

**Report to the Bonner Foundation**  
**Evaluation of Responses to the**  
**2000 Incoming Bonner Scholar Survey**

November, 2000  
*Submitted by Cheryl and Jim Keen*

**THIS SURVEY IS PART OF AN  
ONGOING STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF THE BONNER SCHOLAR PROGRAM**

This past fall, as part of an ongoing effort to understand the impact of the Bonner Scholars Program on its scholarship recipients, we surveyed incoming Bonner Scholars for the second time. This reading of their initial impressions, hopes and experiences will enable us to follow this class for the purpose of establishing a clearer understanding of the impact of various aspects of the BSP Program over four years and to compare it with incoming Bonner Scholars in future years.<sup>1</sup>

These Scholars will be surveyed again at the midpoint of their college career (except in the few cases of third year entrants), at graduation, and as alumni. For the purposes of this report we will not distinguish between incoming first year students and replacement Bonners because the number of replacement Bonners is so small.

The feedback received from individual programs so far indicates that this year we had the same, welcoming reception to the incoming survey as we did last year. We are off to a good start in making this kind of data collection a routine part of the BSP.

**HIGH EXPECTATIONS**

At the end of the survey we gave the freshmen one chance to do more than simply answer survey questions with forced answer, multiple choices. The last question invited them to “feel free to indicate any doubts, ambivalences, hopes, and/or expectations you might have for the program.” Their responses are very positive and will be quoted throughout this report. Eighty-five of the students (23%) took time to write a response and most of them expressed more than one thought about the program.

The responses were fairly easy to sort into categories, the largest of which came from 23 who wrote of their hopes to do service and better the community. The next most frequent response came from 21 who expressed worry about balancing their service commitments with their course work and, sometimes, with sports. A close third came from 20 who expressed a core sense of excitement, hope, and anticipation of enjoyment. Fifteen of them wrote of their hope that the program would help them better themselves and help them in the future. Ten indicated more specifically that they hoped the program would help them explore career interests and another 10 wanted to get to know the community better. Smaller numbers of students mentioned the program would enable them to work with children, to make friends on campus, to set an example of someone who cares, to gain prestige, and to gain patience. Only two mentioned the financial aid aspect of the program. These responses differ from the survey questions, which put first the satisfaction at being about to do community service instead of simply earning money. We can only speculate about what the 77% who didn't write prose responses at the end of the survey might have said.

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<sup>1</sup> We thank Tom Plaut and CARA at Mars Hill College for their coding of the surveys.

## WHY DO THEY WANT TO BE BONNER SCHOLARS?

In response to the survey questions, 84.4% indicated they want “to do community service instead of earning money.” In their own words, we heard:

*“I really appreciate the opportunity to get financial aid for helping the community.”*

Not only did the Bonner Scholarship enable them to do service instead of other work-study jobs, but first year students reported that the Bonner scholarship enabled 57.5% of them (compared to 63.5% last year) to attend their particular college, 18.2% to attend college at all (compared to 34.5% last year), and 18.2%, similarly to last year, to avoid postponing college.

While the BSP enabled 84.4% of incoming Bonner Scholars to do service instead of earn money in another job, they have many reasons they wanted to become a Bonner Scholar. The incoming students were given a chance to indicate which, among a list of 21 motivations, were most important to them in deciding to apply to become Bonner Scholars. The most frequent response, made by 72.2% (compared to 82% last year), was “an opportunity to work with people” (= “very” or “most important”). This priority was also captured in response to the second highest motivation held by 71.9% of the group, which was “for the enjoyment you receive from helping others.”

- *“Knowing I have helped society gives me a great feeling of satisfaction.”*
- *“I enjoy working hard to help others, especially the needy in the community. It makes me feel ten times better to see that others are satisfied and happy. I can’t wait for the upcoming years with the BSP working for the community!!”*
- *“I hope to build my already strong love for helping children.”*

Sixty-six percent (compared to 78.2% last year) of the first year students stressed the importance of doing service apart from the value of the financial aid.<sup>2</sup>

- *“Personally I feel like I was brought to the world to do something and help my country and the community I live in. It is my hope that the Bonner’s Scholars program will enable me to do that.”*
- *“I am looking to continue my community service which is important to me.”*

An equally strong motivation for the first year students was the opportunity for personal growth and development (mentioned by 66.5% of the first year students.)

