



# APRIL BACKUS

Siena College '10

An Assessment Professional Whose Role Models  
Changed Her Life

## From Mentored to Mentoring



Some students begin and end their undergraduate careers knowing that they are wholeheartedly interested in pursuing research for the rest of their lives. April was not one of those students. Four years after graduating from Siena College's first Bonner cohort, she found herself assessing civic engagement on campuses across the nation. April thanks mentors in her life for shining a light on this pathway.

### People Who Paved the Way

As a first generation college student, April points to ways that mentors have shaped her life, even beginning as early as when her cheerleading coach helped her fill out college applications. Once she was in the Bonner Program, April found a new role model to look up to: Gretchen Mielke, Siena's Bonner Director. Though April had been determined to pursue a career as a child advocacy lawyer and worked at Albany's Boys and Girls Club with youth, there was a point during her sophomore year where she remembers lamenting to Gretchen that managing the Bonner Program would be her ideal job.

"As a Bonner Program Director or Coordinator, I could recruit students, mentor students, and help them see that college is not only a possibility for them, but there's a lot that they could do."

While growing in leadership on campus, at her site, and within the Bonner Program, April served as a Bonner Foundation intern during the summer of 2010. At the Foundation, she not only helped create the Bonner Advisory Board, a group of Bonner Scholars and Leaders across the nation dedicated to providing student feedback, but also learned valuable life lessons from Ariane Hoy, the Foundation's Vice President.

"I was always the kind of person—as a cheerleader too—to be at the front of things. [Ari] really taught me how to kind of step back and empower others."

Both her leadership experience within the Bonner Network and the values she was able to glean from Bonner mentors were preparing her for a grand shift in her career aspirations.

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***One mentor really taught me how to step back and empower others***

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## The Postgraduate Search for *More*

April was still driven to pursue child advocacy when she was accepted into law school and interned in a family court before graduation. It was here that she learned of the complexities of policies and yearned to make a more impactful difference outside of the courts.



"I felt like I wouldn't be able to make as big of an impact as a lawyer as I could by working in higher education and actually empowering future leaders and change-makers in the community."

She abandoned law school and joined Siena's Center for Academic Community Engagement instead, at last managing civic engagement programs that had indelibly shaped her as a student. At the same time, she completed a Master's in Higher Education Leadership and Administration at the College of Saint Rose. Thanks to connections with faculty in her program, she landed a job with the [\*National Assessment of Service and Community Engagement \(NASCE\)\*](#). She thanks Bonner for leading her to where she belongs in the professional world.

"I wouldn't have been able to find my passion as quickly [without Bonner] and have the real, raw experiences that I had during my undergraduate to realize what I'm actually passionate about."

## Returning the Favor

In the future, April looks forward to being in a position in which she can return to her passion: mentorship. She is looking into pursuing PhD programs in community engagement assessment, while her position at NASCE serves as a vital stepping stone to her development as both a professional and mentor. She follows her own advice that she relays to graduating students.

"Your first job out of college is not your career...There are so many careers out there that you don't know about, or maybe careers that don't exist yet, that you may be interested in."

With so much still undiscovered in the assessment of civic engagement on campuses across the country, April is thrilled to see where Bonner's influence may take her next.

*Written by Ashlee Renich-Malek  
Bonner Alumna at Stetson University '18*

## Fun Facts about April Backus:

- For the past ten years, April has been a part of the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program and adores spending time with her little sister, Tatyana, on the weekends (see photo above).
- Since April *loves* baking, she and her husband, Ed, bake over 1,300 cookies for friends and family every holiday season. She looks forward to introducing her one-year-old, Eddie, to the tradition this year.