

**REPORT  
TO THE BONNER FOUNDATION**

\*\*\*\*\*

**EVALUATION OF RESPONSES  
BY 929 BONNER SCHOLARS TO THE  
BONNER SCHOLAR STUDENT IMPACT SURVEY  
AND RELATED INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS**

*December*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*What dimensions of impact does the Bonner Scholars Program (BSP) have on its student participants?* Since the Fall of 1997, we, as researchers, have been asking this question:

1. through in-depth interviews by telephone with students across 22 campuses;
2. through interviews with program directors and coordinators, some by telephone, some in person, across the campuses;
3. through interviews with leaders at the Bonner Foundation and with several presidents of colleges with Bonner Scholar Programs;
4. through focus groups conducted with Bonner Scholars on eight campuses; and,
5. through the Bonner Scholars Student Impact Survey (SIS), administered on all 22 campuses in March and April of this year.

The results of the SIS, when added to the material gathered from the interviews and focus groups, indicate that the BSP has strong and positive effects on its student participants in significant dimensions of their current lives. And, based on findings from our previous Common Fire research, we believe that the effects documented in this report are likely to have a lasting and enhancing influence on their lives after college.

Other studies of the impact of service-learning experiences have demonstrated gains in areas such as civic responsibility, academic development and life skills (RAND, 1997) as well as increased social justice concerns and systemic analysis (Eyler, Giles and Braxton, 1997). The survey results detailed in this report confirm and in some respects go beyond earlier studies. We find that the BSP is performing extraordinarily well in providing opportunities and developing the requisite skills for promoting encounters and understanding across boundaries of race, class, gender, culture, language and socioeconomic background. On each of eleven different questions, over 80% of the scholars felt the BSP affected their opportunity, capacity, or commitment to engage with others across boundaries of difference, confirming testimony from interviews and focus groups indicating that encounters across thresholds of difference constitute a central area of BSP impact.

Responses to questions on understanding social problems, while robust, are slightly lower than those regarding engaging difference. SIS data suggests that the BSP provides fertile ground for leadership development, strongly supporting the Foundation's initiatives in this area. The BSP also appears to provide experiences conducive to the development of a systemic perspective. Results in this area match or exceed results on similar measures in the RAND study.

The survey results also provide documentation of the significant impact of Bonner financial support on Bonner Scholars. But the strong responses on the SIS to other dimensions of impact as well as

the consistent testimony of focus groups and interviews indicate that while Bonner financial support is crucial, the BSP is about community service. The scholars made it clear that those who are “only in it for the money” either get converted or drop out. In the BSP, the wise provision of an extrinsic motivation (financial support) appears to facilitate and enhance the achievement of goods internal to practice. The kinds of virtue that seem to be blossoming in the Bonner Scholars as a result of their participation in the program are consistent with those that will help them to become successful adults able to care about those in need and to act on behalf of the common good.

The survey results demonstrate a strong dimension of faith development facilitated by the BSP. Many Bonners take religion very seriously - it ranks only after academics and the BSP itself as the third most cited important aspect of their college experience. There is significant evidence that for Bonner Scholars who are strongly religious, the BSP provides a focus for exploring and developing faith commitments as well as for acting upon them. The BSP also supports other key dimensions of personal development including Scholars' sense of identity, sense of meaning and purpose, sense of compassion, and involvement in learning.

SIS results are particularly notable for the high level of response on questions of academic involvement, indicating that Bonner Scholars are not only academically engaged but that the BSP supports them in developing and maintaining this high level of academic engagement.

Based on what we have learned from this survey, we believe that the current survey should be replaced by a series of four survey tools which would be administered to particular groups of Bonner Scholars at critical points in the odyssey through the program, including:

1. an incoming freshman survey to be used as a baseline for measuring the growth of Bonner Scholars;
2. a fine tuned version of the current SIS for sophomores and juniors;
3. a graduating senior survey to discover the full four-year impact of the BSP;
4. an alumni survey to begin documenting the impact of the BSP beyond its four-year span.

Survey and other data, banked by the Foundation for the programs as a whole, and by each campus for each individual, would provide an excellent resource for:

1. the documentation of the BSP's short and longer time impact,
2. the on-going development and refinement of the overall BSP approach and of each individual program,
3. future research on sustained community service in the undergraduate years,
4. the development and refinement of approaches to community service beyond the BSP on participating campuses, and

5. the initiatives of the Bonner Foundation, as it carries out its role as advocate for community service nationally, and as it seeks funding partners in future initiatives.

Second, we recommend that the Bonner Foundation continue using qualitative evaluation and research approaches. The on-site student focus groups are of great use in interpreting survey results and in understanding how the program varies in accordance with the culture and missions of the host institutions and the profiles of their student bodies. Recognition of institutional variety argues for close listening to what Bonner Scholars on each campus say about their own programs.

