

First-Year Class: From Generosity to Justice

by Cathy Hamilton, Bonner Scholar Director

Purpose

- Provides first-year Bonner Scholars with a for-credit course, allowing them to study leadership, service, and civic engagement from an academic perspective.

Background

The first Bonner director at DePauw, Dr. Stuart Lord, conceived of the idea of a service-learning class with academic credit connected to the Bonner program.

How It Works

Course Description

Students explore concepts of community, culture, democracy, service, leadership, and personal relationships. Issues addressed include engaging in service with justice, integrity, and authenticity, the link between service and leadership, the meaning of American democracy, and how volunteers can be transformed into agents for social change.

Course Format and Participation Requirements

The class is conducted as a seminar. Students must come to every class prepared to discuss themes and reading assignments. The Bonner director facilitates discussion, provides context, and may present additional material, but the class format is designed to give students an opportunity to reflect on and analyze critical questions about citizenship, generosity and justice, democracy and community, the message and the messenger.

Student pairs are responsible for presenting the reading material and setting the context of discussion during one class session. Student's personal community service experiences are encouraged in the context of discussion. Student teams in charge of discussion hand out questions for reflection and observation. Classroom participation in the discussion is worth 20 percent of the final grade.

Assignments include a wide range of readings. Students engage their critical thinking skills as they read and prepare the material for discussion. The Bonners' eight-hours-of-community-service-per-week requirement gives students a unique opportunity to apply classroom theories and concepts to their service. Their service placement creates a context for students to connect their personal civic engagement to issues found within the broader society.

Written Requirements

Students must write a six- to seven-page midterm paper based on an interview with someone who they believe "walks the talk" and serves as a moral exemplar in the life of the student and others. The paper is worth 20 percent of the student's final grade.

Civic Education Convocations

Each year the Bonner Scholar Program and the Hartman Civic Center invite speakers to campus to share their thoughts about civic engagement and service. As Bonners, students must attend all civic education convocations and write a two- to three-page paper connecting the speaker's message with class discussions and readings and the student's service placement. The papers are worth 30 percent of the student's final grade.

Group Project

Student pairs must work cooperatively throughout the semester on a final project exploring a problem

that relates to their studies and their Bonner placement. Their written project will be presented orally at the end of the semester. It is worth 30 percent of the final grade.

What Makes The Project Unique

The for-credit class is a requirement for first-year Bonners. It begins immediately after the Bonner orientation and lasts through the first semester. The class meets for two hours on one evening each week.

Benefits

The seminar encourages students to begin thinking about and experiencing together the elements crucial for a successful student development model. Many of the students are away from home for the first time, and this class gives them an immediate group with which they can identify. Students may not be from the same background or political persuasion, but they are united together through their commitment to service.

Resources And Partners

Community Agency Partners

- These agencies provide service placements for Bonners.

Mayor of Greencastle

- The mayor is always willing to come and speak to the class about the community.

The Compton Center for Peace and Social Justice

DePauw University

- Faculty members from the Religious Life Center at DePauw provide training.
- The Hartman Center for Civic Education and Leadership staff members provide space, teaching faculty, and all financial and material support for the class.
- Various faculty and staff contribute to the seminar.