

THE BONNER SCHOLARS PROGRAM

A FOUR-YEAR COMMUNITY SERVICE
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM MODEL

Presented 1996

by The Bonner Foundation Leadership
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I. Introduction

The goal of the Bonner Scholars Program is to give young people an *access to education* and an *opportunity to serve*. It seeks to identify students who have both a high financial need and a desire to continue their service while in college. The Bonner Scholarship is a leading example of a new breed of scholarship — *a community service scholarship* — that helps students help themselves by helping others.

The Bonner Scholars Program grew out of the recent rebirth of student interest and activism in community service and social justice. With notable exceptions, most of the students who have taken on leadership roles in this movement have been able to make significant commitments of time and energy to service because they did not have to work to put themselves through college. Students who receive financial aid have been handicapped in pursuing their passion to serve because their financial packages require that they work on a regular basis during the school year and save from summer earnings.

Bonner Scholars are selected based on their financial need, their academic abilities, and the commitments they have made in their communities and at home. The majority of the Bonner Scholars come from the lowest 20% of the economic spectrum. Many of these students, based on the financial aid formula established by the Department of Education, have “zero parental contribution,” meaning that their family has absolutely no financial means to pay for their schooling. Fully a third of the 1500 Bonner Scholars are the first in their family to attend college. Many Bonner Scholars would not be attending college were it not for the scholarship.

But, for all Bonner Scholars, their lives as students are different from many others who have come before them. In the past, low-income students often entered college with a desperate need to earn money for school and often times had to send funds back home. As a result, while students of means are able to rush to campus activities and social events, many of these lower income students are required to find jobs, work twenty hours a week, and serve wealthier students as cafeteria workers, dorm crew, handing out towels at the gym, or checking out library books. In contrast, as Bonner Scholars students can enter into the collegiate life with recognition, support, and purpose. Many college presidents make a special effort to welcome and recognize the incoming Bonner Scholars when they arrive on campus. In these ways, this group of low income students, many of whom have never been recognized for their commitments or achievements, come to the campus not as marginalized students, but as honored scholars who have the immediate attention of the faculty, administration, other students, and local community leaders.

The original Bonner Scholars colleges were small, mostly private, liberal arts colleges in the Appalachian region. This is a region of the country that has experienced a variety of people reaching out to it in an attempt to address its needs. Outside agents of change are an important resource for this region, but there is only so much that an outsider can accomplish. The Bonner Scholars Program was designed, in part, to identify, support, and encourage indigenous leadership in this part of the country. Rather than encouraging outsiders to come in to help, the Foundation has tried to encourage and uphold student leadership to serve and lead in their own communities. Service and leadership by these students has an authority, sensitivity, and ability that is unique, powerful, and transformational.

After each institution was invited to be considered for the program, Foundation staff made a formal presentation of the newly developed Bonner Scholars Program not only to the college presidents and development offices, but also to current students, faculty, administrators and community leaders who would be central to the program's success. This strategy was central to our approach because the Bonner Scholars Program is based on a transformational model for the student, the campus and the community, and therefore it is necessary to have the different groups not only supportive but involved. Our hope was that by reaching out to each of these groups, they would feel the kind of ownership necessary to keep them engaged and understand their leadership role within the program.

The Bonner Scholars Program has a broad and liberating *reinterpretation* of what constitutes service by applicants to the program. We ask the colleges to not only look at applicants participation in the community service clubs or volunteer at the local community service agency, but also what responsibilities they have had at home as the primary child care provider, caregiver to a grandparent or other elderly relative, or breadwinner to help put food on the table. While students who have assumed these responsibilities may not traditionally have considered themselves as "volunteers," they have indeed demonstrated a clear commitment of service to others in the spirit of the Bonner Scholars Program.

Below we outline for a vision on how the Bonner Scholars Program operates as a four year program to transform the lives of individual students. While the description below does not reflect any single campus program nor is it necessarily appropriate for every student, it draws from our experience with all 25 campuses over the past five years, as well as the our involvement in campus community service organizing over the past nearly two decades. Our hope is that it provides a useful framework and basis of comparison as you evaluate and plan for your program's future.