## NARRATIVE

*What dimensions of impact does the Bonner Scholars Program (BSP) have on its student participants? Since the Fall of 1997, we, as researchers, have been asking this question in the following ways:*

1. through in-depth interviews by telephone with students across the 22 campuses;
2. through interviews with program directors and coordinators, some by telephone, some in person, across the campuses;
3. through interviews with leaders at the Bonner Foundation and with several presidents of colleges with Bonner Scholar Programs;
4. through focus groups conducted with Bonner Scholars on 8 of the 22 campuses; and
5. through the Bonner Scholars Student Impact Survey (SIS), administered on all 22 campuses in March and April of this year.

The full results of the SIS, when added to the material gathered from the interviews and focus groups, indicate that the BSP has strong and positive effects on its student participants in significant dimensions of their current lives and will likely have positive effects on their future development.<sup>1</sup>

## A BRIEF REVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH

Indeed, we had anticipated that the BSP mirrors the impact that has been attributed by other studies of undergraduates engaged in community service and are pleased to report that data from all of our sources strongly confirm this. Most research on the impact of service has focused on students' course-based service-learning. We would categorize the BSP as service-learning, too (despite the fact that students get paid for their service work) because of the significant reflective component found in the regular meetings, as well as the journals and dialogue with a consistent peer group and faculty/administrative leader who is central to the BSP design.

Key existing research includes the Corporation for National Service's contract with RAND to evaluate the *Learn and Serve America* grants awarded to 116 institutions between 1995-1997. For RAND, the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), led by Alexander Astin, surveyed over

---

<sup>1</sup> We thank Tom Plaut and his colleagues for help with preparing the data .

3000 students taking service-learning courses to understand the impact of these experiences and participants. They found that participants, when compared to nonparticipants, reported gains in three areas: civic responsibility, academic development, and life skills.

More specific areas of gain included the following: commitment to help others, to promote racial understanding, and to influence social values and political structures; greater aspirations for advanced degrees; more involvement in study and talking with faculty; heightened perception of leadership abilities and opportunities; and increased personal skills such as social self confidence, interpersonal skills, understanding of community problems, and knowledge and acceptance of other races and cultures. All 35 areas of growth HERI studied showed gains, and with no cost to academic growth. This supports observations reported recently at various conferences that GPA has not been hurt, and may be helped, by engagement in service.

Because the RAND study draws upon the immense, state-of-the-art data base generated by more than three decades of student survey research through the Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP), this study is highly reliable in indicating the probable impact on students of well supported service-learning experiences of at least one semester. As we will report, Bonners do at least as well and usually exceed the gains documented by the RAND study in all areas for which the Bonner research generated comparable data and we believe it is reasonable to assume such an outcome would be likely in all areas of impact documented in the RAND study.

Most research available from other sources focuses on the impact of semester-long courses. One study of a program more like the Bonner 4-year experience was conducted by Scott Myers-Lipton. He assessed students' growth in a comprehensive 2-year service-learning program, compared with a non-equivalent control group. He found larger reductions in racism along with larger increases in civic responsibility, and in international understanding, concern and respect than in students involved simply in volunteerism or not involved in service at all.<sup>2</sup>

Eyler, Giles, and Braxton,<sup>3</sup> in their FIPSE-supported Comparing Models of Service-Learning research project, collected data from over 1500 students at twenty college and universities during the spring of 1995. They collected pre- and post-surveys from 1140 students involved in service learning courses and 404 students who selected neither the service classes nor the options within classes. They measured the impact of service on goals often expressed for service-learning programs: increased sense of citizenship, confidence in ability to make a difference, and an increase in values that are sensitive to the needs of communities, social problems, tolerance of others, and social justice. They found at the beginning of the semester that students who chose to participate in service were "already higher on

<sup>2</sup> Myers-Lipton, Scott "Effect of a Comprehensive Service-Learning Program on College Students' Level of Modern Racism." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 3 (1996): 44-54.

<sup>3</sup> Eyler, Janet, Giles Dwight and Braxton, John "The Impact of Service-Learning on College Students." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*. Fall (1997): 5-15.

each of these measures with the exception of valuing attaining wealth,” yet participation in service-learning still “has a small but significant impact on many outcome measures over the course of the semester.” (p.10-11). They found women more likely to show higher outcomes, and that closeness with faculty accentuated these results in both men and women. They found support for their previous findings that “students are more likely to perceive a systemic rather than individual locus for social problems and to be concerned with social justice issues when they work in the community.” (p.11) They found no support for impact on critical thinking, issues identification or communication skills. It is important to remember that this study, as with most, is looking for quite significant growth in students over only the course of a semester and may therefore miss growth effects that take time to blossom.

