

## Dreams into Deeds

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### Purpose

- Focuses the entire campus on a single community-based issue each year, such as homelessness, diversity, or sustainable development.
- Provides opportunities for campus-wide interdisciplinary reflection and service surrounding the year's community-based issue.
- Allows students, faculty, staff, and community partners to make connections between faith and service, as well as academics and action.
- Engages Bonners in reflection, training, and enrichment around the theme.

### Background

Over Christmas break in 1996, Mars Hill took a group to a conference in Washington, D.C., called Dreams into Deeds. The title came from a translation of a New Testament verse by Clarence Jordan, the founder of Koinonia Farms: "Faith is the turning of dreams into deeds." The conference focused on making connections between faith and action. The leaders of the conference challenged the participants to return to their respective campuses and create a Dreams into Deeds program. When the group got back to campus, they learned that civil rights leader John Hope Franklin was to visit the following year, and they decided to focus the entire year on race relations. This idea for a thematic year then merged with the idea to create a Dreams into Deeds program on campus, which began in 1997.

### How It Works

#### Themes

The College has a three-year rotation of broad categories of themes: diversity, human needs, and the environment. The staff of LifeWorks Leadership Academy has conducted surveys and held meetings to get input from faculty and students about themes to focus on in the future. Below is a description of the 2002-2003 theme.

#### 2002-2003: Take Me to the River: Focus on the Environment

This year's theme related to water, to the river. The river is a central subject in disciplines throughout the liberal arts—the humanities, the arts, and the sciences. Wallace Stegner, in a 1969 essay, encouraged readers to listen to "the sound of mountain water." In the mountains of western North Carolina, Mars Hill spent the year doing just that—listening to the sound of the rivers and listening to what scientists, artists, and preachers say about the rivers. In addition to the programmed events, students were involved in a wide range of service and research activities connected to regional rivers and streams, and all freshmen read portions of Wilma Dykeman's *The French Broad*.

#### Theme-related Activities

As the College prepares for each year's theme, community partners are recruited to help design new service-learning experiences for the year. Many of the freshman seminar faculty choose to have their classes do service-learning projects around the theme. Other faculty members invite guest lecturers to speak on the theme. Several of the chapel speakers throughout the year also address the theme. Mars Hill faculty and staff work to create internship opportunities around the theme.

#### 2002-2003 Service Projects

During the 2002-2003 academic year, when the "Take Me to the River" theme was explored, students

worked with the local soil and water conservation agency on a stream buffer project and participated in several one-day river cleanups. Others worked alongside middle school students in a water quality testing project in a local stream as part of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Clean Water Act. A fall break trip was organized to McDowell County, West Virginia, to work on flood relief. A Bonner Dreams Into Deeds his service with the Southern Appalachian Bio-diversity Project working to minimize the effects of development on the habitats around rivers and lakes.

#### The Bonner Program

Dreams into Deeds presents Bonners with reflection, training, and enrichment activities surrounding the theme. Many of the Dreams into Deeds programs are used as enrichment or training opportunities for Bonner Scholars. Bonners are also encouraged to connect their service to the theme. While not all will work directly with the theme for their main service site, the themes are usually broad enough to encompass a wide range of service projects. The first-year service trip also focuses on the theme. During the 2001-2002 academic year, when the theme was “Make Yourself at Home,” first-year Bonners went to Louisville to work with several organizations that deal with homelessness and affordable housing. When the theme was “Take Me to the River,” the service trip involved environmental work around the coastal waterways.

#### Curricular Connections

LifeWorks staff work with faculty members to make curricular connections to the theme. Faculty members teaching the first-year seminar are assisted in choosing a theme-related common text for the course.

LifeWorks also helps faculty members establish Learning Communities based on the theme. Learning Communities (LC) involve a set of students who take two or three courses together, tied together by a theme developed by the faculty teaching the courses. In the 2002-2003 academic year, a pottery teacher teamed up with a biology professor and an English professor for an environmental LC. In other years, a professor teaching a course on popular film teamed up with a Spanish professor and an English professor for an LC on global diversity.

