THE APPALACHIAN COLLEGE ASSOCIATION

The Appalachian College Association is a non-profit consortium of 35 private four-year liberal arts institutions located across the central Appalachian Mountains in Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The mission of the Association is to serve Appalachian communities through the transformational work of its faculty, staff, and students. Programs offered by the Association are designed to promote cooperation and collaboration among member institutions, and to support scholarly and creative activities of faculty, staff, and students.

Over its thirty years of history, the assets of the ACA have grown to over $30 million due primarily to the generosity of the foundations that have continued to fund its programs to benefit central Appalachia. Member institutions also contribute annual general dues as well as fees in support of the collaborative Bowen Central Library.

The ACA sustains a staff of six persons to manage consortium operations. It is governed by its Board of Directors, which entails each of the members’ presidents. In addition, the Council of Chief Academic Officers (encompassing the CAOs from each campus), working with the ACA’s Vice President for Academic Programs, supports the implementation of the ACA’s various academic programs and opportunities, and the Council of Library Directors (in concert with the Association’s Director of Library Services) possesses similar duties regarding the Bowen Central Library of Appalachia.

ACA member institutions are critical contributors to their local and regional communities. Each campus serves as a “beacon” for its particular region, providing its students and its surrounding community access to exceptional educational and cultural experiences, often in areas facing serious economic distress and lacking in relative educational attainment. Serving approximately 95,000 students annually, with nearly 3,200 full-time faculty, ACA schools collectively generate about $1.4 billion in direct annual expenditures, further supporting Central Appalachia.

The colleges and universities of the Appalachian College Association work diligently to make higher education accessible to the students of this region. Member institutions are dedicated to making post-secondary education available to students with financial need or who otherwise may not have opportunities for baccalaureate education. According to the most recent IPEDS data, nearly 60% of member institutions furnished institutional aid to all or virtually all its undergraduate students; 86% provided aid to more than 90% of these students. Over three-quarters of ACA schools have first-year cohorts that are at least 40% Pell recipients; over 20% of undergraduates identify as a minority race/ethnicity.

ACA PROGRAMS OF INTEREST TO FACULTY & STAFF

The Annual Summit

Each fall, the ACA’s Annual Summit provides an opportunity to bring together faculty, staff, and administrative leaders from across the consortium to engage in ongoing collaboration and to share information and best practices in the ever-evolving effort of preparing students for success. The two-day conference showcases outstanding ACA members across a broad spectrum of teaching, research, and service. It furnishes opportunities to share proven strategies to implement in the classroom and/or other areas of campus life and to network with colleagues from member schools with comparable missions facing similar opportunities and challenges.

The 2019 Summit, at the DreamMore Resort and Conference Center in Pigeon Forge, TN, brought together the largest number of presentations and attendees in the history of the conference. Presently, we intend to return to Pigeon Forge in 2021, as we will continue the ACA’s intentional effort to expand participation in the conference, as we both appreciate and cultivate student learning in a broader context entailing the traditional classroom, co-curricular programming, and student services. For full details on the Summit, visit the ACA website.

The Teaching and Leadership Institute (TLI)

The colleges and universities of the Appalachian College Association share a common commitment to support their students through exceptional teaching and learning opportunities. To these ends, each summer, the ACA hosts an intensive, week-long workshop on a member campus delivered by national experts and master-teachers from ACA institutions, designed to promote pedagogical development and innovation among member institution faculty. The Institute emphasizes integrated learning, student-centered learning theories, and best teaching practices.

The Institute began in the summer of 2003 to provide professional development for faculty on pedagogical techniques, which remains an emphasis of the TLI today. In 2017, the Institute added a much-needed additional track focusing upon leadership development in the ACA context designed to benefit practically all parts of the campus but especially valuable to faculty or staff new to their leadership positions.

We encourage all ACA faculty and staff to participate in the TLI. The workshops are inexpensive and (according to previous attendees) exceptionally valuable learning experiences! More details on the 2022 TLI, including registration information, will be provided in the spring of 2022.
**The Faculty Fellowship Program**

The Appalachian College Association’s Faculty Fellowship Program is its longest running program, preceding even the incorporation of the consortium. The Fellowship Endowment, supported by foundations, members, and individual contributions, provides support for pre-doctoral completion of terminal degree, or for post-doctoral research. Fellowships are awarded in three categories: full semester fellowship (maximum award of $20,000); Summer Research Fellowships (maximum of $7,500); and In-Year Fellowships (maximum of $10,000).

To be eligible to receive a fellowship, applicants must be full-time faculty members at an ACA institution, have held their current teaching position for at least two years, agree to return to their ACA institution to teach for at least one additional academic year, and arrange leave/release time for the fellowship. Fellowship recipients are selected by the Fellowship Review Committee of the Council of Chief Academic Officers. Fellowship funds, dispersed to the institution, may help to cover the costs caused by the awardee’s absence and/or other direct research expenses related to the project. Applications for the Faculty Fellowship program open in August each year with a deadline of October 31, and final decisions on awards are normally made by early December by the Fellowship Review Committee. Please review the ACA website for further information.