James Mannon, in his interview study of thirty-seven Bonners at DePauw University, found that they gained new insights about career choices and “that they thought less about success and material values as their sense of service to others and the community increased.” Mannon also reports in his summary of his findings that the BSP “has a decided impact on the students’ academic lives. They tended to be involved in co-curricular activities as well. They learn to organize their time and commitments effectively so that their academic work receives the highest priority.” Mannon reports that he finds the Bonners to be academically successful on campus.<sup>4</sup>

## **ENGAGEMENT WITH THE OTHER**

Moving beyond other research on service-learning, the SIS data that stands out most for us (not surprisingly perhaps, but still remarkably noticeable) relates to our own previous research. In our book, Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World (Daloz, Keen, Keen and Parks, 1996), we reported on more than a decade of inquiry into how commitments to the common good developed and are sustained in the lives of exemplary people. A key catalyst of such commitment proved to be what we term an “enlarging engagement with otherness,” an experience which enables a person to move across thresholds of significant difference in a way that someone or some group that was previously constructed as an outside “they” becomes encompassed within a reconstructed, wider sense of “we.” This kind of humanizing experience sometimes occurred in chance encounter, but most often emerged in a more

<sup>4</sup> The studies of the impact of community service cited above share the assumption that a valid approach to documenting the impact of a college program on its participants involves posing a set of carefully constructed questions to those participants, carefully recording their responses, and systematically analyzing these responses. The approach to studying the impact of the BSP taken by the researchers was to develop and administer a survey tool supplemented by in-depth interviews and focus groups. This approach is consistent with most research on community service and service learning in that it relies on participants’ report of their experience and takes such reports seriously.

There are other approaches to evaluating the impact of a program such as the BSP which could reveal differential impact which do not rely on participants’ sharing their judgments with researchers. For example, one could compare grade point averages or retention rates of BSP participants with control groups. Or one could examine participants to discover whether they are able to demonstrate certain competencies that may be associated with community service - such as the ability to analyze a particular social problem in regard to its root causes. Or one could administer standardized tests which are either nationally or comparison group-normed to measure correlates of intellectual, ethical or moral development. Or one could conduct interviews using standard protocols aimed at assessing faith development or moral development. Such strategies are available to those responsible for the BSP on particular campuses and might be employed productively in a college’s approach to assessing its own BSP. However, each of these alternative approaches would yield insight on a narrower range of impact than the SIS is intended to document. It is the researchers’ judgment that no matter what other approaches might hold promise, a comprehensive approach to measuring program impact would make substantial use of participants’ reports of their own experience.

sustained context such as the Peace Corps, travel study programs, or summer work experiences. And it often happened when our respondents had risked moving out of their own zone of safety and comfort - often when people were away from home. Over time, for our 100 interviewees, these encounters formed a strong sense of solidarity with people whose life contexts and experiences differed irreducibly from their own, leading to the development of a strong and persistent calling to work toward a common good that includes a wider sense of humanity.

The data from the SIS as well as from our interviews and focus groups indicates that the BSP is performing extraordinarily well in promoting opportunities and developing the requisite skills for such encounters. Almost all of the strongest responses on the SIS were to survey questions reflecting on aspects of engaging with otherness. Unless otherwise noted, all percentages in this report indicate students' choice of one of the two positive responses available on the five-point Likert scale.<sup>5</sup> Here are some responses to survey questions that capture aspects of engaging with the other:

- 89% agreed that BSP provides “opportunities to work beside others from different cultural, racial, ability, language or socioeconomic backgrounds;”
- 88.8% agreed that BSP provides “opportunities to serve people from different cultural, racial, ability, language or socioeconomic backgrounds;”
- 88.2% agreed that BSP provides “understanding of the local community around my school;
- 87.5% agreed that BSP provides “understanding people or a person of a different background or life experience from my own;”
- 86.8 agreed that BSP positively affected an “appreciation of my own relative good fortune in life;”
- 85.4% agreed that BSP provides “opportunities to work at service sites with staff from different cultural, racial ability, language or socioeconomic background;”
- 85% agreed that BSP has affected their skill in “listening careful to other people;”
- 84.5% agreed that the BSP provides “encouragement to work across boundaries of race, class and gender within the BSP;” and,
- 82.2% agreed the BSP has positively affected the development of their “sense of compassion.”

\*\*The few results that were higher are listed in Appendix A.

In response to a question which asked them to score their perception of the levels of concern for people in need held by the public at large, by college students, by Bonner Scholars, and by themselves, Bonners believe they are the most concerned, at a rate of 85.3%, compared to thinking, for instance, that only 29% of the general public is concerned. We also noted that the value of “promoting racial

---

<sup>5</sup> We have chosen to consistently report the “percent” figures rather than the “valid percent” figures provided by the Mars Hill faculty who collaborated on this project. In doing so, we honor those who chose not to answer a question, rather than mask non-compliance. Typically, the percent figures are only 1-2% different from the “valid percent figures.” Sometimes however 5-25% of the Scholars did not answer a question, which leaves the “valid percents” looking very skewed. Appendix B lists the questions to which students did not respond at high rates.

understanding” is of significantly higher value to Bonner Scholars than it is to the typical college student in a service-learning course, as found by the RAND evaluation.

Because service off campus is a regular feature of undergraduate life for Bonner Scholars, the experience of venturing beyond their home base and becoming at home in a wider community is a common element of the BSP. In interviews and focus groups Bonner Scholars often discussed the importance to them of learning to move with facility and sensitivity from context to context and coming to have their sense of place include the wider community. The fact that 88.2% of scholars feel that the BSP provides them with an “understanding of the local community around my school” both underscores the high salience of this finding about otherness and suggests that Bonner Scholars are learning to be at home in multiple contexts, an attribute we found among the adult exemplars of commitment interviewed for Common Fire.