- *“The program will provide me with the experienced needed to work with students before it is required in my secondary education major.”*
- *“I am hopeful that this is program will help me in choosing a specific career and unleashing a specific passion.”*
- *“I hope this program will help develop my social skills.”*
- *“I hope that it will provide me with a support network.”*

The 21 possible motivations for becoming a Bonner that were offered in the survey are listed in Table 1 in the order in which the incoming 2000 Bonner Scholars ranked them. For comparison, we have included the 1999 seniors’ and 1999 incoming students’ responses to similar questions. ( Because the five point scales were worded somewhat differently over the years, it’s more useful to compare the way

<sup>2</sup> While it is impossible to gauge reasons for the drop of about 12% on this and the previous question, repeating the incoming survey in future years should help us to distinguish repeated patterns from ephemeral changes.

seniors and first year students ranked their motivations, rather than strictly comparing percentage points.)

Similarly to last year, more than one third of incoming Bonners do not look forward to the BSP as a context for leadership development. Perhaps we haven't been successful at promoting this aspect of the program as a more important entrance criterion, or perhaps these students associate leadership with popularity - a common perception among high school students. One student expressed her readiness to lead. "I am ready to jump in with both feet. I'm a real 'mover-and-shaker' when it comes to this kind of community service."

## WHO ARE THESE STUDENTS?

**SIZE OF GROUP:** 374 responded to the survey out of 405 students for a 92% return rate. From 5 to 25 scholars responded on each of 25 campuses.

**GENDER:** There is a 60/40 female/male balance among the first years again.

**AGE:** Most students are traditionally-aged freshmen. 6.1% of them either took a year off before entering college or transferred to their current college, compared to 7.2% last year. Only 2 of the students are nontraditional students, entering several years after their teens.

**GPA:** 46.5% of the first years had a high school GPA of 3.7 or better (compared to 52.3% last year) . and 80.3% had a GPA of 3.3 or better, almost identically to last year.

**"RACE":** 24.6% of the first year Bonners are African American, 4.5% are Hispanic , 3.5% Asian-American, 1.1% American Indian, and 65% are Caucasian. (1.3% didn't respond or marked in "other."). These figures are almost identical to last year's.

**FAMILY EDUCATION LEVEL:** 68.2% of their mothers attended, at least, some college and 66% of their fathers did. (These figures are higher than last year.)

**RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION:** 67.6% of the freshman are religiously affiliated (compared to 74.2% last year, with 22.7% identifying themselves as spiritual but not affiliated and 7% as not religious. Of the 67.6% who are affiliated, about three fourths indicated their affiliation, 99.5% being Christian. The largest group is Baptist at 17.1%, 8.8% are Catholic and 7.2% Methodist.

## HOW MUCH COMMUNITY SERVICE HAVE THEY DONE?

Given our scholarship criteria, it is not surprising that 94.7% of the entering Bonner Scholars had already participated in *organized or formal* volunteer service experiences and 96.8% had been involved in *informal* service within the context of their family, school church or community. There is little change between these figures and those reported last year. For comparison, Astin's HERI survey found that a record high of 75.3% of freshmen entering in 1999 reported doing service in their last year of high school.<sup>3</sup>

	<u>Rates of Service in Last Year of High School for First Years</u>	
	informal service	formal service
once a week or more	39.3%	34%
monthly	26.5%	21.1%
every couple of months	21.9%	24.9%
rarely	9.1%	14.7%

<sup>3</sup> Sax, L.J., Astin, A.W., Korn, W.S.& Mahoney, K . (1999). The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1999. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Freshmen were also asked to estimate the number of hours they spent in a variety of high school activities, including service. They report:

	<u>Hours Spent in Service Weekly in Last Year of High School</u>
2 hours or less	24.9%
3-5 hours	37.2%
6-10 hours	25.4%
11-15 hours	8.6%
16+ hours	4.0%

#### WHAT ARE THE OTHER DEMANDS ON THEIR TIME?

Last year, the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, announced that a record number of freshmen were reporting that they were "overwhelmed by all I have to do", with women reporting, nearly twice as often as men, that they felt that way. The HERI researchers speculate that men are less stressed because they spend more time in stress-reducing activities.<sup>4</sup> This year our male students report spending more time socializing with friends, in athletics, using the internet, playing video games and watching TV. The female students report spending more time studying and doing service.

