public, charter, and private schools)—we offer direct support free-of-charge through our traveling trunk program, other in-school programming, museum exhibits and other museum programs. MHC staff members have presented programs for teacher training at the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching, the North Carolina Museum of History, Mars Hill College, and WCU. The MHC is making teacher resources generated by WCU's discontinued Adventure of the American Mind project available through DigitalHeritage.org.
- Information for campus visitors and the media—MHC staff members field a variety of inquiries. Media inquiries and interviews (print, radio, and television) focus primarily on the history and culture of the region. Visitors to the MHC ask questions about our own exhibits and programs, other regional museums and attractions, as well as other campus offices, and WCU programs. For many of our visitors, an MHC staff member is the first person they meet when visiting campus.

2. How do you identify and measure demand for the unit's programs or services? As a public institution, we measure demand by attendance and participation in our various programs, events, and exhibits. We manually count attendance at discrete events such as concerts, class programs, and receptions. For overall museum visitation, we installed electronic counters in November 2008. These count “visits” rather than individual “visitors.” Both the electronic counters and the hand counts indicate increasing interest in MHC programs and exhibits (Appendix F). We have discontinued programs for low attendance such as the Appalachian Lunchtime Series, while focusing on those with a proven audience.

3. List those other units on campus that interact most with this unit. Briefly describe the

nature of those interactions. Other units interact with the MHC in a variety of ways, complicating a direct comparison. For example, USI 130 instructors (a transition class typically taken during a student's first semester) are most interested in gallery tours and programming on the history of the university. Faculty members in Art, English, and History, among others, also utilize MHC exhibits and programming for their classes.

We typically work with upper level classes for engaged learning projects. Faculty and students in the History Department often collaborate on museum exhibits. Most of the content on DigitalHeritage.org was created by students and faculty in the departments of Communications, History, and Stage & Screen. For Mountain Heritage Day we work with classes in Construction Management (surveying the field), Education (children's tent), Hospitality & Tourism Management (surveys and vendor assistance), the Leadership Program (greeters), Nutrition (food contest), and many student organizations (5-K Run, First Aid Station, stage assistants, drink sales, etc.). These engaged learning experiences contribute to the success of the QEP.

The MHC collaborates with Hunter Library on two digital exhibits: *Horace Kephart: Revealing an Enigma* and the *Craft Revival: Shaping Western North Carolina Past and Present*. We also lend materials to the library for their exhibit spaces. The MHC has listed its books with the Library—thereby giving Western Carolina faculty and students access to our specialized holdings on regional history, material culture, folklore, museum practices, conservation, and related fields. We have collaborated with the Art Museum through co-sponsoring summer camps, themed companion exhibits, and have shared resources and expertise. We coordinate programs with the Parris Professor of Appalachian Studies and the Sequoyah Distinguished Professor in Cherokee Studies.

The MHC works very closely with the university police and facilities management in the coordination of Mountain Heritage Day. The MHC also routinely works with the Print shop for exhibit graphics, with Aramark for reception catering, with the office of Public Relations for publicity and photographic services, and with Alumni Affairs for reunions and other alumni services.

4. List other units on campus that provide related programs and services. Several units provide broadly similar services—though not with the same focus on the region and with different audiences. In all cases, we have endeavored to collaborate with these units to avoid unnecessary duplication. For example, the MHC has assisted with their exhibits and has occasionally lent our smaller traveling exhibits to Hunter. Several collections, such as the Horace Kephart Collection, are split between the MHC (three dimensional objects) and the Special Collections department (papers, maps, and photographs). We have also collaborated on two grant-funded digitization

projects—*Craft Revival: Shaping Western North Carolina Past and Present* and *Horace Kephart: Revealing an Enigma*. The primary goal of both projects was to highlight regionally significant stories and people through the use of artifacts, documents, and photographs. Both the MHC and Special Collections also collect oral history interviews.

Broadly speaking, the Art Museum provides related services associated with other museums of comparable size. However, our collections are very different from one another, as are the areas of expertise of our respective staffs. A variety of venues offer live music on campus, including the Fine and Performing Arts Center, the Ramsey Center, and the University Center. These concerts feature a broad range of music by WCU faculty and students, as well as commercial musicians. The MHC and Mountain Heritage Day are the only university venues that focus exclusively on traditional music, and Mountain Heritage Day is far larger than any other university event.