In light of the Common Fire findings, the salience of the Bonner Scholars’ experience with otherness confirms their own sense that they are developing long term personal commitments to making a difference. Note, for instance, that :

- 89.8% feel that the BSP has impacted “my motivation to serve others;”
- 89.2% felt the BSP has affected their “sense that I can make a difference;” and,
- 87.6% felt the BSP has affected their “sense of long term personal commitment to making a difference.”

In the interviews and focus groups we often heard testimony about important encounters across thresholds of difference, often in the context of direct service to people in need or in the context of mentoring or teaching relationships. For example, one Bonner Scholar spoke passionately about her work with women and children in a local shelter for battered women. She spoke of how these people had become real to her and how she dedicates time and energy beyond her Bonner support to caring for them. She related that neither her sorority sisters nor her own family could see past their own privileged lives to understand her dedication, but that her fellow Bonner Scholars were a key source of support for her in carrying on this very challenging work while meeting her other obligations as a student.

Another Bonner Scholar, who is actively involved in mentoring at a local boys club, told of his disappointment with a fellow student and personal friend who, after having asked to join in this work and having formed an initial relationship, didn’t follow through with the commitment. The Bonner Scholar spoke compassionately of the painful experience of the boy whose expectations for male sponsorship were raised and then dashed when his friend abandoned the relationship. He related the challenges faced by this boy and others like him growing up in poverty without male sponsorship, the difference that filling that void can make in the life of the child, and the appreciation he feels having growing up in a context without this deficit. This testimony provided an excellent example of experience, analysis, dedication and passion coming together for a Bonner Scholar.



Because the interviews and focus groups indicated to us that encounters across thresholds of difference constitute a central area of programmatic impact on the Bonner Scholars, we are not surprised to see the results reported above, although the consistently high ratings in this area provide an even stronger confirmation of this dimension in the eyes of the Bonner Scholars than we had expected. While the program performs excellently in this regard, even with first year students, the percentage of those reporting “opportunities to work beside others from different cultural, racial, ability, language, or socioeconomic backgrounds” increases by 5.4% over four years when fourth year students are compared to first year students. Likewise, the percentage reporting “opportunities to serve people from different cultural, racial, ability, language or socio-economic backgrounds” increases by 5.5% in a similar comparison.

### **UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

A related area regards understanding social problems. The responses to this set of questions on the SIS , while robust, are slightly lower than those reported above regarding engaging with the other.

- 80.1% agreed that the BSP affected their skill in “making connections between what I’ve done in service and what I learned in the classroom”;
- 78.1% agreed that the BSP affected their skill in “understanding of root causes of social problems such as homelessness” (a substantial gain among fourth year students was recorded in this area);
- 70.9% agreed that the BSP provided “opportunities to study or analyze the causes of social problems or the needs of my specific service experience was addressing ;” and,
- 62.8% agreed that the BSP provided ”opportunities to study or analyze public policy issues or options related to the social problems or needs my service experience was addressing.”

### **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Slightly more than half (50.4%) of the Bonner Scholars responding to the survey indicated that they have held leadership positions on campus outside the BSP - a remarkable number for any group, more so among a busy group of respondents that spans the four years of matriculation. Moreover, this number increases steadily from the first through the fourth year of involvement with the BSP, with close to two-thirds of fourth year Bonner Scholars indicating they have held leadership positions outside the BSP. Thirty-two (32.6) percent of the 929 respondents indicated that the BSP had contributed to their holding leadership positions outside of the BSP. By the fourth year, this number increases to more than half of the respondents. In addition, 81% of the Scholars credited the BSP with positively affecting their skill in “leading others in projects.” In focus groups participants often stated that they are more likely to be leaders because they are Bonners, due to internal self identification associated with being a Bonner and to the support in the group where participants tell each other “we are leaders.” They also report that others on campus look to them as people who can fill a variety of positions, because they are Bonners. They are also plugged into the campus through the BSP structure. Program directors, coordinators, and other Bonner Scholars mentor them from the day they arrive on

campus. Bonner Scholars identify orientation programs as giving them a head start at networking and feeling comfortable on campus. In order to succeed in the BSP, they must learn to manage time and set priorities. These skills transfer readily to support both leadership development and academic success.

These findings suggest that the BSP provides fertile ground for leadership development, strongly supporting the Foundation's initiatives in this area. Focus groups also highlighted the importance of collaborative projects and problem solving that occurs within the context of the BSP on several campuses, elements which are generally associated with progressive approaches to leadership development. Based on the survey and the focus groups, leadership development appears to be a significant accomplishment as well as an area for continued enhancement for the BSP.

