

Freshman Bonner Scholars Program

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Purpose

- Places all freshmen Bonner Scholars at one agency, allowing them to grow and mature as individuals by working together as a team.
- Gives freshmen responsibility for planning and carrying out three programs at the Boys and Girls Club of Madison County.
- Provides an opportunity for upperclass Bonner Scholars to develop leadership skills by serving as freshman program coordinators who facilitate training and planning sessions for freshmen.

Background

In 1999, freshmen Bonners were in 15 separate placements. They did not feel they were receiving enough direction or training at their service sites, and they did not feel that they knew their fellow Bonners. At the end of the year, those students suggested that in the future the freshman class work together at one site. The Bonner Scholars Program director liked this idea and implemented it the following year.

The first programs in which the freshmen participated were at Berea Community School. However, the number of participants declined the next year because so many children joined the Boys and Girls Club, which opened in the fall of 2001. As a result, the Bonner Office decided to move the program to the Boys and Girls Club and change the programs to fit their schedule.

The Bonner coordinator and director worked with the staff of the Boys and Girls Club and determined that three programs would work best for both groups. Next, the coordinator and director worked with the freshman program coordinators and found three national Boys and Girls Club programs. They have been adapted to fit a “group” concept of leading, meaning that all six Bonners lead the program, not just one.

How It Works

Three groups of five freshman Bonners are each led by a freshman program coordinator, an upperclass Bonner who provides direct supervision. The program coordinator leads training and planning sessions for the freshman Bonners and provides supervision for each of their group’s program sessions.

Specific Programs

One World—The Diversity Initiative

Through the One World program, children ages 10 to 12 at the Boys and Girls Club participate in a variety of activities designed to promote understanding of the world that surrounds them. The children examine different cultures, religions, and languages, as well as the differences they encounter on a daily basis, such as family size and structure, personalities, and hobbies.

Career Explorers

This program is designed for 13- to 15-year-olds at the Boys and Girls Club. The children explore many of the careers possible in our society and the education needed for such jobs. Speakers, field trips, and activities open the students’ eyes to the variety of opportunities available to them.

Ultimate Journey

This program helps children learn and understand the importance of the environment and how one’s everyday actions have a tremendous impact on the natural world. Through artwork, nature walks,

photography, and guest speakers, students are provided with opportunities to have fun, be creative, and enjoy nature.

Power Hour

All 15 freshmen and three upperclass coordinators spend their first hour at the Boys and Girls Club tutoring during Power Hour. The Boys and Girls Club members are split up by grade level, and the Bonner Scholars work with an assigned group each day.

Training and Reflection

When Bonner Scholars first arrive on campus, they attend an intensive Bonner Scholar orientation. This orientation includes an introduction to the Bonner Foundation, the Common Commitments, and the Berea College Bonner Scholars Program.

During the first month on campus the freshmen participate in daily training sessions dealing with issues they will face in the upcoming year. Many community partners and other guest speakers provide education on a wide variety of issue-specific topics, such as conflict resolution, confidentiality, child abuse, discipline, leadership styles, and problem solving.

For the entire first year, Bonner Scholars meet for one hour each week to receive training and information beneficial to their program or to working in teams. The freshman teams also attend a weekly meeting facilitated by their freshman program coordinator to plan for the next week's sessions at the Boys and Girls Club. Each week, the groups are responsible for giving the Bonner coordinator an agenda for the meeting, the program day's schedule, and the minutes for the meeting.

Each freshman has a weekly individual meeting with the freshman program coordinator. The purpose of this meeting is to reflect upon the scholar's job performance and his/her place on the team, as well as to talk about any other issues or problems that may arise. Freshmen also have a monthly meeting with the Bonner Scholars Program coordinator to discuss the same issues.

Finally, each freshman is required to keep a weekly reflection journal. These journals are an opportunity for the freshmen to share their insights and feelings about the program and their life. These journals are handed in to the Bonner coordinator each week.