5. Describe the unique contributions of this unit. The MHC is both the front door to the university and a strong link between the university and the community. We introduce WCU students to our region's rich heritage through meaningful, engaging projects, and then share their work with a diverse audience through exhibits, radio broadcasts, and digital media. An excellent example of this work may be viewed here:

<http://fpamediaserver.wcu.edu/~static/mhd.mp4>

Students in Arledge Armenaki's Documentary class did all the filming, editing, and interviews. MHC staff arranged for the interviews, provided the soundtrack, and provided logistical support. The resulting short documentary is a testament to the importance of Mountain Heritage Day to the region. It also epitomizes our mission. We connected students with regional tradition bearers, built intergenerational bridges between the university and the community, while creating a quality product that will attract visitors to the region.

Quality

1. How do you identify and measure quality of the unit's programs or services? List the top benchmarks used to assess quality. We use a combination of written evaluations, stakeholder surveys, attendance and donation trends for MHC events, verbal feedback, and direct observation. We also collect data on website usage, and contracted with an external evaluator to assess the Digital Heritage Project in relation to the QEP (Appendix C). We use this information to evaluate a program's structure, content, timing, popularity, and opportunities for improvement.

2. How do you use the results of quality assessments to improve programs and/or services?

Provide specific examples. We conducted a series of surveys in 2008-09 with the three key groups involved with Mountain Heritage Day—visitors, craft vendors, and the festival coordination

committee. We used this information to recalibrate marketing efforts, to revise the fee structure and festival procedures, and to revisit the mix of performers, crafts, and activities. The preliminary results are promising. The festival is a more positive experience for our visitors and vendors. These changes also strengthened the festival's finances and facilitated better budgeting. We increased concert attendance by combining our Winter Gathering Concert series and Open Jam Series, renaming them the First Thursday Concert and Jam series. We changed our hours to make the MHC more accessible to the WCU community and the public.

3. What were the major accomplishments of the unit in the past 5 years? Include those directly related to unit functions AND/OR other contributions related to University goals. Our major accomplishment over the last five years has been to increase our level of collaboration with regional organizations and other campus units. In the process, we have enjoyed increased attendance at MHC events, while contributing to WCU's educational mission, and enhancing the offerings of other regional heritage organizations. We launched DigitalHeritage.org in June 2008 and are now completing a reorganization of the site's content and navigation. These collaborations have increased outreach through traveling exhibits, a regional radio presence, online offerings, and regular print media contributions. (See Appendix D for a description of collaborative efforts including: *The Artistry of Plain Style Furniture*, *The History of Haywood County*, *Feeding the Social Fire: Barbeque the North Carolina Way*, and *Women's Work: Stories of the Appalachian Women's Museum*.)

Other improvements to the MHC include a wireless network in public spaces, work areas, and the conference room; improved gallery lighting; and a significant increase in interactive elements (including two touch-screen kiosks) in our exhibits. We initiated physical improvements to our entrance and auditorium to bring those areas into ADA compliance and have updated the auditorium's media system. We also completed a major reorganization of our space to improve our work areas and to remove potential fire hazards.

We installed electronic counters to better assess visitation to our galleries. We adopted PastPerfect, the industry standard in software for collection management. Not only will this improve collection management—and the creation of online exhibits—it will also enhance our students' education as they become familiar with the software used by the majority of American museums.

Cost Effectiveness

1. How do you identify and measure cost effectiveness of this unit? List the top benchmarks used to assess cost effectiveness. Museums are commonly judged by the degree to which they

fulfill their mission. To assess cost effectiveness, benchmarks must be informed by our mission: connecting people with local history and culture, building bridges between WCU and the wider community, and serving as a resource for other heritage organizations in the region.

