

## The LifeWorks Leadership Academy

*by Stan Dotson, Bonner Scholars Director and  
Cindy Frost, Bonner Scholars Coordinator*

### Purpose

- Connects Bonner Scholars' experience and reflection in a four-year developmental model, building a foundation for lifelong learning and leadership development.
- Links knowledge, skills, and values to students' community-based experiences, encouraging students to learn by doing.
- Maximizes students' ability to make a difference in others' lives by providing weekly reflection and training meetings for all Bonners and merit scholars, teaching them to work alongside civic leaders to build community and serve the common good.

### Background

This leadership program is an outgrowth of the strategic planning for a developmental model that began in 1996 at the urging of the Bonner Foundation. There were initially three stages in the program, and in 1998 when the faculty began to work on a general education curriculum, consisting of "Commons" courses, the LifeWorks Leadership Academy expanded its co-curricular program to accompany the set of curricular offerings in the new "Liberal Arts in Action" (LAA) program.

The LifeWorks curriculum was first offered to freshmen in 2000. As the project's guinea pigs, this freshman class provided a great deal of helpful feedback.

### How It Works

#### Stages

There are seven stages in the leadership program: exploration, service, advocacy, collaboration, contribution, demonstration, and lifework. Six of the stages correspond to the Commons courses in Mars Hill's new general education program. Still a work-in-progress, the first four stages of the curriculum have been designed, and administrators are working on the remaining stages.

#### Components

The curriculum is geared for 15 hour-long weekly sessions. There are five weeks on the knowledge base, five weeks on the skill set, and five weeks on the values component. Students connect their service experiences to the knowledge, skills, and values areas addressed in the meetings.

In the knowledge component of the program, teaches scholars to ask essential questions that deepen understanding of themselves and the world. In the skills component of the program, focuses on students' developing one particular skill at each stage that will deepen their impact on community life.

In the values component of the program, facilitates students' examination of one value at each stage, along with an accompanying set of attitudes and behaviors that demonstrate a commitment to that value. Maximizes students' ability to make a difference in others' lives by providing weekly reflection and training meetings for all Bonners and merit scholars, teaching them to work alongside civic leaders to build community and serve the common good.

#### Scheduling

All Bonners and merit scholars are required to participate. Students are required to set aside a specific hour every week to attend meetings. Each class meets separately because they are at different stages of the developmental model. Freshmen must set aside an additional block of time to visit different placement sites for group service projects each week. Course scheduling is therefore a key component in preparing students to take part in the leadership program.

### Curriculum

The curriculum pedagogy aims to reach students with diverse learning styles. Each session includes a film clip, music, small and large group discussion, journaling, and interactive exercises. A great deal of time went into preparing the various pieces of the pedagogy. Ideas for film and music clips to be used in the sessions were gathered from faculty, staff, students, and friends of the LifeWorks staff. After deciding on the films and music, all of the clips were consolidated on video tapes and CDs. The staff has written lesson plans for each of the 15 sessions.

### Reflection Journals

Guided reflection journals have been designed to accompany each stage of the program, with quotes and artwork that reinforce the theme. Artwork accompanies the quotes for each day in the journal.

### Incorporating LifeWorks into General Education courses

Faculty members are now teaching Mars Hill's new general education courses called the Commons. LifeWorks staff were included in the work of the design teams, representing service-learning and experiential education. This work familiarized the LifeWorks staff with the resources and materials being used in the curricular component and enabled them to design the LifeWorks program as a companion to the for-credit courses. For example, the common text for the all-freshmen Challenges course was Wilma Dykeman's *The French Broad*, a history of the river that runs through the area. Because the freshmen were all studying the book in class, LifeWorks staff could refer to her work and talk about her use of appreciative inquiry during the students' river service project. Similarly, while the students examine the value of courage in service, the staff can reference *Warriors Don't Cry*, a history of the integration of Little Rock High School that is used as a text for the Commons' Character course.

### What Makes The Project Unique

The conceptual framework for the program is one of its unique features. Each activity is integrated into the framework so that it reinforces the theme and desired outcome for knowledge, skills, and values development at the particular session. To design the activities, the LifeWorks staff borrowed material on effective training sessions from a variety of sources. For example, the campus Upward Bound leaders have a wide repertoire of interactive exercises that LifeWorks has incorporated into the curriculum. LifeWorks staff have also taken advantage of faculty who have expertise in executive coaching and group facilitation, utilizing their interactive exercises. The LifeWorks staff has also attended service-learning and experiential education conferences and workshops where best practices of experiential pedagogy have been demonstrated. LifeWorks utilizes these borrowed activities and have designed some on their own, but what makes these sessions unique is the way they are integrated into the developmental framework. The program therefore serves as a basic template for those facilitating reflection groups for service-learning.

### Resources And Partners

#### Mars Hill College Faculty

- Two faculty members regularly facilitate the sessions with the merit honors scholars. A group of faculty and staff also facilitate many of the sessions with the Bonners.

#### The Council of Independent Colleges Grant

- Through their Engaging Communities and Campuses program, they provide funding for the journals and stipends for the facilitators.

### Overcoming Challenges

The biggest challenge has been generating resources for the journal books.

It has also been difficult to find a publisher who could get the appropriate permissions for all the quotes, artwork, music, and film clips. If these permissions were gained, the resources could be published in book form and offered to other colleges. If a significant volume of the books were published for a larger community, they would be affordable to Mars Hill students. However, printing them for Mars Hill students alone is cost-prohibitive.

## **Evidence of Success**

There is currently more student enthusiasm for the weekly reflection meetings than in the past. As expected, because the pedagogy is designed to appeal to multiple learning styles, different students have responded more positively to some aspects of the weekly session.

## **How to Make it Grow**

The program would benefit from finding donors to underwrite the project. Grant money has been used to pay for the journals and the facilitators' stipends so far, but additional resources must be found to sustain these aspects of the program.

The staff will soon begin planning the seventh stage of LifeWorks, which is helping alumni apply the lessons of the academy to life and work. The staff is already working closely with the director of career programming to create an alumni "NetWorks" program under LifeWorks. In NetWorks, it is envisioned that alumni will be connected together and back to the College in several ways. The staff hopes to identify "LifeWorks Leaders" in every major or field. For example, Andrew Runheim, a Bonner Scholar alumnus, is now finishing a dual residency in medicine at both Carolina and Duke. He excelled at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine and is now the first to complete such a dual residency. He describes how important his service-learning work was for him at Mars Hill. He states that it prepared him with the knowledge and skills to succeed in medical school and helped him develop the values that will make him a different kind of doctor. The LifeWorks staff hopes to bring people like Andrew back to Mars Hill to talk to premed students and flesh out what he means by this values-centered approach. They also want to connect Andrew with other MHC alumni in the medical field and create opportunities for dialogue so that professionals can find space and time to support one another in working toward civic responsibility in their field.