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## A Reflection on a Collegiate Service Program

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## A Reflection on a Collegiate Service Program

College is one of the most stress inducing time in a person's life (<https://hms.harvard.edu/news/college-stress>). The standards and the expectations are high causing students to crack under the pressure. As a person with already previous mental health issues, change is a very hard thing for me. One thing that assisted me not only mentally, professionally, personally and socially was being a party of an on our campus' Civic Engagement Program called, the Bonner Service Leaders. The Bonner Foundations motto is "Access to education, opportunity to serve." The Foundation was originally created for underprivileged children to get the chance to attend college while also doing community service and civic engagement within communities that need them.

The Corella & Bertram F. Bonner Foundation launched its first program at Berea College in Kentucky, with the goal of challenging students to continue doing service within their collegiate career. It became the largest privately funded service-based scholarship program in the country (<http://www.bonner.org/goals>). The program not only has transformational goals for the student but also for the campus. According to Bonner.org, the transformational goals for students are, to provide access to higher education for those with high financial need, to allow students the opportunity to enhance abilities, talents and leadership, and to create a supportive group of students whose common focus is community service. Not only does the Foundation have these goals for students but they also have goals for campuses, such as retaining a diverse group of students, to challenge the college to create a culture of service, to support the students as leaders, and to support faculty and professional staff. As someone who was a part of this Foundation, I can confirm that the Bonner Program creates a safe space of individuals who share a passion. Students not only bond from trainings and doing service together, but train through hardships and time management techniques through the rigorous program.

Being a Bonner Service-Leader is not only about direct service to places and people that need it. It is also involves project development, professional networking, training for collaborative environments, and creating sustainable change. The Bonner Program at Siena College in Albany, has a program called step-it up sophomores which allow sophomores to create a new project, or do something within the program or to help in program development. Leaving home is a challenge that many first-time, college students face. The orientation to the program, beginning before freshman orientation, surrounds students with fellow classmates and Bonners, starting the

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bonding process between them. Each Bonner receives a site with a community partner that they will assist with developing projects with sustainable change. There are also opportunities to understand the world and those in need better, such as a summer trip the summer after freshman year to a rural city. This allows students to understand how those in worse situations than theirs live.

Community service programs are vital to a student's social development, starting with bonding once on campus, professional development, networking, being a part of a non-profits, and being held to a higher standard than other students their age. They also provide support for mental health, because there is a support system within the program to help students with their needs, and to personally assist their needs to meet deadlines and master time management. Programs like the Bonner Program should be implemented on more colleges around the country. Not only are they needed for the students and the campuses, but also for those in need. Programs like this can give students access to better jobs and higher paying jobs straight out of college with their professional background, as well as to help their psychosocial development while in college.

### **Work Cited**

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