

RUNNING HEAD: Access to Education through the Bonner Scholars Program

Access to Education through the Bonner Scholars Program:
Post-Graduation Service and Civic Outcomes for High Financial Need Students
of a Co-Curricular Service-Learning College Program in the United States

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Abstract

College alumni from co-curricular service-learning programs on ten liberal arts college campuses were surveyed six years after their graduation. Participants, all high financial need scholarship students, had been engaged in four years of co-curricular service and reflection experiences which required them to engage across perceived boundaries of difference both on and off campus. Survey questions were drawn from UCLA's Life After College Survey, allowing for three comparison groups: all survey participants on 10 campuses hosting the service-learning programs, those from 20 similar liberal arts campuses, and those from the national Life After College sample. One hundred percent of service-learning program graduates were still doing community service compared to, respectively, 66%, 69%, and 68% of the comparison groups. Service-learning program graduates were also more likely to be civically engaged, particularly in civic activities that require dialogue. The discussion addresses the long-term civic outcomes of liberal arts education, dialogue across lines of perceived difference, and paid versus unpaid community service.

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The contribution of co-curricular and curricular service-learning to increasing the number of engaged citizens in the United States is relatively unexplored. Much of the available research on college-level service-learning has explored the effect on a variety of student outcomes of academic service-learning during the college years in a single course and there are at least two large, multi-campus studies of curricular service-learning (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999). While colleges may include in their mission statements a commitment to develop responsible citizens, little is known about the best use of resources or the best program designs to accomplish this goal.

The lead researcher has been involved for ten years surveying participants of a program on 25 campuses—the Bonner Scholar Program (BSP)—which is designed to promote civic development of financially-needy college students. Studies of changes during Scholars' four college years, supported by the Center for Social Development, are reported in two forthcoming publications (Hoy, in press; Keen & Hall, 2007). Learning that colleges hosting 10 of the 25 Bonner Scholar Programs were also part of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA's Life After College survey occasioned the decision to pursue and survey the alumni of those Bonner Scholar programs and compare survey results to the larger national sample (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2005).

The tendency in the field in the United States is to use the phrase “service-learning” and assume the reference is to “academic service-learning.” In contrast, these Scholars were involved in a program that drew them into service and reflection in a non-credit environment that was often integrated with their academic efforts. The terms *service-learning* and *civic engagement* have recently been used interchangeably in the field, particularly in discussions where the concept of civic involvement goes beyond the narrow definition of voting (Keen & Keen, 2004; Long, 2002). The BSP lists civic engagement as one of its seven “common commitments” and defines civic engagement as intentional participation in the democratic process, public policy, and direct service (Keen & Keen, 2002). The BSP’s co-curricular service-learning fits well within the construct of civic service. The students’ service is voluntary, remunerated, organized, hosted by partnering institutions, focused on both the server and the served, aimed toward improving societal conditions, and involves significant investment of time (McBride & Sherraden, 2007, p. 4-9).

Yearly, the BSP funds 1,500 Scholars, almost all traditionally-aged college students, and engages them in a four-year program that requires service while offering extensive training and support. Ten to twenty students are selected yearly on each BSP campus and are required to complete a minimum of 10 hours of service, training, and reflection each week. The percent of racially diverse Scholars is at least twice the average of the student bodies on each campus. Ninety percent of the Scholars make a contribution to their annual tuition below \$4,500, or about one-sixth of the typical annual cost of a liberal arts education in the United States. The financial need of Bonner Scholars does not, however, always equate to socio-economic class status. The majority of Scholars’ parents had at least some college education: 64% of their mothers and 60% of their fathers. Reflection, retreats, classes, participatory meetings, coaching, and informal

dialogue are intended to help students make sense of their experiences crossing boundaries of perceived difference, and ultimately to develop critical, systemic understanding of the world anchored in compassionate approaches to human need. In addition, the program provides financial support for two to three full-time service experiences for at least seven weeks in summer or during co-op terms, including international service. By graduation, each Bonner Scholar has served at least 1,680 hours. The BSP's best practices and developmental model (Hoy, 2006) align well with other models of developmental outcomes and best practices of higher education (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Keeling, 2004; Pascarella, Wolniak, Cruce, & Blaich, 2004; Astin et al., 2000; Chickering & Gamson, 1987).

The president of the Bonner Foundation wrote of the BSP,

First and foremost, the Bonner Scholars Program is about access. Almost all students in the program have demonstrated considerable financial need. The program is designed to support students who want to make a significant commitment to community service and connect service activity to their academic experience. Rather than have the service activity oriented toward an individual student, the Bonner Program puts the community back into community service as students move together in their service journey (Meisel, 2006, p. 2).