II. The Bonner Scholars Program As a Four-Year Developmental Model

A major struggle that the service movement has faced is that there is not a clearly defined age appropriate understanding of service. Students who serve as a candy striper their freshman year may do the same thing for all four years. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, it doesn't meet the challenge presented by the Bonner Scholars Program. Our goal is to encourage students to assume a servant-leadership role that takes on new dimensions, awareness, and responsibility as they move on in their education. Just as it is not appropriate to take Freshman English all four years, neither is it appropriate for a Bonner Scholar to do the same service activity for their entire college career.

To give direction to the student and to clarify expectations to the leadership of the Bonner Scholars Program, we have developed a four-year model that creates benchmarks and expectations to which students should aspire. It should be noted that these benchmarks are loosely defined and should be applied on an individualized basis. The Foundation has not set any requirement for a school to adopt this particular language or curriculum. Instead, this framework is a challenge and a tool for all those involved in the Bonner Program to help strengthen this initiative with an eye on student development. The goal here is not to make everyone the same. Instead the hope is to encourage students to move along, to develop their

own leadership style, and to come out of the four year experience with a strong sense of who they are and where they are going.

Each year has been assigned a concept and a strategy.

- Pre- College *Expectation*
- Freshman Year *Exploration*
- Sophomore Year *Experience*
- Junior Year *Example / leadership*
- Senior Year *Expertise*

Below is a description of how a school might proceed with implementing a student developmental model. The summer placements are a suggested strategy for how students might be placed as they move along their path of service, study and career exploration.

A. Expectation —Pre-College

Recruitment:

Admissions offices are encouraged to work with the Bonner Scholars Program on their campus to help identify and recruit students, especially low-income students, who have taken on service leadership roles at home or in the community. In fact, the colleges have taken this recruitment message beyond just a presentation of the Bonner Scholars Program, but instead advertise to all potential applicants of the full range of service opportunities available on their campus.

Some institutions have instituted a number of creative ways to reach out to potential Bonner Scholars. Several institutions require that students return to their high school and at least one other youth organization (such as church youth group, Girl Scouts, YMCA) to present their experience about the Bonner Scholars Program and recruit other high school students to apply to the college with support from the program. One institution has developed a service award from their Bonner Scholars Program to give out to local high school students in recognition of their service activities. Further, other institutions make sure that at award day in the local high school, someone from the institution attends the event and recognizes the incoming Bonner Scholar by making a presentation of the scholarship at that ceremony. Almost all programs have a brochure describing the program that is included in recruitment material sent to prospective students.

Selection:

If the most important part of developing and establishing a Bonner Scholars Program is recruitment, not far behind is the selection process. Again, what initially may be perceived as a mechanical process, is a critical part of the success of the program and the impact that it will have on the individual student, the campus, and the community. Each institution is required to develop a selection committee. Clear instructions have been made to the institutions that this

committee should be made up of students, administrators, faculty members, and community leaders. Again this ensures buy-in and input on the part of the four main groups involved in the program. A student committee is formed to contact and interview each of the students that have applied. This not only offers a chance for the students to get information about the applicant, but also gives the students a chance to tell the applicant about the college and specifically about the Bonner Scholars Program and other service organizations on campus. This is a critical moment for a student. The lines of communication are opened so that students at the deciding moment have a connection not only with a person, but also with a concept of how service may fit into their college career. A student will ask, "Why am I going to college?" Our hope is that the selection and recruitment process helps a student gain some perspective as to who they are, what is valuable and what is valued.

Once students have been accepted into the program, Bonner Scholars will then call the students again to ask if they have any questions and to encourage them to think about attending the school and taking them up on the offer of being a Bonner Scholar.

