

# **The Bonner Scholars Program: A Study of the Impact of Stipends on Indicators of a Community Service Ethic**

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In the past decade an increasing number of scholarship programs have offered stipends for community service during college (e.g., Marquette University, Western Oregon University). The most widely known is AmeriCorps, a federal initiative which provides living expenses and educational awards (or educational awards only) for service during college. Although positive results have been achieved by AmeriCorps, little is known about the effects of financial rewards on the internalization of “an ethic” of community service (Chronicle of Higher Education 1998). Such an ethic is a clear goal of recent programs to integrate service into higher education, as indicated by a statement from Michigan Campus Compact that “direct contact with social problems and efforts to solve them...lay the foundation for a life-long ethic of public responsibility and community service.”

The purpose of the present study was to examine the effects of one stipended college service program—the Bonner Scholars Program—on the development of an ethic of community service. The Bonner Scholars Program was founded in 1990 to provide access to college for those with financial need and to “heighten the overall education a Scholar receives by asking students to engage in ongoing service work.” Qualifying students must demonstrate financial need, high academic achievement in high school, a history of service and, once in college, must perform 10 hours of service a week during the academic year and 240 hours of service during at least one summer.

The aim of prosocial socialization intervention efforts, such as the Bonner Scholars Program, is to effect not merely compliance with norms for prosocial behavior, but internalization, a process in which members of a society “adopt socially important values, goals, and attitudes as their own, with the result that individuals will act in accord with these standards even in the absence of explicit rewards, punishments, and desirable relationships” (Clary, Snyder, and Stukas 1998). However, Deci’s (1971) Cognitive Evaluation Theory and Overjustification Theory (Lepper, et al. 1973) suggest that financial rewards may undermine this internalization. Three decades of research have confirmed an undermining effect for tangible, expected, and task-contingent rewards on intrinsic motivation, particularly among subjects with high initial intrinsic interest in an activity (Rummel and Feinberg 1988; Cameron and Pierce 1994; Tang and Hall 1995; Deci, et al. 1999).

In the domain of prosocial behavior, Batson and colleagues (1978) found a negative effect for reward for prosocial behavior on individuals' self-perception as altruistic persons. Piliavin and Callero examined the effects of different systems of blood donation: a Polish system of paid blood donation, a voluntary Polish system in which donors receive social rewards, and the U.S. system of voluntary blood donation on motives for donating, as well as role identity as a blood donor (1991; Piliavin 1989). In comparisons of Polish participants, paid donors were more likely than volunteers to cite social pressure (e.g., "not wanting to disappoint someone") as a motive for donating, while voluntary donors placed greater emphasis on the motives of self-satisfaction and moral obligation. Additionally, donors from both voluntary systems assigned greater importance to the blood donor role than paid donors, scored significantly higher on a measure of the self-based salience of the blood donor role, and were more likely to view their blood donor role as connected and similar to their other social roles.

Batson et al.'s (1978) and Piliavin and Callero's (1991) results suggest that tangible, expected rewards, such as stipends, can provide an external justification for prosocial behavior and diminish the intrinsic motivation and self-definitional processes associated with a commitment to engage in this behavior for its own sake. The purpose of the present study was to examine the short and long term effects of stipended service on indicators that students had internalized an "ethic" of community service. Indicators selected as evidence of such an ethic were those that have been conceptually linked to long-term commitment to other prosocial behaviors and included motives for performing service (Clary and Snyder 1991), role identity as a community servant (Callero 1983; Piliavin 1989; Piliavin and Callero 1991), citizenship (Eyler and Giles 1997, 1999), and behavioral commitment to service (Callero 1983; Piliavin 1989).

Research showing that some situational features of reward can offset its negative influence (Deci and Ryan 1999) led us to hypothesize that characteristics of participants' community service experience might moderate the influence of stipends. We selected three aspects of the Bonner Scholars' service experience as potential moderating variables: character attribution as a prosocial individual (the frequency with which others had described the student as generous or caring during the service experience); empathy induction (the frequency with which a supervisor shared details about a service recipient's circumstances); and exhortations (the frequency with which a supervisor or another endorsed service as a way of solving social problems). Grusec and her colleagues (1978) found that children who received character attributions as prosocial individuals donated more than those who received external attributions. In Batson's empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson and Oleson 1991; Batson, et al. 1988) empathy is conceptualized as the source of helping motivated by concern for others. In their review of the research, Eisenberg and Miller (1987) conclude that the majority of studies demonstrate a relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior. Finally, studies have shown an association between exhortations to engage in prosocial behavior and this behavior in children (Rushton 1975; Grusec, Saas-Kortsak, and Simutis 1978; Smith 1983). It was hypothesized that these aspects of the service

experience might mediate against the undermining effects of stipends on Bonner Scholars' internal commitment to service.

## **Methods**

### **Subjects**

Participants were 265 Bonner Scholars from nine colleges and universities in the Midwest and South. Forty-two students from these institutions who were nominated by their community service coordinator for high levels of volunteerism served as the comparison group. Sixty-one percent of subjects (60% of Bonner Scholars and 71.4% of volunteer nominees) were female and 39 percent (40% and 28.6%) were male. Seventy-nine percent of participants were of Caucasian ethnicity (77.6% of Bonner Scholars and 88% of volunteers). Eleven percent were African American (12.7% and 0%); 2.3 percent were Hispanic-Latino (1.9% and 4.8%).