Summaries of the annual program survey of the BSP indicate that the program is probably as effective an incubator for the formation of sustainable adult commitments as is likely to be found (C. Keen & J. Keen, 2002). The BSP is now more than 16 years old and its program design has been well honed. No previous study has been completed on the alumni of the program.

The lead researcher's interest in the capacity of college experiences to foster students' life-long commitments to strengthen communities and ameliorate human and environmental problems stems from analysis of interviews with 100 people to find what had influenced them in their sustained commitments to working on behalf of the common good in an age of diversity, ambiguity, and complexity (Daloz, C. Keen, J. Keen, & Parks, 1996). All 100 interviewees spoke of enlarging encounters with *otherness*, moments in their lives at which some person or group that had previously been an external *they* came to be included in a newly reframed sense of *we*. These encounters, enabled most often by travel, shared work or study, military service, or community service, were always rich in meaningful dialogue. The perceived differences included but were not limited to ethnicity, *race*, religion, culture, physical ability, and social class. The developmental power of dialogue and reflection across thresholds of difference identified in the lead researcher's co-authored book, *Common Fire*, has become a fruitful theoretical lens for examining educational programs, including service-learning. The potential of the Bonner Scholars Program to support lifelong service commitments drew two of the four *Common Fire* researchers into working with the Bonner Foundation more than 10 years ago. In fact, early evaluations of the Bonner Program found that multiple programmatic opportunities for dialogue across thresholds of difference were its most valuable component (C. Keen & J. Keen, 2002).

While the number of available studies on the impact of college-level service-learning activities in the years after graduation is small, they support service-learning programs as a vehicle for carrying out the civic engagement mission embraced by many colleges and universities. A phone survey of alumni who had graduated between two and nine years earlier (n = 491) from a religiously-affiliated liberal arts college found that participation in both service-

learning and general community service predicted involvement in community service and service-related careers (Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005). A survey of alumni of 31 colleges belonging to the Appalachian College Association found that the strongest effect of alumni participation in service activities came from participation in college activities. Respondents' average age was 40, so most of them had graduated in an era when service-learning courses were not readily available (Johnson, 2004). Using the National Educational Longitudinal Study and examining reported behavior eight years after high school graduation, Hart, Donnelly, Youniss and Atkins (2007) found that community service, both required and voluntary, and extracurricular participation during high school predicted both adult volunteering and adult voting.

Time-consuming service and leadership opportunities are often out of reach for academically able students of high financial need. Marks and Jones (2004) found that financially needy college students were the most likely group of students to stop doing service they had sustained during high school. Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) review of the literature on the effect of work during college found little relationship between work and cognitive development suggests that requiring off-campus service won't detract from desired student outcomes (p. 196-197). In one study of four-year colleges that controlled for critical thinking upon entering college, 15-20 hours of work per week enhanced critical thinking scores at the end of the third year (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1998). Under certain circumstances work can contribute to graduation rates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 415). A recent study found that college students who worked were more likely than college students who did not work to be interested in politics, read newspapers, talk with friends, and engage or practice civic skills (Jarvis, Montoya, & Mulvoy, 2005).

Others have argued that requiring service mutes the desired outcomes of service-learning. Marks and Jones (2004, p. 307) noted that the episodic service that is required of many high school students for graduation may result in increased rates of service in college but may undermine long term participation. They concluded that encouraging students to do service would be more effective than requiring it. In particular they found that “co-curricular or extra-curricular membership supported maintaining service involvement in college” (p. 333). Melchior and Bailis (2002) also expressed concern about community service behavior in high school dissipating without encouragement.

Methods

A survey was conducted to determine if alumni were still doing service and were civically engaged six years after graduating from college programs which provided scholarships for doing service and regular reflection. Of the 25 campuses involved in the Keen and Hall (2007) longitudinal study of the impact of the BSP during the college years, 10 of those campuses had also participated in UCLA’s 2004 Life After College Study (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2005). Of the 124 BSP alumni who graduated in 1999 from those 10 campuses, 41 Bonner Scholars were reached (33% response rate of 29 women and 12 men) with the help of the college alumni offices, directors of service offices, parents, and internet searches. The 41 BSP alumni survey participants were from the following ten colleges: Berea College, DePauw College, Earlham College, Emory and Henry College, Hood College, Ferrum College, Morehouse College, Spelman College, University of Richmond, and Waynesburg College.