#### Six or more hours of weekly activity during the last year:

	females	males
Socializing with friends	64%	75%
Studying and doing homework	64%	50%
Paid work	55%	54%
Athletics and exercise	44%	64%
Student clubs and activities	40%	40%
Community service	40%	34%
Faith development/relig. activities	26%	28%
Using the internet	21%	33%
Watching tv	18%	35%
Playing video games	2%	10%

Worry about time commitments was frequently mentioned at the end of the survey.

- "I am worried about getting good grades with these ten hours a week (of service).
- "I hope that I will be able to organize my time in a way that I can do all the things I want to do at college."
- "I am bad enough at studying - I'm afraid the service commitment may lead to less time spent preparing for classes."

<sup>4</sup> Leo Riesberg, "Student stress is rising, especially among women," Chronicle of Higher Education, January 28, 2000, p. A49.

- “I am not great at time management. I hope the commitment does not become overwhelming.”
- “I have some concern about working over 20 hours a week, college, and Bonner.”
- “My only fear is that I will try to do too much and not be able to put my full heart and enough time into everything that I care about.”

## WHAT DO THEY CARE ABOUT?

We asked the incoming Bonner Scholars to rate the following values, which are drawn from the CIRP survey given to freshman on hundreds of campuses and overseen by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. This allows us to get a sense of how unique these students are. The following are “essential” or “very important” to our incoming first year Bonner Scholars, and are compared in the second column to the responses of last spring’s graduating seniors and in the third column to freshmen nationally, as indicated by the HERI survey.

	<u>Essential or Very Important Values Held by Groups</u>			
	Incoming '00	Incoming '99	Seniors '00	National Frosh'99
develop a meaningful philosophy of life	66.3%	59.7%	67.4%	
raising a family	61.5%	62.4%	72.2%	
influencing social values	61.3%	53.5%	60.7%	35.8%
helping promote racial understanding	58.0%	55.4%	65.6%	28.4%
being well off financially	33.4%	34.1%	39.6%	
influencing the political structure	28.6%	27.3%	37.4%	

This year’s entering students are notably more oriented towards social values and developing a meaningful philosophy of life than were last year’s students. “Being well off financially” drew the largest negative response for the incoming first year Bonners, with 12.3% saying this was “not important.” It will be interesting to see how these values develop with the same age cohort over four years. Assuming that the character of the incoming students has been consistent over the past five years, it appears that in the course of the four years Bonners become substantially more systemic in their thinking about change. We are noting some changes from year to year that suggest that the concerns of the larger society interact and may mute the impact of the BSP on the seniors. This year’s graduating class looks more like entering freshman than they did the previous year’s graduating class, suggesting that the current societal values may have more influence than does the developmental impact of the program. Alternatively, we could be recruiting a different group of students into the program. In the end, the best way to achieve greater clarity about this is when we will be able to compare several cohorts, beginning as incoming students and culminating as seniors.

For a majority of these entering students, their thoughts about their future careers are similar to their service interests or commitments, with 33.2% claiming they are “very similar” and 29.4% saying they are “somewhat similar”. Only 22.7% say they don’t know and only 14.7% say they are different. Of course many incoming first year students have not yet chosen a major, or, if they have, will change that choice by the third year. We expect to generate clearer data on major choice in the midpoint survey and on career choice on the graduating senior and alumni surveys.

## THEY ARE HOPEFUL AND CONCERNED

Incoming Bonner Scholars are hopeful about their future, with 53.2% feeling very hopeful and 33.2% feeling “hopeful”, totaling 86.4%. Only 9 of them are fearful about their own personal futures. These results are very similar to the responses of the ‘00 and ‘99 seniors and last year’s incoming students.

15.8% of the incoming students are fearful or very fearful about the future of society (a drop from 21.4% last year) and 37.1% feel hopeful or very hopeful about the future of society. The largest group, 47.1%, are uncertain about the future of society. The seniors’ response to this question indicate more hope. 46.7% of last year’s graduating seniors are hopeful or very hopeful about the future of the society. Responses to this question can be highly influenced both by individual developmental process as well as national and world events that have occurred during a student’s lifetime. But we’ve now seen a pattern over two years of graduating seniors being more hopeful than entering freshman.