### **UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY PROBLEMS AND GAINING A SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE**

For the most part, undergraduates do not bring a systemic perspective with them to college - most freshman tend to think dualistically or multiplistically, which means that while they can make connections between things, they have difficulty engaging the multidimensional complexity required of systemic thinkers. And many students graduate from college without having developed systemic thinking. The BSP appears to provide significant elements conducive to the development of this capacity. We noted earlier that 87.5% felt that the BSP provides an opportunity to gain skills in understanding across thresholds of difference. This achievement in the areas of interpersonal and intercultural perspective taking, combined with the fact that 78.1% felt the BSP affected their skills in understanding of the root causes of social problems (a substantial gain appears in this area in the fourth year), points to students being well on their way to achieving systemic thinking.

These results match or exceed results on similar measures in the RAND study in which only 70%, after a semester of service-learning, felt they gained in their service-learning work in their knowledge of different races and cultures and 61% gained in acceptance of different races/cultures. While 90.6% of the Bonners felt they better understood the communities surrounding their college, the RAND study found service-learning helped 73.5% to understand community problems. The percentages are virtually identical when Bonners are compared with participants in the RAND study regarding how their community service experience has affected their understanding of social problems (78.1% vs. 77.6%).

While the BSP's support for the initiation of new service projects is rated very highly at 82.2% and increases substantially after the first year, opportunities to develop issue area expertise is rated at 69%. This figure, along with low reports of policy engagement and voting, indicates that there is room for growth in this area of the BSP. We are also well aware that it is often through full time work or internships and graduate school that young adults begin to grapple with the larger scale policy and political choices facing our societies.

### **EVALUATION ON REFLECTION**

There are multiple opportunities for reflection in the design of the BSP, and the survey enabled us to evaluate their relative effectiveness. Eighty-five (85.5) percent believe the BSP provides

“opportunities for reflection on my field experience and social issues;” 71% reflect with supervisors and co-workers; and 72.9% reflect through journaling.<sup>6</sup> Yet reflection ranked as least important among five aspects of the BSP they were asked to rank, with “opportunities for community service“ being highest.

John Gardner, author of the Senior Year Experience, told Jim Keen at a recent conference that he has a senior seminar in which he has students reflect on what they learned over four years, what was important and what was missing. They decided that what was missing was reflection. It had been the first time anyone had asked them to reflect. They thought now that they would have learned a lot more if they had been asked to reflect over the four years. In another personal conversation, Alexander Astin confirmed that undergraduate students characteristically give low ratings to reflection.

### **FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMITMENT**

The SIS confirms the importance of financial support afforded to Bonner Scholars by the Bonner Foundation:

- 83.5% say that meeting financial needs motivated them to become Bonner Scholars;
- 68.8% agree that Bonner financial support enables them to do community service instead of earning money in another job;
- 45.4% report holding another job in addition to their community service work in the BSP;
- 63.8% confirm that they would have to spend more time earning money if it were not for the BSP and that this would negatively impact the time they spend on community service;
- 58% agree that Bonner support enabled them to attend the particular college at which they are matriculating; and,
- 20.6% indicate that Bonner financial support made it possible for them to attend college at all.

But as important as Bonner financial support may be to helping students afford college, the access it affords to the high impact the program has on its participants, as documented earlier in this report, appears to be the most salient effect of the financial support. In focus groups and interviews we heard consistent testimony that while the financial support is crucial - in some cases a lifeline - the BSP is about community service. Bonner Scholars made it clear that those who are “only in it for the money” either get converted by the experience or drop out. So financial support proves to be a critical extrinsic motivator that works with the intrinsic experience of multidimensional growth, challenge and satisfaction afforded by sustained involvement in community service and further supported by the supplemental educational program provided for Scholars by the BSP.

As one student put it, in a comment that echoed others we heard, “I knew I felt a calling to serve and Bonner enabled me to do much more than I could’ve otherwise. But I had no idea that this is what it would be, that it would mean so much to me and would help me grow in so many ways.”

---

<sup>6</sup> We thought that journals were mandatory, so this question and its response is confusing. Perhaps some are saying that they don’t “agree” that the journal is an opportunity for reflection, thinking instead, that it is a mandatory writing exercise of little value.

The Bonner connection of financial support with service is further validated by the outcomes on this survey which are consistently as high or higher than those reported in studies of other programs referenced above. These results undermine arguments that the provision of extrinsic motivators may corrupt the emergence of intrinsic goods associated with community service. In the Bonner case, the wise provision of the extrinsic motivator of needed financial support appears to facilitate and actually enhance the achievement of goods internal to practice. This may work so well because financial support is accompanied by a challenge to care for the world and an expectation of sustained work towards that end. And as we have stated above, the kinds of virtues that seem to be blossoming in Bonner Scholars as a result of their participation in the program are consistent with those that can help them to become successful adults able to care about those in need and to act on behalf of the common good.

### **CAREER PLANS**

The BSP seems to have an impact on Scholars' career plans. Eighty-four (84) percent have changed or reaffirmed career plans since entering the program, and 75.2% of them agreed that the BSP provided exposure to a variety of career options. This may have been a surprise for them, as only 34.9% remember being motivated to be a Bonner Scholar because it might help them explore career options.