A major method for achieving this mission is through programs and exhibits at the MHC and coordination of Mountain Heritage Day. The MHC's average cost per visitor has dropped from \$13.92 in 2008 (\$312,596.78 divided by 22,441 visits) to only \$7.58 in thus far in FY 2010-11 (\$278,238 divided by 36,693). This is well below the average of similar museums in the southeast. The most recent national museum census (American Association of Museums, 2002), reported median cost per museum visitor of \$18.83 for history museums or \$17.39 for museums with annual operating budgets of \$180,000 - \$750,000. Several factors contribute to our unusually low cost per visitor. We have increased our utilization of student workers and graduate assistants. Through personalized training and one-on-one mentoring by professional staff, our student workers effectively function as auxiliary staff members in exhibit development, collections management, and museum education. We also benefit from the university covering costs such as insurance, housekeeping, IT support, Security, and Facilities Management. Over 75% of the MHC's FY10 operating expenses are devoted to museum-related activities. In comparison, 2002 museum census medians were 45% for history museums and 50% for museums with annual operating budgets of \$180,000 - \$750,000. While this metric is skewed by expenses absorbed in the University's budget, it still indicates efficiency of operation and a high degree of dedication to mission.

K-12 schools are an important audience for the MHC. We offer six on-site programs, five themed classroom visits, and three traveling trunks, all keyed to standards of learning for specific grade levels. In addition, twelve multi-media presentations highlight different aspects of southern Appalachian history and culture (see appended Educational Programs brochure for more detailed descriptions). Like most museums, K-12 school participation at MHC has been trending downward in the past two years due to schools' administrative and financial constraints to field trips. Our Education Associate's paternity leave in Fall 2009-10 also reduced our outreach. We are working with regional teachers to re-package our K-12 programs and services to better serve this audience's changing needs.

Although the variety of MHC public programs has decreased in recent years due to multiple projects and smaller staff size, the Center has concentrated on presenting programs with maximum audience appeal and impact. Therefore, general museum visitation and attendance for exhibit openings and First Thursday programs are trending upward. Our audiences typically include a broad cross-section of community members and WCU students, faculty and staff, and the

interactive nature of our programming helps to achieve our goal of building bridges between WCU and the wider regional community.

We are extending our impact on the region and beyond through electronic outreach. The MHC has a presence on six websites. We have a web page on the main WCU website (wcu.edu/mhc), and manage stand-alone websites (DigitalHeritage.org and MountainHeritageDay.com). MHC content can be accessed on the Horace Kephart website (www.wcu.edu/library/digitalcoll/kephart/index.htm) and Craft Revival website (http://www.wcu.edu/craftrevival/collection/mountain_heritage_center.html). Over forty of our quilts are included on The Quilt Index website (www.quiltindex.org/mhc.php). We also maintain a FaceBook page.

We serve as a resource for other cultural heritage organizations through our traveling exhibit program, by exhibit-related partnerships, and through professional consultation and service. We currently have four exhibits available for display (following premieres at the MHC): *Bartram's Travels*, *Our State Dog: North Carolina's Plott Hound* (two versions), *Decoration Day in the Mountains*, and *Working the Land*. A nominal venue fee covers the costs of administering the traveling exhibit program and provides a modest revenue stream. We have also developed exhibits in partnership with the Haywood County Historical Society and the Appalachian Women's Museum. The partnering organization provided content and some financial support, while the MHC handled exhibit design and production. Following a premier at the MHC, these exhibits have also traveled to the partner organizations.

2. Attach an itemized spreadsheet (see template) outlining ALL revenues/resources generated and expenses incurred (including salaries) for the unit for the past 3 years. See Appendix G

Opportunity Analysis

1. How can programs or services offered by the unit be enhanced? The MHC's galleries and auditorium provide an ideal platform for programs that serve our various target audiences. Incentives for expanding programming include the physical capacity for additional programming, opportunities for WCU student, faculty, and community involvement in creating and presenting programs, and the prospect of increasing visitation and developing new audiences. Barriers to expanding programming include lack of MHC staff to plan, publicize, manage, and evaluate additional programs; lack of funding for program expenses; and lack of time to solicit sponsorships or grants to support programming. Plans for enhancing specific programmatic areas include:

K-12 School Programs

- Over the past two years, WCU undergraduate and graduate students have created new curriculum-based pre-and-post visit materials for school groups, keyed to existing on-site school programs.
- Graduate assistant Megan Griffin is currently working on additional teacher resources based on MHC's Plott Hound exhibit that will be posted on DigitalHeritage.org.
- Education Associate Peter Koch is working with an informal teacher advisory group to create two email surveys—one designed to elicit feedback on MHC's existing K-12 programs and services, the other seeking input into the redesign of MHC's signature Scotch-Irish exhibit.
- Survey information will be used to adjust school programming delivery and communication systems, thus increasing use of MHC's K-12 services.
- MHC will recruit and train community volunteers to assist with K-12 programs.
- MHC will research potential funding sources for additional expansion of school programming.