As is to be expected, the first year students perceive the people closest to them to be most concerned about people in need. They perceive the following groups to hold high or very high levels of concern:

	<u>Perception of Very High or Moderate Levels of Concern for People in Need</u>			
	'00 incoming	'99 freshman	'00 seniors	'99 seniors
the general public	48.4%	33.3%	29.6%	22.1%
high school students	55.6%	41.8%	-	-
college students	55.9%	47.8%	22.6%	16.2%
myself	58.8%	68.2%	68.8%	80.4%

It is notable that this is the first survey on which Bonner Scholars mark themselves as rather typical of other students’ level of concern. Perhaps this is a result of an upsurge of community service requirements in high schools across the country. Will this lack of “specialness” influence the programs on our campuses this year?

## HOW DID THEY LEARN ABOUT THE BSP?

They heard about the BSP from a variety of sources:

	'00 incoming class	'99 freshmen
from a recruitment brochure or letter inviting you to apply	50.0%	-
from a letter inviting them to apply	-	39.6%
from a recruitment brochure	-	16.2%
directly from an admissions officer	18.7%	22.6%
from an adult such as a guidance counselor, clergy or coach	12.3%	-
from another Bonner scholar in HS	10.2%	17.4%
from a parent or sibling	8.8%	-
nonrespondents or “other”	-	10.3%

(several mentioned that they had siblings in the program.)

## THE TRANSITION TO COLLEGE AND THE BSP

The transition to college from high school, family life, or work life doesn't seem to be a great challenge for the first year Bonners in 1999 or 2000. Only 3.2% feel poorly prepared or not prepared at all this year and 64.2% feel well prepared or very well prepared. When asked particularly if they felt prepared to deal with the demands of a full academic schedule and the volunteer and training commitments with the BSP, the confidence dropped only somewhat, with 55.0% feeling well prepared or very well prepared and 4.0% feeling poorly or not prepared.

## THE INCOMING STUDENT SURVEY IS PART OF A LARGER RESEARCH EFFORT

In 1997 we began a research process which aims at yielding a comprehensive portrait of the impact of the Bonner Scholars Program on its student participants. This approach began by gathering interview data in the service of refining an omnibus student impact survey that had previously been piloted by the Foundation. We reported on the findings of the omnibus survey in a presentation to the 1998 June gathering held at DePauw University and in a subsequently written report entitled, "Evaluation of Responses by 929 Bonner Scholars to the Bonner Scholar Student Impact Survey and Related Interviews and Focus Groups." In that report we recommended that the omnibus Student Impact Survey be replaced by a series of four surveys addressing particular groups of Bonner Scholars at critical points in their matriculation through the program:

1. **the Incoming Student Survey (ISS)**, the subject of this report, which seeks to clarify the profiles of incoming students on each campus, attending to their motivations for becoming a Bonner scholar, demographic questions, past service experience, areas in which the BSP aims to engender growth, and the outlook and expectations students bring with them into the BSP. This survey provides a very useful point of reference for measuring the growth of Bonner Scholars over the course of their years in the BSP.
2. **A Mid-Point Impact Survey (MPIS)** which is being administered for the first time in 2000 to all continuing Bonner Scholars in the first semester of their **junior year**. This survey will gauge impact of the first two years of Bonner participation while yielding a view of the program from those who are in the midst of their Bonner involvement.
3. **The Graduating Senior Impact Survey (GSIS)** gathers data on the full four-year impact of the program. This survey focuses both on impact and introduces questions regarding outlook and plans beyond college. This survey yields clearer information about the impact of the BSP on career plans, majors, scholarly interest and leadership activities. In the long run, we anticipate that GSIS results, when compared to the results of the first two surveys from the same Scholars, will yield clearer focus on areas related to intellectual development, such as the growth of systemic and critical thinking. In October, 1999 Jim Keen reported on data from 1999 GSIS at the Foundation Summit at The University of Richmond. Details are found in our October, 1999 memorandum on the GSIS and Cheryl Keen reported on the senior 2000 data at the June, 2000 summit. At each June meeting and November Directors' gathering, Cheryl Keen meets individually with a number of campuses program directors to discuss ways in which the data for their particular campus varies from the whole. Such variations may indicate campus uniqueness as well as strengths and challenges posed by that uniqueness. Other directors have been contacted subsequently by phone and by mail.
4. **A Bonner Alumni Survey (BAS)** is on the drawing board. In the context of the Bonner alumni gathering in June 2000 at Berry College, we conducted a series of focus groups with alumni aimed at generating a set of questions grounded in alumni experience. Several preliminary focus groups have already been conducted. To these questions will be added basic demographic questions as well as questions suggested by the Foundation. Our goal will be to have this Alumni Survey ready to be sent to all alumni in the network in 2001.