### **ISSUES OF FAITH**

The survey shows a strong impact of the BSP on issues of faith.

- 76.5% agreed that the BSP provided a focus for exploring and developing faith commitments;
- 64% agreed that it supported acting upon faith commitments;
- 84.4% identified themselves with a religious tradition (a fairly high 7.1% appear not to have responded to this question);
- 88.1% are engaged weekly in religious activities;
- 79.3% indicated the the BSP has positively affected their moral development;
- 38% were motivated to be Bonner Scholars because of previous service through a religious organization.

As an important aspect of their college experience, faith development and religious activities were at the 42.6 percentile level, rated above athletics, other community service, other paid work, and social life on campus and in Bonner and rated below academics and the BSP. Finally, in ranking important aspects of the BSP, "an opportunity for following through on faith commitments" was ranked third, above social life and opportunities for reflection and dialogue.

This set of questions drew some fire in the four focus groups conducted after the administration of the survey. Some students found these questions intrusive, including those on one campus with a strong religious affiliation. For people who do take issues of faith seriously, as most Bonner Scholars seem to, it should be noted that there is a strong correlation between faith development and intellectual

development. That is, conventional religious faith tends to reflect conventional reasoning, while post-conventional faith development tends to reflect the more critical forms of reasoning that are often the hallmark of a good undergraduate education. The transition from external to internal authority that characterizes the move from conventional to post-conventional faith development can cause turbulence in the area of religious commitment. That the BSP has a positive impact on the opportunities to explore, develop and act upon faith commitments should help facilitate this transition with the effect of yielding a sturdier form of post conventional faith that accompanies a more critical take on social issues and an enhanced sense of personal growth. It should also be noted that variation among campuses was considerable in forming the composite numbers cited above, much more so, for example, than in the responses to the somewhat related question of moral development reported below. This is not surprising in that BSP colleges vary from secular institutions to ones with strong religious affiliations.

### **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The BSP has promoted a sense of self knowledge and personal development. The following percentages of scholars felt aspects of their development were positively or somewhat positively affected by the BSP and small increases in each of these areas over four years proved to be characteristic:

- 89.2% sense that they can make a difference
- 87.6% sense of long term personal commitment to making a difference
- 82.8% sense of compassion
- 79.9% sense of meaning and purpose
- 79.3% morally
- 77.1% involvement with learning
- 74.9% sense of identity

There is no area of personal development on which fewer than 65% of the scholars indicated the BSP had an effect, except for “understanding of political issues, rated at 35.2%. At least 65% felt the BSP has impacted their overall quality of life, their attitude towards the future, and the way that others perceive them.

### **ACADEMIC INVOLVEMENT**

When asked to rate the importance of various aspects of their college experience, 89.9% of respondents indicated that the academics are important to them, marking the fourth or fifth positions on a five-point scale ranging from least important to most important. Seventy-eight (78.1) percent identified academics as a “most important” aspect of their college education. Bonner Scholars also tell us that they spend more time doing homework than in any other activity we asked about - much higher than is the current norm for undergraduates (see Ted Marchese’s editorial in the May/June 1998 issue of the American Association of Higher Education’s Change Magazine). Astin (1993) reports that studying and doing homework is more strongly correlated with outcomes of a liberal arts education than

any other variable he has studied.<sup>7</sup> High responses to the survey's questions in this area compare with the RAND study report associating enhanced academic development with community service. Because 79.7% of Scholars indicate that the BSP has positively affected skills in managing time and balancing priorities, the high level of response on questions of academic involvement indicate to us that Bonner Scholars are not only academically engaged but that the BSP supports them in developing and maintaining their high level of engagement, which correlates, in turn, with desirable outcomes, such as increased student retention.

## **PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE EFFORTS**

This report addresses issues that the researchers find compelling based on the results collected from only about 70% of Bonner Scholars. In every case, therefore, the percentages we presented should be read with the caveat: "based on 929 surveys collected from among 1331 Bonner Scholars." The comparisons of data on first, second, third and fourth year students must be limited by a similar reservation. Yet even with these caveats in mind, it is clear that the numbers yielded by the survey speak strongly of a program which is outstanding in its impact among these students surveyed and we believe that the results are strong enough to assume significant impact on the entire group of Bonner Scholars.

An omnibus survey such as this one, which aims to collect data from students who range from their first through fifth years in the BSP, presents certain problems in the collection and interpretation of data. For example, certain questions such as those pertaining to how students heard about Bonner, how the Bonner program affected their college choice, and their community service experience prior to joining the BSP, are most appropriate for students entering the program. Questions addressing impact on choice of major and on participation in other campus activities are better put to scholars closer to the midpoint of the college career. Questions about choices after college, professional direction, and the impact of BSP experiences on these are best framed with graduating seniors. Moreover, an omnibus approach would require a double administration each year in order to render portraits both of incoming students not yet affected by experiences in the program (Fall administration) and of graduating seniors who can reflect back across their full experience of the BSP (Spring administration). The current omnibus survey was administered toward the middle of the year, and while it yielded some useful differentiation within the range from first to fifth year students, the first year students were reporting on more than a semester's experience in the program, a point at which they could already be expected to have experienced substantial impact from their Bonner experience.