Bonner alumni survey questions were chosen from UCLA’s Life After College Survey (2005) so that the responses of the 41 Bonner alumni could be compared to three UCLA survey groupings: 1) participants on 10 Bonner campuses (n = 393); 2) participants from 20 comparable

liberal arts campuses ($n = 766$); and 3) all participants in the Life After College weighted sample ($n = 8,474$). Given the difference between sample sizes, z-tests were calculated to find if differences were statistically significant between sample proportions ($p \leq .05$). Z-tests confirmed the findings discussed below. Individual z-scores are not presented for brevity.

Findings

One hundred percent of the 41 Bonner alumni were still involved in community service activity six years after graduation. In comparison, data from the Life after College Study suggests that only 66% of graduates from the same 10 colleges from which the Bonner alumni had graduated were still doing service, as were 69% of graduates of 20 comparable liberal arts colleges and 68% of the national sample (see Table 1).

Bonner alumni were also more civically involved than alumni in three comparison groups. Bonner alumni more often responded with “frequently” or “occasionally” on seven of nine questions regarding civic activities (see Table 2) and all nine questions regarding expressing opinions on political issues (see Table 3) than did the comparison groups. The greatest differences were Bonner alumni’s report of using on-line communication to raise others’ awareness about social and political issues, playing a leadership role in the community, working with others to solve community problems, signing petitions, and displaying campaign materials.

Similar to other studies of students that focus on service, Bonner alumni were less likely to vote in national elections or donate to a political campaign than graduates of liberal arts colleges, although donating is low for both groups (Long, 2002); but more likely to vote than the national sample of alumni. Otherwise notably high levels of civic engagement in comparison to their peers did not bear out in voting, though the difference in voting is not statistically significant. Bonner graduates were also more likely to be working in the non-profit sector and to

be satisfied with the opportunity to contribute to society through their job than were alumni in the three comparison groups (see Table 1).

When asked about 15 college activities that strongly affected their preparation for life after college, BSP participants, compared to alumni in the three comparison groups, were more strongly affected by engagement in community service and activity in religious organizations. Community service and participation in the Bonner Scholar Program were the two aspects of college life to which the Scholars attributed the strongest contribution to their life after college (see Table 4). Scholars and other liberal arts groups are equally affected by interaction with faculty and mentors; though Scholars are affected by mentors more than other groups, though marginally.

Discussion

These data do not support the conjecture that students who are required to serve and financially supported to do so will stop doing service once requirements are fulfilled and financial support ends. Though the BSP participants are self-selected into the program as college freshmen, these alumni survey results cannot easily be explained away by pre-college characteristics of Bonner Scholars. Pascarella et al. (2004) found that students from liberal arts colleges, compared to those from research and regional universities, were more likely to report experiencing best practices, regardless of their pre-college characteristics. The advantages of the intensive and supportive nature of the BSP cannot be explained away by the entering motivations of the Scholars. Pascarella et al. urged colleges to seek ways to continue the developmental supports offered during the first year of college, such as those supports provided by the BSP (p. 72). Keen and Hall (2007) found that significant developmental influences of the BSP could be

explained by the program's intensity and duration, skills Scholars gained in dialoguing across perceived boundaries of difference, and attendance at a more diverse college.

Hart et al. (2007) pointed out the developmental importance of finding dialogue partners with whom one can engage in talking about service, community needs, and policy implications. The BSP experience confirms related research regarding the power of such dialogue opportunities, particularly when the dialogue partners include diverse peers with whom one must sustain a conversation for the college years, as well as people whom they serve and who supervise their service (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Hurtado, 2005; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). The Bonner alumni survey results suggest that students who are embedded in service and dialogue across lines of perceived difference not only value dialogue and reflection with peers, mentors, and faculty, but also are drawn to civic involvement that is more dialogical than simply voting: making online educational efforts with peers and family regarding social and political issues, doing community projects with others, and working with others in a leadership role to improve the community.

Monetary rewards in the form of a scholarship do not seem to diminish either Bonner Scholar alumni's service or their civic involvement. McBride, Pritzker, Daftary and Tang (2004) also suggest that financial rewards do not obviate the benefits of service-learning. In fact, an obligation of service for four years may have a powerful positive effect. Festinger (1957) suggested that we come to value and find meaning in what we do, particularly when the financial rewards are small, as in the case of the Bonner scholarships. Without the meaning, it would be too hard to repeat the action daily. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory suggested that students who are surrounded by peers, staff, faculty and activities that embrace the values of service and civic engagement would indeed be more likely to continue to serve.

The BSP is not alone using service scholarships as a means of supporting and engaging students. Campus Compact (2004) reported that service awards to students are the most often used mechanism for supporting student involvement in service, with 68% of surveyed institutions awarding service involvement, an increase from 48% in 2000. Many of these awards may be merit awards, irrespective of need. Another Campus Compact publication recently advocated for service scholarships as a powerful tool for developing students (Zlotkowski, Longo, & Williams, 2006).