Summer Preparation:

Once a student accepts a Bonner Scholarship, a current Bonner Scholar is assigned to correspond with that student during the course of the summer. An effort is made to actually have the students meet and, if possible, have the Bonner Scholar make a visit to campus. Incoming Bonner Scholars are also given a packet of information including articles to read and a description of the service sites located near the campus.

The coordinator or the assistant coordinator will also contact the incoming Bonner Scholar sometime during the summer to check up on them and make sure that everything is proceeding well. This is particularly important with first generation college students who, even after they have been accepted into college and received large amounts of financial aid and honors, sometimes have a tendency to get intimidated and not show up to orientation.

Orientation:

Think back on the first day you started college. Who was the first person you met? Interesting enough, while most of us forget what we learned in many of our courses, we more than likely remember the first person who we met when we walked arrived on campus for freshman orientation.

The first week of college for an incoming student is one of the defining moments of their college years. It sets the pattern. It will often decide who your friends are, what your interests become, what job you take, what courses you sign up for. It also has a lot to do with defining one's attitude. Will a incoming student be encouraged and directed, or will they discover that the cool thing to do is to drink beer, stay out late, and disengage?

Most every college has an orientation for their incoming students. The Bonner Scholars Program has one too, scheduled prior to the regular freshman orientation. The expectation is that this Bonner orientation last anywhere from two to five days. This is too important a moment to assume or hope that a two hour session sandwiched in to the larger orientation is sufficient to

prepare Bonner Scholars for their experience in the program. For the most part, incoming students love the idea of arriving at college early, even if it is the week before the rest of their classmates. Who doesn't remember the apprehension and anticipation about who one would meet, where they would live, and what they would do?

The Bonner Scholar Orientation reiterates the importance of the student's role as a Bonner Scholar and the gifts and commitments that they have made. The orientation focuses on *identity, community building* and *service*. *Identity*: because this is the first event of their college career, it takes on an importance and makes the service piece a priority. *Community Building*:: students, like most of us, are starving for community. When students enter college, they are often wondering if they will make friends and connect with others. Many of the activities that are planned at an orientation have to do with socialization and building relationships. Yet this is not a keg party in front of a fraternity. Instead this is a planned gathering of students from varied backgrounds that are coming together around the common ground of service and justice. *Service Focus*: students are introduced to concepts and ideas behind community service and social justice issues. Students watch movies relating to different topics, hold discussions, and learn from older Bonner Scholars about their experience. Events like tours of the town and interviews with community leaders and clients of service agencies are also held.

B. Freshman Year — Exploration

While some students arrive at college with a clear understanding of what type of service they want to be involved in, many want to use this time as a chance to explore and experience any number of different opportunities.

As described above, the primary goal for the first year is to help a student explore their passions, interests, and talents. Many Bonner Scholars have not had extensive volunteer work, thus the first year offers them a chance to explore a variety of interests. Does the issue of hunger affect them keenly, or perhaps the environment? Or maybe a student wants to combine a passion for children with the issue of housing; the end result being a team of children working on a Habitat for Humanity home?

This is also a time for students to begin discovering their strengths and weaknesses. Maybe students will discover that they have abilities they never knew they had. Maybe they will learn that they like to organize, or raise money, or that public speaking is not worse than death, and that while they might not make the varsity soccer team, they can coach in a youth soccer league.

Another important part of the exploration piece for the first year student is exploring the vision of the Bonner Scholars Program as well as their own vision for the world and their own activism. This was touched upon during the application process. It must continue in order for students to be taken fully into the experience of being one of 1,500 students involved in the Bonner Scholars Program. This will ensure that the Bonner Scholars Program is not just another scholarship program with 1,500 individuals but rather a collective effort that draws strength from itself and that shares in a common commitment. Activities planned and sponsored by the Foundation encourage students, especially freshman to understand the founding vision of the

Bonner Scholars Program as well as give them an opportunity to shape and own the future vision of the program.

As part of the exploration process, students are expected to look at the larger issues of race, class, gender, and cultural differences that bring some people together and keep others apart, and these issues have both a direct and indirect affect on the communities where they serve as well as on themselves. This is accomplished through the reflection, discussion, and education steps described above.

