Three graduate students and a faculty member from the Center for Appalachian Studies presented papers at an international mountain studies conference in Jasper National Park, Alberta, Canada, May 5-8, 2015. Organized by the University of Alberta's Canadian Mountain Studies Initiative, the academic conference, Thinking Mountains 2015, was an interdisciplinary gathering of over 140 scholars from around the world presenting research about mountain environments and cultures.   
  
Dr. Katherine Ledford, assistant professor of Appalachian studies, and three of her graduate students pursuing the Master of Arts degree in Appalachian studies--Melanie Harsha, Karen Russo, and Robyn Seamon--shared their research on the Appalachian Mountains with the conference attendees. The graduate students' presentations emerged from their papers for Dr. Ledford's fall 2014 seminar on Global Appalachia. The seminar places early representations of Appalachia within the European traditions of the picturesque and the sublime and directs graduate students in studying the region in comparison with other mountain regions around the world including the Alps, Pyrenees, Carpathians, and Andes, among others.   
  
Melanie Harsha presented research from her seminar paper and thesis project on serpent handling religious traditions in Appalachia; Karen Russo introduced conference attendees to the development of ecotourism in Appalachia; and Robyn Seamon compared systems of natural beekeeping in Appalachia with apiarian practices in other mountain environments in Europe. Katherine Ledford presented an argument for the benefits of comparative mountain studies to the field of Appalachian studies, a portion of her current book project.   
  
Dr. Ledford notes, "This conference was a unique opportunity for my graduate students to practice comparative critical thinking about mountains in conversations with other scholars from around the world. We met people from Africa, Asia, and Europe, all conducting research on mountains and mountain cultures." As part of the conference, Dr. Ledford and the graduate students visited the Athabasca Glacier and learned about environmental factors impacting the Columbia Icefield, the largest ice field in the Rocky Mountains. "In Canada, my graduate students visited mountains that are very different, physically and culturally, from the Appalachian Mountains," Dr. Ledford said. "This conference extended the work we did in my Global Appalachia seminar in beneficial ways. It challenged my graduate students to consider our Appalachian Mountains from different perspectives."   
  
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