

**The Upper Housatonic River Valley Experience: An Overview of the Industrial,
Cultural, and Environmental Influences of the Region
Summer 2006**

Course Content:

The purpose of this course is to introduce teachers to the industrial, historical, and cultural heritage of the Upper Housatonic Valley and to help teachers design projects that infuse this information into the curriculum. The course is based on the theory of “contextual learning”—that students learn best when teachers integrate the contexts of students’ lives into the curriculum. Field trips to local cultural, environmental, and business sites and presentations by guest lecturers will be included.

Course Objectives:

Participants in this course will:

- Learn how to incorporate real-world, contextual information from areas such as social studies, history, science, or business and industry into the curriculum;
- Develop an understanding of how to build and maintain collaborative understandings with business and cultural institutions in the area;
- Understand how past historical and industrial developments affect present and future regional interests;
- Develop approaches to curriculum that enhance all students’ opportunities for success (underachieving students, special needs students, ELA students, male and female students).
- Share the projects developed in this course with colleagues and administrators in their school districts.

Activities:

- Site visits to local industrial and environmental sites provide background and context for the instructional projects.
- Faculty presentations and discussions provide in-depth exploration of science, history, and business topics.
- Daily field journal notes (submitted to the Course Web Site) provide opportunities to record observations and reflect on possible curricular implications.
- Online course area provides a space for sharing ideas with course participants and submitting assignments to course instructors.
- Showcase Website will display completed projects.

Readings:

John Dewey, Democracy and Education

<http://www.johndeweyphilosophy.com/books/democracy_and_education/>

Selected websites (see course website)

Evaluation:

Daily Attendance and Participation (20%)

Submissions to Daily Journal/Discussion area (20%)

Course proposal (20%)

Completed project (40%)

Course Project:

Design and develop a content-specific project which builds on your understandings about the Upper Housatonic Valley and related material. The project can be designed for use by students (and/or other teachers) at your school or at schools across the Berkshires and across the world. All projects should adhere to the philosophy that teaching and learning in context helps students understand the connections between content of the curriculum and the world outside the classroom. The project will be shared on a Website that will be available to the public.

Projects will be assessed on the degree to which they:

- Familiarize students (and/or teachers) with significant places in the Upper Housatonic River Valley National Heritage Area.
- Include hands-on, place-based opportunities for students (e.g. field-trips to sites featured in this course, online collaboration related to local activities, etc.).
- Address relevant content that connects to the Massachusetts Frameworks for Learning.
- Include interdisciplinary connections (contextual learning is not about content in isolation; if not included in the unit itself, connections can be in pre- or post-unit activities).
- Use active learning teaching methods (e.g. inquiry based learning, project-based learning).

Due Dates:

June 30. Project proposals should be submitted to the Project Proposal area of the Course Web Site. Proposals will be reviewed by all instructors, who will provide suggestions for revising and completing the projects.

August 1. Completed projects should be submitted to the Completed Projects area of the course site.

Project Possibilities:

You can select from the following possibilities:

1. A curriculum unit.

The unit must include not only the description, but also the activities and materials that will be used for individual lessons. (E.g. Webquest, handouts or worksheets for students, PowerPoint presentations). A template for the unit development and sample units are provided on the course website. Your lessons (6 to 10) should include the hands-on, active learning, context-based strategies, directly related to the sites we visited or similar local sites, such as those suggested throughout this course.

2. A resource collection

Examples:

a. You might develop a collection of lesson plans related to the Upper Housatonic River National Heritage Area (revised for Massachusetts frameworks) using resources from nationally reviewed sites such as the Marco Polo collection. If you choose this option, you will need to include an explanation of how to use the lessons; suggestions for adapting each lesson to the Massachusetts frameworks and to the criteria (above) for this course; and mention of locally available resources, such as the STEM collection of probes, software, and other teaching materials available through MCLA. The lesson plans should involve active-learning and contextual learning activities.

b. You could develop an “experts” database—a list of human resources in the Berkshires—people who would speak to your classes or to your colleagues about topics related to the Upper Housatonic Valley. This project must include background information (e.g. web sites, materials) on the areas of expertise for each expert along with contextual active-learning activities that students could do to learn before and/or after hearing each of the speakers. Develop the experts database and suggested activities as a resource that other teachers could use.

3. A collaborative project

You could design a local project that is connected to national or international projects in other classrooms. See this guide to planning an international project at the Education Department website:

http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/tech/international/guide_pg10.html#planresources

4. A digital storytelling project

If you enjoy digital photography or video, you could design a field trip video and other resources that could be used to create a compelling story of some aspect of the Upper Housatonic River Valley. Provide a written guide that a teacher could use. If you choose this option, your written guide to the resource would need to include activities for using it in the classroom as well as an explanation of how it is based on the contextual learning approach required for this course.