Freshman Summer:

After their freshman year, students are encouraged to return home and serve in their local communities, perhaps at an organization from which they received services when they were younger. So often times students who receive help, leave and never get a chance to return as a service provider. By returning, students not only get a chance to show what they have learned and how they have matured over the year, but they are able to send a strong message to others about what is possible for an individual to achieve.

The return home for the first summer also serves to reconnect a student with his or her roots. There is a strong force at work that pulls people away from their communities once they have left, especially when they come from poor communities. The tendency is to leave and never look back. Yet, to have a student return with a stronger sense of confidence and purpose, can go along way in strengthening the ties between a student and his self-image and between them and their home community. While this may be the last time a student returns home for any length of time, the hope is that the connections that are solidified by a strong service-based summer experience will have a lasting impression on the student.

Another reason for encouraging students to return home after their freshman year is to help recruit new Bonner Scholars. As the student has only recently left the community, he or she no doubt has strong ties with local groups and other college-bound high school students. One cannot underestimate the influence a student can have on a person just a few years younger than them in college. Bonner Scholars are encouraged to make presentations to youth groups around town and to work one on one with interested candidates. The visibility and leadership of the Bonner Scholar goes along way in encouraging other students to follow in their footsteps.

C. Sophomore — Experience

In the second year, a student is by now expected to have focused their activism and involvement with a particular issue and with a specific organization. The second year is centered around the ideas of focus, commitment, and relationship building.

While some students want to continue to work in a number of agencies, the student is encouraged to focus on a particular project or agency. Thus, a student might work at the boys and girls club organizing a basketball league or teaching a photography class or directing a children's theater company. Another student might work with a citizens group to establish a countywide recycling program. Yet another student might work for a full year as a teacher's aid in a special education classroom. In every instance the goal is to get a student deeply involved

and committed to an idea and an organization, as well as to establish a working relationship and a trust with the community and the clients.

If a student is allowed to continue dabbling in a wide of service activities, the possibility for growth and development is diminished. Too often students are unfocused in our service activities. The greatest potential for growth and meaningful and effective service comes when a student works day in and day out with the same group and the same people. This consistency also enables a student to take on additional responsibility, as well as the agency to depend on that student for meaningful, challenging and innovative work.

Students who at this stage want to create their own programs are supported if they are ready. However, most students are asked to work with existing programs in their sophomore year and to put off starting a new program until their third year. The idea behind this is to make sure a student works to build off existing programs rather than create new initiatives. Any work a student does must have a community sponsor; we have found that projects solely run by students rarely outlast that student and often fail to connect to true community needs.

Sophomore Summer— Local Service Placement:

In between their sophomore and junior years students are encouraged to stay on or near campus to work with the organization or project where they were placed during the school year. This is in part so that the student can have a full-time experience with this organization, but also to prepare the student for a leadership role that will be expected of them in their junior year.

Because students in their junior year are expected to serve in a leadership capacity that will include supervising other students and administering a program, students are able to receive additional training and prepare for the upcoming year. This time of preparation is critical. Effective service initiatives cannot be planned a week before the beginning of the year nor can the leadership role be placed solely on paid staff. Instead students are required to take on added and directed responsibilities. Therefore, during the summer the student gets a chance to strengthen the ties with the community leadership, discuss service programs with community leaders and plan and prepare for student participants for when they arrive back at college.

D. Junior Year — Example / Leadership

Juniors are expected to take on a leadership role by their junior year. For many this will mean taking on the role of student volunteer coordinator with the agency with whom they serve (as described earlier). In this capacity a student is expected to help with every aspect of developing, maintaining, and evaluating a team of students involved in a particular issue area, project, or agency. Such responsibilities include: recruitment of new student volunteers, placement, orientation, supervision, monitoring and motivating students. Student volunteer coordinators are responsible for arranging transportation, making sure students show up at placements, and communicating with community leaders on a regular basis. They are also responsible for identifying and training their successor for the following year.

