In 2007, CELTS was awarded a 3-year Learn and Serve America (LSA) Community-Based Research Innovation Grant, to fund CBR collaborations, focused on issues of energy and empowerment. CELTS service-learning staff facilitate the development of CBR partnerships among faculty, students and community organizations, communication among CBR project participants, and the funding of CBR projects through the LSA grant.

**Learn and Serve America**

**Community-Based Research Innovation Grant:**

**Energy and Empowerment in an Appalachian County**

**Code-Approved Natural Building Projects**

Berea College Sustainability and Environmental Studies (SENS) Independent Majors Erin Finsel, ’11, and Phil Hawn, ’09, worked with HomeGrown HideAway’s to research natural building techniques and the code-approval process. This research led to their participation in the design and construction of the first code-approved Earthbag home in Kentucky and a code-approved StrawBale/Ear art studio during the summer of 2008.

Dr. Richard Olson was the faculty sponsor of this project. HomeGrown HideAway’s continues to offer community workshops to share what they learned in the code-approval process along with natural building techniques in general.

**Grant-Writing with Energy in Mind**

During January 2009, students in ENG 227 Grant-Writing, a Short Term course taught by Dr. Kate Egerton, partnered with Sustainable Berea and Madison County Home Energy Improvement Program, Inc.

The students in this service-learning course learned a great deal about writing for non-profit organizations. They wrote portions of grants for each of the two organizations, which in turn gained temporary access to a foundation directory. They also researched grants for which the organizations were eligible.

**Survey of Health Professionals: Impacts of Coal-Fired Power Plants**

Students who took HST 210 Health in Appalachia in Spring 2009, taught by Dr. Ker Wright, partnered with the Kentucky Environmental Foundation (KEF) and Judith Weckman, of the Berea College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. In addition to studying various perspectives about health in the region, students created and administered a survey for health professionals about their knowledge of health impacts from coal-fired power plants.

After the survey concluded, students invited participants to a forum to discuss the results.

This project supports the work that KEF and a coalition of other groups in the region are doing to propose alternatives to a new coal-fired power plant in Clark County, Kentucky.

**Transition Town Berea**

Transition Town Berea began as a project of the community non-profit Sustainable Berea. In Fall 2008, Sustainable Berea partnered with SENS labor students and five academic programs and departments:

- African and African American Studies
- Appalachian Studies
- Peace and Social Justice Studies
- Sustainability and Environmental Studies (SENS)
- Women’s Studies

The goal of Transition Town Berea is to increase the ability of the City of Berea to deal with economic uncertainty, peak oil, and climate change. The approach for this goal was developing a Transition Plan to increase the city’s resilience—including its ability to withstand shocks from the outside—particularly in the areas of energy, food, and economy.

The Transition Plan for Berea is modeled after the Kisnale (Ireland) Energy Descent Action Plan and was developed according to The Transition Handbook by Rob Hopkins. The Berea College students, who were enrolled in one of five collaborating capstone courses, facilitated discussions at public meetings. Notes from these meetings and students’ research were synthesized into a set of 36 recommendations for the City of Berea. Students presented these recommendations, along with their visions of Berea in 2025, to 85 people at a public meeting on November 12, after which the public was asked to comment. In addition, each attendant received three evaluation sheets to provide written comments on the recommendations and to suggest additional actions. This feedback was compiled and discussed at another student-led public meeting on November 20, during which attendants also prioritized the recommendations.

Along with the 36 recommendations, the group also planned a year-long series of Re-Skilling workshops. “Re-Skilling” refers to regaining the skills our grandparents had and updating them for advances in knowledge and technology. These workshops aim to increase community resilience by teaching citizens practical skills for reducing their energy use, installing alternative energy sources, growing and storing food, and supporting a local economy. In addition to coordinating workshops, SENS labor students worked with members of Sustainable Berea to create a calendar with corresponding information for each of the monthly Re-Skilling workshops hosted by the organization.

The City of Berea has been designated as an official Transition Town. Berea joins 133 communities worldwide in this designation, and is only the thirteenth Transition Town in the US and the first in Kentucky.