Summer Programs

- MHC will collaborate with the Fine Art Museum and Hunter Library on a joint day camp program.
- Museum Educator Peter Koch will apply for North Carolina Museums Council funding for a summer intern to staff the day camp program.

Volunteer & Membership Programs

- In January 2011, MHC representatives attended WCU's annual Service Learning Fair to recruit student volunteers who will help to staff MHC events and Mountain Heritage Day 2011.
- As part of our strategic planning process, new volunteer job descriptions will be developed and additional volunteers recruited.
- Strategic planning will include evaluation and possible reactivation of MHC's membership program.

Care & Use of MHC Collections

- After conducting extensive collections surveys, MHC is currently seeking formal institutional approval to deaccession 224 objects from its collections. This process would remove inappropriate objects, free up space for better collections storage, and provide additional funds for collections care.
- MHC has a rich collection of film, audio and video recordings of oral history interviews, musical performances, and folklife demonstrations dating from the 1940s to the present. We are currently working on a comprehensive plan for inventorying, rehousing, preserving and cataloging this important collection to make it accessible as a research resource.

WCU Involvement

- MHC has convened a Faculty Advisory Committee to extend outreach to academic departments and to disseminate and solicit information on potential engaged learning opportunities at MHC.
- MHC staff consistently communicates with non-academic departments (Admissions, Continuing Education, Service Learning) regarding programs, events and exhibits of interest to their constituents.
- The DigitalHeritage.org website is currently being reorganized and expanded to provide a more user-friendly platform for WCU student and faculty work.

Community Involvement

- MHC is currently negotiating with the Liars Bench, a coalition of regional writers, musicians and storytellers, to present free performances of their “Appalachian Variety Show” at the MHC.
- MHC is in conversation with the Junior Appalachian Musicians (JAM) group to provide a venue for their weekly music lessons and jam sessions.
- MHC has submitted a proposal to the North Carolina Humanities Council to host the SITES Journey Stories exhibit at the Center in fall 2012. If accepted, we will work with a wide variety of WCU and community partners to create and present additional exhibits and programs.

Cultural Heritage Resource

- MHC is currently in conversation with the Appalachian Women’s Museum to extend its successful exhibit collaboration with the creation of a virtual AWM presence on the DigitalHeritage.org website.
- In June 2011, MHC will convene a group of western North Carolina cultural heritage organization representatives to discuss potential partnerships, training needs, and joint marketing opportunities. It is our intention that this will result in an ongoing working group of regional organizations.

2. How do the activities of other units advance or hinder the effectiveness of your unit? Focus should be on those units identified in item #3 in the section on “Demand for the Program.”

Our collaborative work with other units enhances our effectiveness while also stretching our budget dollars. Through collaboration with Hunter Library, the Art Museum, and others, we are able to extend our reach while helping others to do the same. Our work with classes from across campus enhances our students’ education while also helping the MHC in the creation of exhibits and programs.

Several factors hinder our work. Our calendar is strongly affected by the academic calendar. More

classes visit the MHC during Fall semester than other time of the year. Mountain Heritage Day occurs on the last Saturday in September and adds to the Fall semester workload. Home football games on festival days increase attendance to both events, increasing stress on university resources such as parking and personnel—especially the Police Department. Our slowest season, the summer, is the busiest time of year for other heritage sites in the region. Our increased teaching load in 2009-10 compromised our ability to work with other classes that met at the same time.

It is the university's policy to assign Graduate Assistants only to academic departments. The History Department occasionally reassigns a GA to work at the MHC, but not always. This unpredictable process makes planning difficult. Campus outreach is hindered by the perception that we work only with students interested in a museum career. We are actively educating campus to change this incorrect belief.

3. What programs and services offered by the unit are redundant or outside the scope of the unit's primary purpose? Through collaboration and joint projects, the MHC actively seeks to minimize duplication of services. Our traveling exhibits also reduce redundancy within other WCU units and with other organizations, as we offer a low-cost alternative to creating their own exhibits.