**The Bowen Central Library of Appalachia**

The Bowen Central Library of Appalachia (BCLA) remains a centerpiece of the ACA, furnishing member institutions access to resources through cooperative purchasing and other collaborations that would otherwise not be available to faculty, students, or staff. The Bowen Library has a core collection of more than 100,000 ebook titles, estimated to be the equivalent of 120,000 volumes or more in print format. It provides a shared catalog for 28 institutions. As a combined unit, more than 1.5 million unique holdings are represented reflecting almost seven million physical and virtual items. The BCLA also provides ebook collections and databases through group purchasing, and it constantly strives to seek out new options for group purchasing that will benefit member institutions.

The Digital Library of Appalachia provides online access to archival and historical materials related to the culture of the southern and central Appalachian region. The contents of the DLA are drawn from special collections of Appalachian College Association member libraries.

The Library Directors and other campus librarians are essential to the success and ongoing expansion of the BCLA. Oversight of the Shared Catalog is provided by the BCLA Shared Catalog Group, which includes all of the directors of BCLA libraries who participate in the Shared Catalog. Through the BCLA, library faculty and staff have access to several development opportunities each year, including mini-grants, support for conferences, and professional development workshops. For more details on the BCLA, please visit the ACA website.

**Graduate Tuition Discount Program**

In addition to promoting revenue enhancement from increased enrollments, the ACA’s graduate-level tuition discounting program encourages greater educational attainment and professional development among members’ faculty and staff and furnishes its qualified undergraduate students more affordable opportunities to achieve their educational goals while remaining in the Central Appalachian region. Current discounts are in place for the 2020-2021 admissions cycle and will take effect for students entering the specified program in the 2021-2022 academic year.

Each year participating member institutions that offer graduate education may provide tuition discounts on selected programs to qualified applicants from ACA institutions. The levels of discount may vary among three categories of potential students: 1.) ACA full-time faculty seeking terminal degree credentials; 2.) All other ACA member institution full-time employees (including faculty seeking other degrees); and 3.) Students who have completed/are completing an undergraduate degree from an ACA member institution.

Individual institutions that offer graduate degrees determine how and to what extent they wish to participate in the ACA discount program. Any persons who begin a provider’s program and remain in good standing will be allowed to continue at the initially determined discount rate. For full details on program policies and procedures, and on current discounted programs, please visit the ACA website.

**Ledford Scholars Program**

The ACA’s Colonel Lee B. Ledford Scholars Program offers financial assistance for summer research projects to undergraduate students enrolled at ACA member institutions. Undergraduate students from Appalachian or contiguous counties, from any disciplines, are eligible, and a variety of fields of study have been supported in the past.

The Ledford Scholarship provides stipends for students at a rate of $10.00/hour for up to 360 hours ($3,600 maximum) over the course of the summer and an allotment of up to $1,000 for reasonable research-related equipment and/or travel needs. Applications must have the support of a faculty member who agrees to serve as a mentor to the student throughout the project. The program culminates each fall when the Scholars present their research findings at the Annual Summit and/or by recorded video. The application period for the 2021 summer period opens following fall semester. For full details, including application protocols, please visit the ACA website.

**Course Sharing Consortium**

Through a special partnership of the ACA and Academus, participating member institutions have access to consortial online course sharing among ACA schools. Through an online portal, students from the “home institution” can easily register for online courses offered by the “host institution,” and Academus facilitates the admissions and registration processes for the students, provides syllabi for all courses and necessary documentation for “home” institutions to satisfy all federal and regional reporting and ensure quality controls, and helps the students remain enrolled in their home institutions and graduate on time. As a special consortium, schools are able to apply grades, credit hours toward full-time status, and financial aid to courses shared.
across our members as if the course were offered internally. ACA institutions sustain full discretion—in specific cases and generally—regarding when and how they participate in the partnership.

Through this collaboration/academic sharing, ACA colleges and universities can accomplish a number of strategic goals, including, among others:

- Developing new degrees and programs
- Combining (and making viable) under-enrolled sections (and possibly even programs) on our campuses
- Helping students make progress toward graduation and eligibility (enhancing retention)
- Providing students access to hours in which we have greater confidence regarding quality and mission "fit" (in the summers and otherwise)
- Generating additional tuition revenue and grant possibilities
- Offering more hybrid and online options across our communities
- Providing students access to courses that otherwise would not be available at specific institutions.

Workshops

Over the course of each year, the ACA coordinates and/or hosts multiple short workshops designed to furnish professional development or special training for various communities of practice across member institutions. For example, in the recent past, ACA has hosted workshops focused on grant writing with the National Endowment for the Humanities, multiple Community of Practice workshops for disability services coordinators from member campuses, a training workshop for persons responsible for coordinating campus emergency planning, and its ongoing professional development workshops for ACA librarians.

