



ADAM STANALAND

Davidson College '15

A Social Innovator, Policy Consultant, and
University Researcher



Unpacking Social Norms Through Community-Based and Data-Driven Research

In many ways, the Bonner Program can be described as a laboratory for idea sharing and collaboration. If a student wants to delve deeper into a particular issue or initiate a new program, he or she will undoubtedly find ample support. For Adam Stanaland, this climate of support provided a platform for pushing his limits and challenging community norms.

Making His “Yes” Environment

After growing up in Little River, SC, Adam attended Davidson College and earned a degree in Psychology and Intercultural Communication Studies. He describes his service site as a place that always said yes to his ideas and passions. This “yes” environment allowed Adam to advance his own interests in early literacy development.

“For my Bonner position, I worked at the Ada Jenkins Center in their after-school tutoring program for my entire four years at Davidson,” said Adam. “This program got me really interested in children’s literacy and after my first year there, I proposed some changes to boost student morale. The director at the time liked my ideas and asked me to implement them as the recreation instructor for next year.”

In this role, Adam worked with Davidson College faculty as part of a community-based learning course to expand the tutoring program to include middle and high school students. Adam then went on to work on a variety of special projects with senior leadership to further increase the capacity of the center. These experiences broadly influenced his decision to continue his work and studies in nonprofit management and social innovation.

Building an Education-Centered Career

Given his service experience at the Ada Jenkins Center and the link between his service and academics, Adam knew that his commitment to education would not change. “I wanted to be in education forever, particularly at the administrative level; however, I did not think I had enough teaching experience to be competent at that leadership level,” said Adam.

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"I decided to teach first, so I got a teaching assistant job in the Bronx in my senior year and moved to NYC two weeks after graduation."

After six months of teaching, Adam was offered a research position with the New York City (NYC) Department of Education, where he did data-related policy and strategy work for the City's lowest-performing schools. In this role, he leveraged his research and psychology background to conduct data analyses that would inform strategy and then inform policy. This experience cultivated his interest in exploring how social pressures shape self-concept and influence interpersonal behavior.

While he loves working with youth, Adam learned through his time in NYC that his true passion for education is not necessarily in teaching, but in empirical research. For this reason, he decided to pursue a Ph.D. in Social Psychology and Public Policy at Duke University, starting in the fall of 2017. Following his doctoral program, he plans to continue his work in government by using research to inform decisions at the public policy level.

Bonner and Beyond

"Everything you do should in some way be impactful or innovative, with regard to how it builds your community," said Adam. "Whether that is the immediate or broader community, just having that social impact component is really important."

Adam credits his time in the Bonner Program for instilling these values of impact and community building into him. Because of his experience as a Bonner Scholar, he now looks for ways to give back to the people around him, in both his work and life.

Adam's advice to current Bonner Scholars and Leaders is to be present. That is, be fully engaged in all the opportunities that a Bonner Program provides from going to optional speakers to participating in extra service hours. According to Adam, "You will not always have these opportunities for free. Take advantage of them now."

*Written by Alexander Nichols
Bonner Scholar at Davidson College '19*

To learn more about Adam, check out some of his favorite books:

- **Brave New World** by Aldous Huxley
- **Go Tell It on the Mountain** by James Baldwin