4. What are similar units at peer or aspirant institutions doing that this unit would like to do or should be doing? AAM Accreditation—Several southeastern university-based museums are accredited by the American Association of Museums. These include the UNC system's Weatherspoon Art Museum (UNC-G), the Ackland Art Museum (UNC-CH), and the Turchin Center (ASU). At WCU, the Fine Arts Museum is currently enrolled in AAM's accreditation program. In the 1990s, the MHC has undergone several Museum Assessment Program (MAP) reviews in preparation for accreditation. We will continue our work toward accreditation by enrolling in the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) Standards and Excellence Program (StEPs). This self-study program uses assessment questions and three levels of performance indicators to rate performance in six standards sections.

Institutional Planning—One of the standards for accredited museums is “ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes involvement from its audiences and community.” This process generally results in an interlocking set of planning documents, beginning with an overarching strategic plan. All the accredited museums listed above have created such plans. MHC is currently working on a new strategic plan, an updated disaster and emergency response plan, and a collections plan. This spring we have also scheduled sessions with MHC's faculty advisory committee and with representatives of western North Carolina cultural heritage organizations to

obtain their input on various aspects of our planning process.

Expansion of K-12 School Services—We are researching other university-based museums' K-12 school programs for a model of sustainable expansion for our own program. Education Associate, Peter Koch, is working with an informal teacher advisory group to plan an assessment of MHC's current K-12 programs.

Traveling Exhibit Program—The MHC is also researching other university-based museums' traveling exhibit programs to guide the growth of MHC's program. We are interested in exhibit formats, pricing, marketing, as well as policies and procedures for scheduling and circulating exhibits.

Museum Management Graduate Certificate Program—The WCU History Department offers a certificate in Public History, while staff at the Art Museum offer occasional classes in Museum Studies. The MHC has a long history of providing substantive museum training and experience to students through internships, work-study assignments, team-taught classes, and individual projects. As part of our strategic planning process, we will explore working with these other WCU units to enhance these academic programs.

5. What additional cost-savings could be achieved in this unit? Given the recent loss of two positions and a graduate assistant (representing a third of our staff) it would be very difficult for the MHC to find additional cost-savings without compromising our ability to meet our mission.

6. What external funding opportunities exist that could be pursued by this unit?

Sponsorships—The MHC has successfully solicited sponsorships from local businesses for Mountain Heritage Day activities. We are currently in conversation with Frontier Communications regarding a presenting sponsorship that would involve national rather than local funding. We are also involved in soliciting sponsorships for MHC programs (such as our First Thursday concerts) and projects (such as MHC publications) from local businesses.

Foundation Funding—The MHC is completing a project funded by a Blue Ridge National Heritage Area grant and are exploring other funding opportunities for digital heritage and exhibit development projects.

State Funding—The MHC recently submitted a proposal to the North Carolina Humanities Council to host the Smithsonian's *Journey Stories* traveling exhibit. If selected, we will be eligible for additional funding to support community programming for the exhibit and will save the exhibit rental fee.

Federal Funding—The Center plans to apply to appropriate grants programs of the Institute for Museums & Library Services (IMLS) and the National Endowment for the Humanities to support collections care and conservation initiatives, as well as our projects involving the use of new media in cultural preservation.

7. What would it take to make the program exemplary? An exemplary Mountain Heritage

Center would have several noteworthy characteristics including:

- The MHC would be accredited by the AAM and be a valued resource to the university and the region.
- Our websites would be the “go to” site to learn about this region with more content, a robust interface, and with more contributors.
- Our extensive collection of oral history interviews, films, and musical performances some dating to the 1940s) would be transcribed as needed, fully indexed, digitized, and made available online.
- There would be a public research area to facilitate sharing the MHC’s rich collections with students, faculty, and the public.
- Gallery space would be more flexible and the auditorium larger. There would be additional room for conservation and storage, a classroom, sufficient workspace to include small groups of students, improved signage, and better parking.
- The MHC would have sufficient resources and sufficient staff to accomplish our mission and to meet demands for our resources from the university and the region.

Additional Questions Applicable to Centers and Institutes

Is current funding of the Center sufficient to continue its operation? The MHC can maintain its core mission at its current level of state funding. We will solicit external funding to enhance our programming as current funding and staffing are insufficient to expand our work in expectation of increasing requests for engaged learning opportunities and regional partnerships.