What Makes The Project Unique

This program is distinctive because it keeps the freshmen together for an entire year instead of having them split among many different sites. The freshman Bonner Scholars, therefore, do not have the option of trying out various sites; they must stay at the same site for their entire first year. However, they are encouraged to volunteer with other programs by allowing them several free Bonner hours a week. Thus a potential problem has been turned into a strength by designing a program that offers substantial training, support, and mentoring. Indeed, the freshman Bonners share an experience that prepares them well for working in teams in various student-led programs as upperclassmen.

Berea College is a "work college," which means that every student is a work-study student and therefore has a "labor position" assigned to them each year by the college's Labor Program. Freshman Bonner Scholars complete this requirement through their service work with the Bonner Program, and their Bonner coordinator serves as their Labor Program site supervisor.

Benefits

To the Students

The students gain experience planning, organizing, and leading events in a team setting, preparing them for leadership roles in other service programs. They have complete ownership of their program because they are in charge of every aspect. They build strong relationships with each other and with those they serve. The structure of this program also benefits students by creating a cohesive class of Bonner Scholars. Their shared experiences throughout the freshman year contribute to a strong, supportive atmosphere on which to build.

To the Administrator

For the campus administrator, it is much easier to ensure that students are having positive, educational

experiences at their service site when all fifteen freshman Bonners are serving at the same organization. Also, because all freshmen work with the same population, the training can be much more topic-specific, while still remaining relevant.

To the Community

The community and service site benefit from having highly trained college students working as mentors with at-risk youth. The Boys and Girls Club does not have to hire as many staff members because the students serve as staff.

Timeline

Spring

Meet with the Boys and Girls Club of Madison County to discuss the partnership and plan a series of meetings to work out details. Choose coordinators for the following year. Verify that sufficient financial support is available. Explain the program to newly selected Bonner Scholars.

Fall

Hold orientation for the coordinators and the freshman Bonner Scholars. Provide a month of intensive training specific to working with youth ages 10 -15 and team building. Select teams. Recruit participants at the Boys and Girls Club.

Program begins:

Maintain continuous assessment and evaluation of programs with Boys and Girls Club staff to make decisions about the schedule for the spring semester.

Spring

Select new coordinators for the following year. Reevaluate the effectiveness of the programs and make changes as necessary.

Resources and partners

Berea College

- Students are paid through the Berea College Labor Program. Berea funds the staff position of the Bonner Scholar coordinator, who supervises the freshmen and freshman program coordinators.
- The College also provides space for training sessions, which are held on campus at CELTS (Berea College's Service-Learning Center).
- Funding also comes to the programs through CELTS' departmental budget, which covers the cost of using college motor pool vehicles for transportation to the Boys and Girls Club.

Boys and Girls Club of Madison County

- The Boys and Girls Club of Madison County provides the space for holding the programs, as well as most equipment used.

The Bonner Foundation

- The Foundation provides funding to Bonners through the scholarship itself, as well as through the Bonner Scholars Community Fund, which provides assistance for certain projects.

Overcoming Challenges

The most common challenge is dealing with personality conflicts among the freshman Bonner Scholars. The program tries to avoid this problem by having many training sessions about how to deal with different personalities. Freshman coordinators also have weekly individual meetings with each freshman to discuss any problems or issues. The Bonner coordinator also meets monthly with each student. Mediation sessions are offered to resolve some issues.

Another challenge has been to keep children in the programs for the entire school year. Many have left to play sports or attend other programs. This challenge has been addressed by shortening the programs to one semester. This change has created an increase in the number of participants each semester, allowing freshman Bonners to serve more students each year.

Evidence of Success

The number of participants has grown from three to five children per program per day to around 15 to 20. Retention of students has also improved, with more than 75 percent of the students who began the programs returning until the last session of the program.

How to Make it Grow

As the Boys and Girls Club continues to grow, so will the programs. The Bonner office plans on working with the Boys and Girls Club to recruit and retain participants.