Further research should be done on the value of scholarships, including the U.S. Federal Work-Study Program funds that are tied to a requirement for service and on the role of required reflection and sustained support for service across the college years. Studies of the impact of service-learning should include co-curricular service-programs as well as the value of engaging across boundaries of perceived difference as potentially crucial aspects of the developmental value of service-learning.

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Table 1

Current Alumni Service Involvement and Career Choice in Public and Nonprofit Sectors

| | '99 Bonner Scholar alums from 10 campuses (n = 41) % | '98 alums from 10 Bonner campuses (n = 393) % | '98 alums from 20 comparable liberal arts colleges (n = 766) % | '98 alumni from national sample (n = 8,474) % |
|---------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Volunteering at all | 100 | 66 | 69 | 68 |

| | | | | |
|---|----|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Volunteering 3+ hours a week | 33 | not measured | not measured | not measured |
| Satisfied with opportunity to contribute to society through job (very satisfied or satisfied) | 82 | 66 | 62 | 62 |
| Current job in nonprofit sector | 33 | 16 | 15 | 12 |

Table 2

Percentage of Alumni Who Engaged in Civic Activities in the Six Years Since Graduation

| | '99 Bonner Scholar alums from 10 campuses (n = 41) % | '98 alums from 10 Bonner campuses (n = 393) % | '98 alums from 20 comparable liberal arts colleges (n = 766) % | '98 alumni from national sample (n = 8,474) % |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| Discussed community issues | 78 | 75 | 77 | 66 |
| Used on-line communication with family or friends to raise awareness about social and political issues | 69 | 42 | 41 | 58 |
| Voted in national election occasionally or frequently | 66 | 75 | 77 | 43 |
| Donated money to a religious org. | 58 | 42 | 46 | 43 |
| Donated to an educational org. | 48 | 38 | 43 | 34 |
| Played leadership role in improving the community | 46 | 22 | 17 | 13 |
| Worked with others to solve a problem in the community where you live | 45 | 16 | 16 | 13 |
| Donated professional services on a "pro bono" basis | 38 | 26 | 24 | 19 |
| Donated money to a political campaign | 8 | 13 | 17 | 10 |

Table 3

Percentage of Alumni who Expressed an Opinion about Community Political Issues in the Six Years since College

| | '99 Bonner Scholar alums from 10 campuses (n = 41) % | '98 alums from 10 Bonner campuses (n = 393) % | '98 alums from 20 comparable liberal arts colleges (n = 766) % | '98 alumni from national sample (n = 8,474) % |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| Signed a written or email petition | 50 | 31 | 32 | 22 |
| Bought product because of social/political values of company | 50 | 35 | 40 | 29 |
| Didn't buy product because of values of company | 48 | 46 | 33 | 36 |
| Wearing campaign button, sticker or car, or sign in front of home to support issue, cause or candidate | 28 | 16 | 18 | 12 |
| Gave opinion/contacted/visited pub. Official | 20 | 15 | 16 | 10 |
| Worked with a political group or official | 18 | 9 | 11 | 6 |
| Contacted newspaper or magazine | 13 | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| Worked door-to-door for candidate or cause | 10 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| Called a radio or TV talk show | 8 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Table 4

Percentage of Alumni Indicating a Strong Impact of Campus Activities on Preparation for Life After College

| | '99 Bonner Scholar alums from 10 campuses (n = 41) % | '98 alums from 10 Bonner campuses (n = 393) % | '98 alums from 20 comparable liberal arts colleges (n = 766) % | '98 alumni from national sample (n = 8,474) % |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Community service | 57 | 19 | 14 | 13 |
| Living away from home | 55 | 63 | 62 | 62 |
| Overall participation in the BSP | 52 | - | - | - |
| Interaction with faculty | 46 | 34 | 37 | 24 |
| Internships | 43 | 34 | 28 | 31 |
| Friendships | 43 | 62 | 59 | 43 |
| Living on campus | 39 | 34 | 38 | 32 |
| Employment | 39 | 25 | 23 | 31 |
| Mentors | 39 | 26 | 22 | 20 |
| College course work | 36 | 29 | 27 | 23 |
| Religious organizations | 27 | 13 | 17 | 15 |
| Study abroad | 21 | 24 | 22 | 13 |
| Student clubs | 16 | 12 | 14 | 13 |
| Fraternities/sororities | 7 | 12 | 15 | 10 |
| Student government | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 |
| Athletics | 0 | 12 | 13 | 11 |