The value added to Bonner Scholar's growth and development by participation in BSP can be most fully gauged by comparing readings taken when they are beginning the journey to those taken when they are completing it. The SIS was geared to reflect specific profiles neither of the students entering the program nor of participants graduating from it with the likely result that differentiation on cross tabulations comparing first, second, third, fourth, and fifth year students yielded somewhat muted

<sup>7</sup> Astin, Alexander. What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited. San Francisco, Jossey Bass, 1993.

results. Gathering the clearest and most reliable indications of impact of the BSP will require an approach that begins with a survey administered to all incoming students at the outset of their participation in BSP. Beyond this, the most logical time frames from gathering additional data would be close to the mid-point of participation, when impact on choices of major and integration of the BSP into the matrix of on-going campus life should be most salient, and again at the point of exit from active participation in the program (late in the senior year) when the impact of the BSP on participants' development can be measured over the fullest span of participation and when Bonner Scholars offer their most informed appraisal of the BSP and of their plans after college. Moving away from an omnibus survey, to a series of surveys posing questions appropriate to different key points in participants' odyssey through the BSP, would permit most Bonner Scholars to respond to three surveys over the course of four years, each one finely tuned to issues likely to be salient to the students at that point in their Bonner experience. It will also permit program directors and coordinators to focus their efforts regarding the administration of surveys upon three smaller groups at different points in the yearly calendar, in-coming students at the beginning of the fall semester, third year students in October, and graduating seniors towards the end of the spring semester.

One significant virtue of such an approach will be the lessening of "survey fatigue" which would surely become increasingly problematic for compliance if participants were simply asked the same set of questions repeatedly, year after year, especially when some questions were already best answered when they were first year participants and some are not yet fully appropriate until the third or fourth year of matriculation. Furthermore, separate surveys can support the generation of strategies for gaining high levels of participation tailored to separate groups of respondents (with a goal of approaching 100% participation), which will yield greater data validity. Moreover, such an approach permits clearer and more meaningful longitudinal comparisons not only within cohorts, as they progress through the program, but also between cohorts - one year's first year students compared to the next, one year's graduating seniors compared to the next. Both kinds of comparisons can be useful to the assessment and development of individual programs and to the Foundation both in assessment of overall BSP impact and in choosing promising avenues for program enhancement and development.

More specifically, **our recommendation is that the current Student Impact Survey be replaced by a series of three surveys that would address particular groups of Bonner Scholars at critical points in their matriculation** through the program as follows:

1. An **incoming freshman survey** which would seek to clarify the profiles of incoming students on each campus, attending to 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. While such a survey would not directly measure the impact of the BSP on students, it would provide a very useful point of reference for measuring the growth of Bonner Scholars over the course of their years in the BSP.

2. The survey used this year would then be administered to all Bonner Scholars during the **sophomore and junior years**. This survey would be modified by removing some questions more appropriate to other surveys. We will also suggest some fine tuning, reflecting emerging data anomalies and feedback on the survey that has been gathered from student focus groups.
3. A **graduating senior survey** would gather data on the full four-year impact of the program. We anticipate that this survey will be a variant of the second survey, differing in several ways, including the introduction of questions regarding outlook and plans beyond college. We also believe that we will get clearer information about the impact of the BSP on career plans, majors, scholarly interest and leadership activities among seniors. We also anticipate that senior survey results, when compared to the results of the first two surveys, will bring clearer focus to the impact of the program on areas related to intellectual development, such as the growth of systemic and critical thinking.

In addition to the three undergraduate surveys, **we recommend that the Bonner Foundation begin documenting the impact of the BSP beyond its four-year span**. There are strong indications that the BSP provides a fertile field for the development of sustained engagement with the “other,” with social issues, and with the common good. But how does this play out after college? Graduating from college can be a significantly disruptive event as life contexts change and the social networks shift. This may be particularly hard on students in environments with a significant sense of community, such as small liberal arts colleges and universities. It may prove even more difficult for students who have participated in environments at college that have strong personal identification, such as the BSP has on most campuses. The BSP’s future programmatic development could be significantly enhanced by increased understanding of how the program may or may not prepare participants to face their challenges after matriculation in ways that are conducive to continuing the development of lives of service and commitment.

Surveys and other data, banked by the Foundation for the programs as a whole, and by each campus for each individual program, would provide an excellent resource for:

1. the documentation of the BSP’s short and longer term impact,
2. the ongoing development and refinement of the overall BSP approach and of each individual program,
3. future research and understanding of sustained community service in the undergraduate years,
4. participating colleges and universities as they seek to develop and to refine their overall approaches to community service, and
5. the Bonner Foundation as it continues to develop the overall program, as it carries out its role as advocate for community service nationally and as it seeks funding partners in future initiatives.