In the summer of 2020, the consortium hosted a series of virtual workshops called Bridging the Distance, which was designed to support faculty and staff regarding the challenges to student learning and development brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. These 40 sessions had nearly 3250 registrants encompassing all 35 ACA institutions. In total, nearly 1250 faculty and staff registered for one or more of the web sessions.

We encourage any ACA community of practice to consider collaborating with ACA staff to develop these important development opportunities. Our goal is to do all we can to provide opportunities for collaboration and development among our faculty and staff. If you have any ideas regarding potential workshops, please contact the ACA.

Communities of Practice/Learning Communities

The ACA facilitates many virtual "Communities of Practice," networks of faculty and staff who share similar responsibilities on their campuses, or faculty from similar disciplinary backgrounds or interests. Presently, we sustain nearly 25 staff groupings and over 50 faculty "learning communities" from our member institutions to cultivate networks of support and information sharing among ACA colleagues across campuses. We believe these communities find their value organically and self-defined from the "bottom up"—with whatever "light handed" coordinating support the ACA office can furnish. Our 35 member institutions share many similarities: student profiles, opportunities, challenges, and constraints. Together, through the collaboration, communication, and support that can occur through our consortium, we can all be stronger as institutions and more effective in cultivating our students' educational experience and success.

Supporting Student Success

The ACA seeks to support member institutions’ efforts to enhance student retention and success on their campuses. For example, we are presently partnering with Credo in its Moving the Needle project to improve student success across ACA member institutions. Small cohorts of colleges and universities engage in deep institutional change to strengthen capacities to support students from matriculation to graduation. These cohorts of ACA schools research their challenges and opportunities regarding student retention, identify the most promising areas for impact on student outcomes, and implement proven strategies for success.

A second initiative is the ACA’s Project PROMISE intended, once fully implemented, to increase the number and proportion of underserved students and graduates on participating ACA campuses. Now in its planning stage, Project PROMISE seeks to help participating member institutions to identify their own strengths and weaknesses with regard to diversity and inclusion and to develop a community of knowledgeable partners who can learn from and support each other as they develop strategies to institutionalize equitable campus cultures.

Consortium-Wide Center for Teaching and Learning

The ACA is very pleased to announce its current new initiative, its consortium-wide virtual Center for Teaching and Learning for member schools’ faculty and staff. When fully developed, the Center will furnish a robust web portal that will serve as a repository for resources on best practices in teaching and student learning and development. Through these resources, faculty and staff will have central access to effective strategies for supporting students in an out of the classroom; they will also have an excellent forum to share with colleagues in similar educational settings their own pedagogical and/or professional research and experiences, promoting the “scholarship of teaching” and other forms of professional development. In addition, the Center will provide a consultant’s bureau of experts drawn from ACA faculty and staff designed to cultivate dialogue across institutions.
Exploring New Initiatives

From resource sharing efforts, to grant opportunities, to a myriad of supportive networks across our colleges and universities, to spotlighting our members’ essential educational and cultural roles in our communities, the Appalachian College Association continually seeks to locate new means to support our member institutions’ educational missions. Our recent strategic planning efforts captures our purposes well—as well as alliteratively!

- **Collaborate:** Building on the success of the Bowen Central Library, offer member institutions new opportunities to collaborate with one another to support institutional vitality.
- **Cultivate:** Promote scholarship and student learning that supports our colleges’ capacity to address challenges and opportunities in Appalachia.
- **Communicate:** Publicize the transformational work of ACA institutions, both collective and individual.
- **Connect:** Leverage partnerships with other organizations and entities focused on Appalachia and higher education.

We continue to seek new initiatives to support our member institutions. And we always welcome feedback—if you have any ideas for new programs or for improving the ACA’s current work, please let us know.

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**ACA Member Institutions**

**Kentucky**
- Alice Lloyd College
- Kentucky Christian University
- University of Pikeville

**Berea College**
- Lindsey Wilson College
- University of the Cumberlands

**Campbellsville University**
- Union College

**North Carolina**
- Brevard College
- Mars Hill University

**Lees-McRae College**
- Montreat College

**Lenoir-Rhyne University**
- Warren Wilson College

**Tennessee**
- Bryan College
- King University
- Maryville College
- Tusculum University

**Carson-Newman University**
- Lee University
- Milligan University
- The University of the South

**Johnson University**
- Lincoln Memorial University
- Tennessee Wesleyan University

**Virginia**
- Bluefield College

**Emory & Henry College**
- Ferrum College

**West Virginia**
- Alderson Broaddus University
- Ohio Valley University
- Wheeling University

**Bethany College**
- University of Charleston

**Davis & Elkins College**
- West Virginia Wesleyan College

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Appalachian College Association
[www.acaweb.org](http://www.acaweb.org)

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