Are support, training, and graduation rates of students consistent with the Center's stated goals and objectives? WCU’s Quality Enhancement Plan defines the need for students to synthesize their curricular and co-curricular college experiences. The QEP promotes synthesis—the ability to integrate knowledge from different areas as the driving framework for teaching and learning. This emphasis complements the MHC’s mission of building bridges between Western Carolina University and the wider community. Through our support of the QEP, the MHC encourages students to learn about the region and a professional career through engaged

interactions with a variety of people, materials, and media.

Currently, four to seven graduate and undergraduate students work for the MHC through Federal Work-Study, graduate assistantships, internships, and as volunteers. All students are treated as paraprofessionals with a work plan including duties and expectations laid out prior to their start. Progress reports and a final summary are submitted by the student to encourage reflection and as part of their evaluation. These reports provide information for references as students pursue their career (whether in museums or another profession). Recently, a soon-to-graduate Computer Information Systems major secured an interview with CNN based on his work with the MHC in developing a Smartphone application for heritage tourism.

We work closely with professors to support student projects with the MHC. In Spring 2010, a Public History class and the MHC collaborated on an exhibit on North Carolina BBQ. The class researched and developed exhibit panels, searched for and utilized images from both private and public sources, created hands-on interactive elements, and installed all these items for an exhibit that ran nine months. Digitalheritage.org includes videos, essays, and image galleries researched and created by students.

Is faculty participation sufficient to continue Center operations? The MHC has significantly increased the quantity and quality of our work with WCU faculty members over the last five years. One instructor noted that working with the MHC will make a class “QEP compliant.” As WCU fully implements the QEP, we anticipate an increasing need for collaborative projects with faculty and students across campus. We have initiated a faculty advisory committee with representation from three colleges, Career Services, the Cherokee Center, and the Coulter Faculty Commons. We also have planned several faculty events to highlight our new exhibit on the history of WCU.

Is the quality of scholarly activity by faculty, professional staff, and students reflected in its output (publications, patents, copyrights, etc.)? MHC staff members are active professionals who present at scholarly conferences, publish books and articles, and are active in professional organizations. Recent highlights include contributions to *Haywood County: Portrait of a Mountain Community* (2010, winner of the Willie Parker Peace History Book Award and the Presidents Award from the North Carolina Society of Historians), *Nomenclature 3.0 for Museum Cataloging* (2010), and *Tar Heel Junior Historian* (2007).

Do current operations of the Center agree with the most recent Charter, goals, and objectives of the Center? (Does it duplicate the efforts of other Centers?) The current operations of the MHC agree with its recently updated mission statement and support the university’s mission, the

QEP, and UNC-Tomorrow. Through collaboration, we minimize any potential duplication with related units such as Hunter Library and the Art Museum. Please see question 4 on page 6 for a description of these collaborative activities.

Within the UNC system, there is only one other history and cultural museum—the North Carolina Collection Gallery at UNC-Chapel Hill. This museum focuses on presenting elements of the state's history through permanent and temporary exhibits. The permanent exhibits highlight settlement of the coastal region, famous writers from North Carolina, and early coins minted in the state.

The MHC does not duplicate efforts of the Centers at WCU or within the UNC system. At WCU, the Fine and Performing Arts Center is actually a performance venue; the Coulter Faculty Commons focuses on providing pedagogical support to faculty; Highlands Biological Station is a natural history research facility (with courses for biology students and faculty and a natural history museum that is open eight months of the year); and the Cherokee Center which provides educational outreach services.

Does the financial audit and professional evaluation demonstrate that the Center is being managed properly? (Were any serious problems discovered?) The Mountain Heritage Center is included within Western Carolina University's audits. No problems were discovered.

Is space required for operation of the Center available? The MHC's current space is adequate, but constraining. The collection room is crowded. After careful review, we are planning a targeted deaccessioning of non-regional, damaged, and duplicative objects. Our workspace needs will increase in proportion to our increased work with students and community volunteers.

Does the Center demonstrate effectiveness through its key performance indicators? Yes, MHC performance is measured by numeric and subjective methods. We use automated counters to measure the number of visits to each of our galleries. We also collect attendance figures for all public and group programs. We measure quality of experience through comment cards and group evaluation forms. We evaluate students' experience through supervisor and student reports.