Curricular connections are also made by working with faculty members to bring Dreams into Deeds speakers into classes when they are on campus. This often happens in the upper-level major courses. For example, a visiting singer/songwriter led a discussion in the senior seminar for history majors because her songs deal with the history of the deep South.

### **What Makes The Project Unique**

At Mars Hill, students and faculty are involved in service-learning around a wide variety of community-based issues including education, homelessness, hunger, and the environment. This breadth allows students to engage in a variety of activities but makes it difficult to delve deeply into any one issue. Dreams into Deeds enables the College to highlight a single community issue each year, allowing time for a sustained focus that provides a depth of analysis and reflection.

Dreams into Deeds also allows people from across campus to contribute to the program. Campus ministry, the visiting artist program, and endowed lectureships such as the Broyhill Business Lecture are all involved. Some participants are not considered part of the core group of service-learning practitioners, but by sponsoring a program related to the theme, they help service-learning students gain a greater understanding of the issue in which they are engaged.

### **Benefits**

Dreams into Deeds is a good way to include more people in service—especially those who ordinarily would not participate in traditional service-learning. The program also provides opportunities for more in-depth reflection, as students engage the theme from a variety of perspectives throughout the year.

### **Timeline**

#### Fall

A wide variety of campus leaders brainstorm ideas for next year’s theme which is generally in place by

late fall or by early spring. This schedule provides adequate time to reserve speakers and plan service-learning experiences. Once the theme is chosen, regular communication between the leaders is established to figure out what programs they will offer for Dreams Into Deeds.

#### Spring and Summer

Publicity pieces are created. Community service staff members work with community partners to plan the service-learning activities.

### Resources And Partners

#### Mars Hill College Faculty and Staff

- The chair of the faculty, faculty members who teach the freshman seminar, the chair of the visiting artists committee, campus minister, and those responsible for endowed lectureships have an active role. A senior faculty member gives a final lecture, connecting faith and academic learning. Speaker fees are usually covered by departments that can allocate funds from their programming budgets.

#### Community Partners

- They help design new service-learning experiences surrounding the theme and take part in lectures and other events for Dreams Into Deeds.

### Overcoming Challenges

It is difficult to find time to collaborate and plan with various groups across campus. Dreams into Deeds is not part of the formal committee work of faculty or staff, so the time they dedicate is in addition to their regular responsibilities. Until a home is found for the program in one of the established committees of the College, there is the risk of waning faculty participation due to burnout.

Another major challenge is marketing the program to the campus and the wider community. This challenge stems from limited resources, and until these funds are found, the College will continue to have good programs that are under-publicized.

### Evidence of Success

There has been good response to the programming, including significant participation from a range of faculty members. New partnerships and service-learning opportunities have been created around the different themes. Dreams into Deeds has fulfilled its objective of allowing for more in-depth reflection and engaging students in the theme from various perspectives.

As an illustration, the 2001-2002 theme was "Make Yourself at Home," and it focused on homelessness and affordable housing. Singer/songwriter Kate Campbell visited from Nashville to kick off the theme with a concert of related songs. A popular artist in the area, Campbell attracted a wide range of students, faculty, staff, and community members, allowing those who would not usually attend service-learning meetings to hear about upcoming Dreams Into Deeds events.

The Mars Hill Christian Student Movement joined in the theme by organizing a spring break mission trip in which they worked with Habitat for Humanity in Charlotte. The College also received a grant from the Valparaiso Project to work on the topic of Christian hospitality. Students focused on reaching out to the growing number of Hispanic families moving into the region.

All of these programs enabled Bonner Scholars to have enriching reflection experiences, and it allowed for the promotion and organization of service-learning projects for other students and faculty members who were not directly involved in the Bonner program or service-learning.

### How to Make it Grow

Dreams into Deeds could grow with additional funding for more speakers, more service-learning projects, and more publicity around the program.