

## Summer AmeriCorps Program

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### Purpose

- Allows Bonner Leaders to do summer service in the local community, tripling the number of hours they serve at the agency per week during the year.
- Increases Bonner Leaders' sense of ownership and investment in their site and the people they serve.
- Educates students about the assets and challenges of community by taking field trips and bringing in lecturers.
- Provides 17 local agencies with highly needed summer assistance.

### Background

When the College began to talk with local agencies about the possibility of bringing the AmeriCorps Bonner Leaders Program to Allegheny, they expressed excitement about the possibility of students serving in the community during the summers. Because of the high level of need in the community during the summer, the planning team decided in 1998 that 300 hours of summer service in the county would be included in the structure of the 900-hour, two-year program.

### How It Works

#### Structure

The 900-hour AmeriCorps Bonner Leader positions at Allegheny require one or two summers of service in Crawford County. Students commit to completing one of three tracks: two 300-hour summers and one 300-hour school year or two 300-hour school years and one 300-hour summer of service in the local community or one 300-hour summer term. Each summer, with Bonner Leaders serving in both the 900-hour program and 300-hour program, Allegheny has between fifteen and twenty-five Bonners serving throughout Crawford County. Bonner Leaders conduct all of their service at one site, deciding with their agencies how they will meet their 300 hours of summer service. For example, they might work forty hours per week for eight weeks or twenty-five hours per week over the entire summer.

#### Learning About the Local Community

As part of their two-day orientation, all new summer Bonner Leaders participate in a half-day educational scavenger hunt on Crawford County. They first discuss perceptions they have of the local people and what perceptions they believe the community has of Allegheny students. They are then split up into groups to discover five aspects of the area: local commerce, history, parks and environment, redevelopment, and human service organizations. Each group has meetings with area experts, visits sites, and gathers information about this aspect of the local community. At the end of the four hours, all the groups come together to share what they have discovered about the community in which they now live.

#### Summer Dinner Gatherings

Each week during the summer, Bonner Leaders meet for dinner to reflect on their experiences and learn from campus or community guests. Several students are responsible for making dinner with funding provided by the Office of Community Service. Gatherings include a reflection exercise or a speaker from the College or the community. Speakers' topics have included the relationship between Allegheny and Meadville, racial issues in the county, and leadership styles.

#### Summer Celebration Event

All Bonner Leaders serving during the summer are taken out for a fun event ending with a group dinner at a restaurant in appreciation for all their service. For the past two years, students have gone to Conneaut Lake Park and Hotel, a historic amusement park and hotel.

## What Makes The Project Unique

This structure has allowed the Allegheny AmeriCorps Bonner Leaders program to focus on meeting the needs of local agencies on a year-round basis. Community partners have repeatedly said that the needs met by Bonner Leaders during the summer are crucial to the level of services they need to provide to clients. Agencies are able to give students longer-term and more in-depth projects that lead to a higher level of learning, understanding, and skill development. Because Bonner Leaders spend more time in the community during the summer, many of them begin to consider themselves citizens of Meadville, not merely just students at Allegheny.

## Benefits

### To Agencies

Over the summer, Bonner Leaders often team up to create collaborative projects between different agencies. For example, a Bonner Leader educating the community about preserving French Creek collaborated with a Bonner Leader at a low-income housing development to do an interactive presentation to the children there.

### To Students

Bonner Leaders share their summer experiences with other Allegheny students, informing them of all the community assets they discovered. For many students who have a negative perception of the community, Bonner Leaders shatter stereotypes and help them appreciate and understand the community.

## Timeline

First week in May after finals

New Bonner orientation is held, including the educational community scavenger hunt.

By Mid-May

All guests, topics, and reflection exercises for dinner gatherings have been scheduled.

End of May through the beginning of August

Dinner gatherings are held once per week.

## Resources And Partners

### AmeriCorps

- Provides each student with an education award of \$2,362 for those participating in a 900-hour term, and \$1,000 for those doing a 300-hour term.

### Allegheny College

- Office of Community Service: Bonner Leaders have access to four community service mini-vans to travel to and from their agencies all summer.
- New Initiative Funding: Through this fund established several years ago, Bonner Leaders receive \$1,000 stipends for their participation during the summer.
- Residence Life and Financial Aid: Bonner Leaders pay only the tax the College must charge to stay in the residence halls, approximately \$80 per month.
- College Faculty and Staff: Facilitate weekly training and reflection sessions.

### Agency Partners

- The agencies that host Bonner Leaders contribute \$150 for each student serving with them during the summer. This amount is given directly to the student to help them pay for meals. Agencies also provide direct supervision to students, meeting with them weekly.

### Community Speakers

- Community members donate time to discuss service and social justice issues with the Bonner Leaders at weekly dinner gatherings.

## **Overcoming Challenges**

Dinner was not incorporated into the weekly summer gatherings for the first few years. The weekly dinner has given the group informal time to develop relationships and get to know each other. Students are responsible for their own meals over the summer, so having one less meal to pay for and cook each week is appreciated.

Many students have struggled with the amount of payment they receive during the summer, which comes to only \$1,150. Providing additional funding to the \$1,000 stipend would assist students in their struggle to make money to pay for tuition and other expenses for the following school year. Initial efforts have been made to find a donor for this compensation.

## **Evidence Of Success**

Allegheny Bonner Leaders have displayed an increased level of involvement and understanding about their agencies and the populations served. When these students continue working at their site during the fall semester, most voice how challenging it is to go from 40 hours per week to eight to nine hours, stating that they miss their high level of involvement and relationships. At the end of the program, many cite the summer component as the time they learned most about themselves, their work, and the community. Agencies continually express their appreciation for their Bonner Leaders during the summer, remarking on how much the students are able to add to the agency's summer programming.

## **How To Make It Grow**

Ideally, 25 students each summer would have funding to participate, since this level of assistance is needed by the agencies. Including several group service projects and more field trip opportunities would further develop a sense of teamwork among the Bonner Leaders. Developing a more strategic curriculum during the summer by incorporating discussions of books on related social issues would add to the learning experience and growth of students.