While juniors are encouraged to serve as student volunteer coordinators, this is not the only form of leadership a student can pursue. Other avenues of leadership might include

helping to develop a service club for high college students or senior citizens. In still other instances, a student might not want to take a leadership role that is so visible but might take on a role that is more behind the scenes such as serving as an assistant to the director of an agency.

Leadership takes on many forms and it is important to respond in such a way that different people's leadership styles are encouraged. While the options for leadership are broad, the requirement to take on leadership role is essential. Not everyone has to be a "leader," but Bonner Scholars are expected to step out and demonstrate their abilities by involving, encouraging, and supporting others. The requirement to take on additional responsibilities challenges them to examine, develop, and strengthen their commitments, abilities, and attitudes towards their roles as Bonner Scholars. Ultimately, we believe that students are needed to help operate, lead, and define the culture of service on a campus.

During the course of the year, juniors are offered a number of workshops that deal with everything from recruitment to how to hold a meeting or what to look for in a successor. Juniors are also encouraged to pursue independent studies and to work with faculty to pursue junior seminars that help students explore and develop their own style of leadership.

Junior Year Summer — Outside the Region:

In the summer prior to their senior year, students are encouraged to find an internship located outside the area where they grew up. They are encouraged to find an agency or organization that works on the issues that they have focused on over the past two or three years. Therefore, students who might have worked with children would be encouraged to go to a national organization in Washington, DC where they could work with some of the country's finest leaders studying the policy issues connected to children's issues. This will help them immeasurably as they enter their senior year by giving them a broader understanding of the causes and potential solutions to the problems they may have encountered in their local communities.

Alternatively, students are encouraged to work with one of the many national student-based organizations that work to get other students involved in service activities. Students might work as interns with such groups as COOL, SCALE, or BreakAway. The goal here is to have students gain exposure with the leading service organizations in the country, while at the same time offering these groups committed and imaginative student leadership. Because Bonner Scholars have received so much experience and support, the intent is that they can share with others to help build service opportunities for students and campuses that have not had the same opportunities.

Another hope for the students during this summer is to gain exposure to agencies and organizations that might be helpful to them after they graduate from college. Summer jobs often have a profound impact on a student's career choice. By supporting students to pursue exciting summer internships that in the past have only been available to those who could afford them, it is our hope that Bonner Scholars will get a head start on thinking about their next steps after college and perhaps find some connections that can help them take them.

Finally, this summer is designed to help a student gain perspective. When a student gets a chance to work with a program like Crossroads Africa where they spend a summer in Africa doing different service projects or working with a church in inner city Detroit, their perspective changes. Our hope is that students will have this life changing experience before they finish college so that it might impact them in their senior year.

E) Senior Year — Expertise

In the senior year, Bonner Scholars are expected to participate in an independent service project which they help design. These projects may include a research or consulting component related to an issue or project in which they have become involved.

In the area of research, students are expected to connect their academic studies and their community work to do some type of research project. Thus, a student will be asked to go beyond the traditional volunteer or leadership positions that students have traditionally held. Instead, students will write grant proposals, research model programs, and participate in other initiatives designed in collaboration with or in response to a request by a community agency. An engineer may design a playground, a computer major a software package to help the flow of traffic in town, or an English major may edit an annual report for a community agency. When a student researches a particular issue such as hunger or housing, the student is expected to not only to share it with a professor but also with the community, other students, and the Bonner Scholar community as a whole. Using the internet for dissemination and discussion, student research related to their service will be used to help students across the country to think critically about issues and help communities gain access to ideas and resources that they desperately need and that they otherwise might not receive.

Seniors are also expected to translate the expertise they have developed by helping other services institutions including high schools, churches, and other colleges and universities. A student that has developed a program dealing with understanding and providing services for people with HIV/AIDS, might write a booklet on his experience and travel to other colleges and communities to help others start similar programs. Seniors might also work with nearby colleges and universities to help them identify and train a student leadership that is capable of starting a campus wide service initiative.