

Student Leadership Teams

by Debbie Deas, Bonner Scholars Coordinator

Purpose

- Provides students with more responsibility, instilling in them a greater understanding of the program and an increased level of ownership.
- Creates three committees: the Action Team which approves Community Fund proposals and conducts the Semester Review Process; the Assessment Team which plans monthly large group meetings, the annual winter retreat, and training and enrichment activities; and, Bonners Looking for Increased Publicity (BLIP) which publicizes Bonner events around campus.

Background

The idea came from discussions with other Bonner directors and coordinators about how to include students in all aspects of the Bonner Program. It is a modified version of the one used at West Virginia Wesleyan College.

How It Works

The Action and Assessment Teams

Both teams are comprised of eight members, two representatives per class who are elected annually. The freshman class representatives are chosen by the director and coordinator through an application process.

The Action and Assessment teams meet every week. The coordinator facilitates the meetings to offer guidance and reminds students about upcoming dates and serves as a reference for guidelines and budgeting. Each team chooses a captain, who is responsible for leading the meeting if the coordinator cannot attend. The team captain also completes administrative tasks, such as sending out letters and creating forms and applications.

The Action Team regulates the use of the Community Fund, which is available to all students through an application process. The team also determines students' levels of performance in the program, ranging from "outstanding" to "unsatisfactory." If the level reaches "unsatisfactory," a student must go before the Selection and Appeals Committee. Beginning this year, the Action Team is also in charge of reviewing and rating the applications of potential new Bonners.

The Assessment Team plans the monthly large group meetings (LGMs), the annual retreat in January, and trainings and enrichments throughout the year.

Bonners Looking for Increased Publicity (BLIP) Team

This publicity team is in charge of maintaining the Web page, creating bulletin boards, and writing the newsletter. Their goal is to produce meaningful, informative publications for current Bonners, Bonner alumni, and perspective Bonners.

BLIP meets biweekly. Members are chosen through an application process, and they elect a team captain. Some Bonners request applications, and others are asked by their director or coordinator to apply. Students are given the opportunity for training, especially in the areas of website and newsletter design.

Commitment and Agreement

Members of each of the three teams sign a leadership team commitment agreement before beginning their work with the team. This ensures that they understand what the coordinator expects from them.

What Makes The Project Unique

The teams provide a structured way to include students in decision-making and leading while keeping them focused on a specific area of responsibility. While some programs rely on the director or coordinator to review student performance, plan meetings, and create newsletters, Wofford Bonners who have these responsibilities have a greater sense of ownership of the program. For example, involving students in the approval and review processes encourages Bonners to use their funds wisely and perform well.

Students are often more knowledgeable than their coordinator about what type of meeting or retreat will engage other students and how a publication could make a fellow Bonner take notice. When students attend meetings and retreats they know that their fellow Bonners have worked hard to plan the activity. Students seem to have more interest in what is going on and are more engaged than they might be had the director or coordinator planned the event. Also, students who must report to the Selection and Appeals Committee due to poor performance know that fellow Bonners have summoned them, not a director or coordinator who may not always remember the challenges a Bonner faces.

Benefits

These teams address problems such as lack of administrative support and student apathy. The teams carry out their responsibilities without any extra administrative support, since they conceive of and execute their ideas. The teams provide training and development opportunities for members. Students often feel more comfortable making suggestions to other students than they do when a director or coordinator is making all the decisions.

Timeline

The Action, Assessment and BLIP teams serve only during the school year. When school resumes in the fall, the Bonner Office accepts nominations. Everyone votes for their respective class representatives at the first LGM within the first two weeks of school.

Resources And Funding

Wofford College

- The student affairs office allows use of the conference room, lobbies, and office equipment to conduct and prepare for meetings and create publications.
- The communications office, information technology office, and the Webmaster provide training for the BLIP team.
- The administrative budget provides funding for the once-a-semester dinner given for the Action Team during their two-to-three-hour review process. It also provides funding for the end-of-the-year celebration lunch for all the teams.

COOL

- COOL provides many of the workshops used for the LGMs, including those from the Service Leadership Curriculum.

Overcoming Challenges

It has been a challenge to get freshmen interested in participating in the teams, because many think they do not have the time. To ease the freshmen's concerns, the Leadership Teams are introduced during orientation. Freshmen are given the names and contact information for the previous years' members, and they are invited to each team's first meeting of the year to see how it is run and to meet the upperclassmen with whom they would work. The teams have made it a goal to minimize the amount of time they spend outside meetings working on planning and programming.

How to Make it Grow

The BLIP team hopes to create a promotional video within the next year, expanding its materials

beyond print.