

Each One Teach One: Bonner Scholar Groups

by Courtney Woods, Bonner Scholars Program Coordinator

Purpose

- Groups together Bonner Scholars on different levels of the student development model so that they can learn from one another.
- Facilitates development of teamwork skills, such as communication, collaboration, and compromising.

Background

The Bonner Scholars program director, Jacqueline Miles, came up with the Bonner group model in 1998 to strengthen bonds between Bonner Scholars and to give them more input in their service experiences.

How It Works

A freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior are grouped together for a year and are required to complete a project or activity of their choice. Projects might include planning an event for the children they mentor, working at a food bank together, or conducting community-based research on an issue affecting the community. The students learn how to build effective partnerships in a small-group setting.

The Bonner group model helps increase teamwork and overall interest in the Bonner Scholars Program. The group model aims to meet the different needs of freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior Bonner Scholars.

Freshman Bonners

As freshmen define their goals and explore service opportunities available in the community, they participate in onetime service projects, visit local community service programs, and hear suggestions about how to make the most of their time as Bonner Scholars. The experience and advice of the upperclassmen greatly benefits these students.

Sophomore Bonners

Sophomores have explored the community and gained enough insight to advise freshmen about connecting their service to academic or personal goals. Sophomores learn from juniors and seniors about utilizing their service experience to further develop themselves, the campus, and the community.

Junior Bonners

Juniors increase their level of participation in the community and have more advanced leadership skills. They demonstrate to underclassmen that being a Bonner is more than mentoring and tutoring: Bonners also have the opportunity to become true stakeholders in the community.

Senior Bonners

Seniors demonstrate that service leadership can be taken to an even higher level, such as creating new community service programs or initiatives. They inspire all Bonners to see that they can be servant leaders no matter what their experience level. Seniors are in a position to pass on their knowledge, ensuring their legacy and long-term impact on the program.

What Makes The Project Unique

The Bonner group model is a reciprocal model, meaning that students learn from one another regardless of their experience level. The project-oriented method incorporates the different levels of the Student

Development Model, assuring group bonding, and empowering students to invest in the model themselves.

Benefits

Benefits to Students

At the start of each year, students are asked to recommit themselves to the Bonner Scholars Program and community service for another year. They must take over the responsibilities of the graduated upperclassmen, welcome new Bonners, and introduce them to the college and local community. Bonner groups help students meet these challenges by providing a framework for team-building.

Giving the students a chance to collaborate on their own service projects revitalizes sophomores, juniors, and seniors because it makes the experience more meaningful.

Freshmen soon learn that their input is valued and that they have no reason to feel intimidated. They are servant-leaders just like others in their group, and participating in a service project reassures them that they make valuable contributions as Bonner Scholars.

Benefits to Campus Administrators

The Bonner group model supports the Bonner Program staff as they develop students' leadership roles. Allowing students to create their own meaningful service experience increases the likelihood that everyone will be satisfied with the program.

Benefits to Community

Some freshmen find that participation in the Bonner group is the most meaningful service experience of their first year. Opportunities for community-based research are available and they are more likely to be taken on in the Bonner groups. For such time-consuming and detailed projects, it is more effective to have four people contributing, rather than just one.

Benefits to Campus

The concept of brotherhood is often discussed at Morehouse, but not often actualized. The Bonner groups provide students and other members of the Morehouse community with a model for effective relationships. Bonds that are formed are not just related to service. Many students in Bonner Groups participate in extracurricular activities together and establish lifelong friendships.

Timeline

August

The roster of new Bonner Scholars for the upcoming academic year is finalized, and students are randomly placed in groups of four. Group assignments are announced at the first Bonner meeting of the year. Each student has access to the names, phone numbers, and e-mails of the members of their group. Directors and coordinators thoroughly explain the purpose of the Bonner group.

September-April

Each group decides on a project or activity to participate in together. They set up meetings and communicate via phone and e-mail on a regular basis. Students are encouraged to strengthen their relationships by participating in academic and social activities together. At Bonner meetings throughout the year, each group gives a brief progress report and discusses issues with other groups.

May

At the last Bonner meeting, each Bonner group gives an oral presentation of their project or activity. In this reflection piece, students evaluate the overall group experience and compare it to the experiences of others in the Bonner Scholars Program. At the end of the year, each group writes a summary of its experiences.

Resources And Partners

Community Partners

- Bonner groups usually work on a project with an existing community partner. These organizations are aware of the Bonner Scholars Program and the impact that it has on the community, and they

are more supportive of students and their service ideas.

Morehouse College

Bonner Program Staff

- The Bonner Program director and coordinator are committed to the success of the group model and support students with information about their project ideas. They also connect students with community programs and resources.

The Community Fund

- Groups of Bonner may use these funds from this fund to support their projects.

The Mertz Mentoring Van

- The van is available to take students without their own transportation to service sites and projects within a limited area.

Overcoming Challenges

If the Bonner program does not have 80 scholars, with 20 students per class, some of the groups will not have four members. We overcame this problem by forming as many four-person, four-class groups as possible, then arranging the remaining students in effective groups.

Evidence of Success

During the last two Bonner meetings of the year, Bonner groups must report back and reflect on their group experiences. The majority of the groups have said that their activity was a positive experience and gave them the opportunity to plan, organize, and complete a service project with fellow Bonners.

Most students have positive and meaningful relationships with the other students in their Bonner groups. They go on to share experiences not just in service, but in academic and social spheres as well.