

First-Year Class: Bonner Love 101

by Angela Logan, Bonner Scholar Director

Purpose

- Orients first-year Bonners to the College, the Lorain County community, and the Bonner Scholars Program.
- Gives Bonner Scholars an opportunity to explore issues relevant to new students in a college environment while learning about community service and community building.

Background

For the past several years, Oberlin's first-year Bonners have been required to take some type of semester-long seminar to aid in their transition to college and the Bonner Scholars Program. The course has only recently qualified as a one-credit course.

How It Works

Course Overview

After completing Bonner Love 101, students have a better understanding of the College, its support services, and issues important to the Oberlin community. They are also more familiar with a variety of service opportunities, have clarified their service and learning objectives as Bonner Scholars, and understand the commitment necessary to be a Bonner. The course addresses essential first-year educational and personal goals, including academic transitions. Students explore their career goals, develop interpersonal relationships, and examine issues of identity and personal wellness and development.

Logistics and Supplies

The date and time for the course is established just before the start of the academic year, so there will be no time conflicts when the first-year Bonner Scholars enroll for their courses. Bonners who participate in intercollegiate athletics are able to attend both Bonner Love 101 and their required practices.

Course Requirements

Attendance at all sessions. Active participation. Completion of all assignments and weekly readings. Openness to working and learning cooperatively with fellow scholars.

Service Site Shadowing

Bonner Scholars arrange to shadow a sophomore, junior, or senior Bonner at his or her service site and must visit a minimum of three different sites. This helps students make a more informed decision when selecting service sites for the spring semester. A list of scholars and their sites is provided immediately following the placement form deadline.

Group Service Project Planning

During the semester, Bonners have worked with two to three classmates to design a group service project for the entire class. This has proved particularly challenging, due to both the size of the class and the ability of community partners to accommodate such a large group of volunteers. In subsequent years students will plan projects for a smaller number of scholars, rather than the entire class, which consisted of 15 first-year scholars and three replacement Bonners in 2002.

Reflection

Bonners complete a 250-word journal entry for each service site shadowing experience, along with weekly journal entries related to selected readings.

Topics

Issues addressed over the course of the semester have included: discussion of September 11, values clarification, time and financial management, social class in America, academic resources, Oberlin College and Lorain County history, do's and don'ts of working with the community, and service needs of Lorain County.

The course emphasizes all of the Common Commitments, but readings center around spiritual exploration. Students at this stage in their development often struggle in this regard, and the course approaches this topic from a very broad perspective. For example, *Your Life is Your Message: Finding Harmony with Yourself, Others and the Earth* (Eknath Easwaran, The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, 1992), and *Meditations of the Heart* (Howard Thurman, Beacon Press, 1981), two of the texts chosen for Fall 2002, explored eastern and western religious philosophies. Because they do not delve too deeply into doctrinal theories, Bonners were very receptive.

Bonner Scholars also explore community building by gathering weekly to discuss and reflect on various topics and readings from the texts. Civic engagement is encouraged through site shadowing several upperclass scholars.

Course Evaluation

At the end of the semester, students are given the opportunity to evaluate the course, both in written form and through a guided reflection discussion, to express whether or not the course met its stated goals and objectives. Critical analysis of the information and ideas shared in the evaluations and reflection discussion will be used to modify the course's content and format for future offerings.

What Makes The Project Unique

Every Boner Scholars Program requires that students meet regularly; this course gives them credit for these meetings and provides them with an academic perspective on their service.

Benefits

To administrators

The class provides an opportunity to share expertise, since many staff lead sessions.

To community partners

Increases exposure to their agency. Provides group of student volunteers to manage a large project. Students have a better understanding of their roles in the community and are better-equipped community servants.

Timeline

April

Obtain and submit necessary paperwork to register the course.

June-August

Create syllabus, research texts/videos for course, order materials, reserve classroom space, select and contact College or community administrators to make presentations during the course.

Fall semester

Hold the course, modifying syllabus and assignments to meet particular student needs and concerns.

Resources And Partners

Bonner Scholars Program

- The director devotes several hours weekly to prepare for classes and read and review journal entries.
- The administrative budget funds books, supplies, photocopies, and occasional snacks for the class.

Center for Service and Learning

Oberlin College offices

Community partners

How to Make it Grow

Based on input from the students, the teams will devise projects for themselves rather than planning a project for the entire first-year class. They will then report back on their victories and/or challenges. Too often, the community partners are ill-equipped to host 15 to 20 volunteers at once, particularly those within walking distance of campus. They will have the option of joining another group's project if the work of another community partner interests them.