Every effort should be made to eliminate repetition in the surveys and to get quick results back to the campuses. Towards this end we suggest maintaining the relationship with our colleagues at Mars Hill and purchasing SPSS software to enable staff in the Bonner office to explore the data further.

**We also recommend the Bonner Foundation continue using qualitative evaluation and research approaches to discern the impact of programs across the BSP and on particular campuses.** For example, on-site student focus groups carried out in the context of site visits have been of great use in interpreting the data generated by the surveys. One clear insight we have gained from these visits and focus groups is how the program varies from campus to campus as influenced by the culture and mission of the host institutions and the general nature of their student bodies.

These differences in the socioeconomic and linguistic cultures of the student body and the particularities of institutional niche and culture can be misinterpreted as reflecting performance differences among directly comparable programs. Survey data of BSP programs which themselves share comparable missions and structures cannot simply be used to compare schools more broadly. The question, for example, of what value the BSP adds on each campus depends on where the students are starting in comparison to where they end up as well as how their graduating profile has been effected by the institutional culture of the particular learning environment.

Attention to differences among campuses argues for an approach that tracks impact over four years and beyond, as does the four-survey approach outlined above. It also argues for an approach that seeks other markers for differentiating among institutional cultures and contexts, for example, a freshman survey, the results of which can be compared with each institution's data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's (CIRP) survey (if a campus uses this survey for its incoming class). Finally, it argues for close listening to what Bonner Scholars on each campus say about their program - the language and concepts they use to describe their experience and their reflective descriptions of their own BSP as it impacts them, their fellow Bonner Scholars, the people and communities they serve, and the college or university in the context in which their lives are centered.

## APPENDIX A HIGHLY RATED ITEMS

In the section of this report that commented on the very high response rate to questions that had to do with engagement with the other, we indicated that there were **a few other questions on different themes that had response rates as high**. They are:

- 94% “very strongly” or “somewhat strongly” identified themselves with the BSP (4-point scale)
- 90.5% are hopeful or very hopeful about their future
- 89.9% ranked Academics as the most important part of their college experience (top two responses on five point scale)
- 83.5% indicate that “financial needs” motivated them to become Bonner Scholars, while 95% agreed that they would have gone to college without the Bonner Scholarship
- 78.5 indicate “very important” to “help others in difficulty” on a 3-point scale

Throughout this report we have given percentage figures that indicate Scholars’ responses on the top two of the five choices on the five-point Likert scales we used. It is worth noting on which **questions high percentages of Scholars checked the first of five choices**: a “strongly agree” or “positively affected” response. They are as follows:

- 79.0 academics are the most important aspect of my college experience
- 75.1 the BSP provided an opportunity for community service
- 64.7 I perceive my future very hopefully
- 54.6 appreciation of my own relative good fortune in life
- 55.7 understand communities served
- 54.6 the level of concern I hold for people in need is very high
- 54.5 understand different people
- 54.1 Financial needs motivated me to be a Bonner Scholar
- 53.7 BSP impacted by motivation to serve others
- 54.3 I identify very strongly with the BSP (four-point scale)
- 50.8 sense of long term personal commitment to making a difference
- 50.2 sense that I can make a difference
- 47.4 Opportunities to serve people from different cultural, racial, ability, language or socioeconomic backgrounds

**APPENDIX B**  
**QUESTIONS WITH LOW RESPONSE RATES**

For such a long survey, the rate of completed questions was generally very high. Therefore the few questions to which students did not respond are instructive. (One set of questions with many non-responses asked them to say Yes or No to whether or not the BSP affected them in a variety of choices they have made, and then to rate on a one to five scale the degree of effect. We think the two-part question was a little confusing, and if the first answer was ‘no’, students would have a hard time rating influence.)

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>% non-response</b>
- participation in campus organizations ( they probably aren't involved in any other campus organizations)	15.0%
- registered to vote	25.8%
- voted in election (we assume they aren't registered and didn't vote)	26.0%
- chosen career plans	20.5%
- changed career plans	26.3%
- reaffirmed career plans (we assume they don't have plans yet)	25.8%
- chosen a major	22.1%
- changed a major	29.2%
- reaffirmed a major (we assume they don't have a major yet)	26.0%

In a set of questions asking them to rank the importance of different activities , there were several low responses. We assume this is due to their not being involved in that activity; “not involved” was not an option.

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>% non-responses</b>
- college athletics	14.5%
- faith and religious activity	10.9%
- other campus activities	29.0%
- other paid work	22.2%
- social life in Bonner	18.2%

Personal identity labels seemed to have evoked a little resistance: To the question: “what’s your\_\_\_\_”, non responses included:

- ethnicity 4.6%	- religion 7.1%
------------------	-----------------

The final set of questions that evoked many non-responses regarded number of hours spent per week in a variety of activities. This question was misprinted, leaving off the “zero” option. Hence we got higher rates of no responses to the following:

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>% non-responses</b>
- participating in religious activities	11.9%
- hours spent partying	13.9%
- hours watching TV	11.0%
- hours spent doing volunteer work outside Bonner	11.9%