### **Instruments**

#### **Motives for performing community service**

The measure of motives for community service included 12 items adapted from Piliavin (1989) and from Clary and Snyder (1991). Four items each were used to tap participants' emphasis on Knowledge Acquisition, Social Adjustment, and Values Expression reasons for performing community service. Participants rated each item's importance on a four-point scale.

#### **Role identity**

A second indicator of internalization was role identity as a community servant. Role-person merger or the self-based salience of students' role identities as community servants was assessed using five Likert-type items adapted from Callero (1983), such as, "I would feel at a loss if I were forced to give up community service work," and "Community service is an important part of who I am." Students rated their agreement with each statement from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree."

Five items were included to measure participants' perceptions of the salience of social norms in their decisions to perform community service (the Other-Based Salience of their community servant role). Other-Based Salience was elicited using statements such as "It is important to my friends and relatives that I continue doing community service," and "Many people would be disappointed in me if I just decided to stop being involved in community service."

#### **Behavioral indicators of commitment**

Subjects' behavioral commitment to community service was assessed using three measures. The first, adapted from Callero (1983), measured the impact of hypothetical role performance failure on subjects' self-esteem. Subjects rated the potential impact of four situations which could be expected to interfere with optimal performance in a community servant role (feeling impatient or bored, forgetting an appointment, not being needed at their site that day, and feeling ill) on cognitive ("Think less of myself"

to “Feel the same about myself”) and affective (“Embarrassed” to “Not embarrassed”) dimensions of their self esteem.

A second measure of behavioral commitment assessed the anticipated impact of loss of financial aid on students’ commitment to community service. Students were asked to rate (1) how difficult it would be for them to continue to do community service if they lost their financial aid (“Easy to continue” to “Hard to continue”) and (2) what they thought they would do if they lost their financial aid (“Definitely keep doing community service” to “Definitely stop doing community service”).

The final measure of commitment assessed proselytizing activity. Students indicated from “Never” to “Often” the frequencies with which they talked to others about community service and tried to persuade them to become involved.

### **Citizenship**

A final indicator of internalization was citizenship. Using a scale developed by Eyer and Giles (1997), three dimensions of citizenship were measured: citizenship confidence, values, and perceptions of social justice. Citizenship confidence included variables such as personal efficacy in solving social problems, perceived community efficacy, and a belief that individuals should give of their time to help the communities. Citizenship values comprised the value assigned to a career helping others, the personal importance of being a volunteer, and personal commitment to influencing public policy. In addition, an item assessing the perceived importance of being financially well off was included as a negative indicator of citizenship values. Perceptions of social justice included beliefs in the importance of improving public policy and achieving social justice. In addition, an item assessing the tendency to attribute misfortunes to internal causes (e.g., lack of ability, laziness) was assumed to be negatively related to perceptions of social justice.

### **Characteristics of students and the service experience**

In addition to these measures, attributes of students including demographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, parents’ educational level) and service experience were assessed on the pretest questionnaire. The post-test included a “Describing Your Service Experience” scale which assessed characteristics of the service-learning experience, including the frequency with which (1) others had described the student as generous or caring during their service experience (character attribution); (2) a supervisor had shared details about a person’s difficult situation with the student (empathy induction); and (3) a supervisor or another had endorsed service as a way of solving social problems (exhortations).

### **Procedure**

The community service coordinator at each campus was contacted and arranged meetings at the beginning and end of the term for Bonner Scholars and comparison students. Surveys were administered in person by the first author or a project assistant.

## Results

All items on the motives for doing service scale which students ranked as “somewhat sure” or “sure it was a reason” were summed to yield a Total Motivation score for each subject.

Items from the role identity scale were added to yield Self-Based Salience and Other-Based Salience scores. Items from the measure of hypothetical role performance failure on self-esteem scale were summed in two ways. Students’ ratings of their potential embarrassment and the extent to which they would think less of themselves across the four hypothetical situations were summed to yield a total embarrassment score and a negative self-evaluation score. In addition, their embarrassment and self-evaluation scores for each situation were added to yield a self-esteem score for that situation.

The measure of motives for performing community service was subjected to principal component factoring followed by varimax rotation. Both analyses yielded four factors. Items which loaded highly ( $> .6$ ) on Factor 1 emphasized the role of community service as a way to “experience personal growth,” “acquire new skills, experience,” and learn about a career; thus, this factor was labeled “Knowledge Acquisition.” A second factor was identified as “Values Expressive.” Reasons for performing community service with high loadings on this factor ( $> .5$ ) included “expressing concern to people in need,” “giving of myself without expecting some sort of payoff,” “helping those less fortunate,” and “moral obligation.” The only two reasons for service to load strongly on Factor 3 ( $> .6$ ) were those which stated that service was performed to “meet a requirement for a class, service, or job” or out of “a feeling of obligation to a group.” Thus, this factor was labeled “Social Obligation.” Statements that service was performed “to avoid disappointing others,” because “friend(s) is (are) volunteering” and because “other people want me to do volunteer work” loaded highly ( $> .6$ ) on a fourth factor which was labeled “Social Adjustive.”

Three sets of data analyses were carried out. In order to determine the impact of Bonner Scholarship participation after one semester, stepwise regression analyses tested the contributions of Bonner Scholarship participation, subjects’ pre-test scores on the dependent variables, demographic characteristics, and service experience characteristics to the dependent variables.

Analyses were also conducted to assess the long-term effects of a Bonner Scholarship on the measures of internalization. Stepwise regression analyses tested the effects of linear and quadratic models of number of years students had had a Bonner Scholarship (0–3), age, ethnicity, and parents’ involvement in community service on students’ pre-test scores on the dependent variables.

A final set of analyses was conducted to determine the effects of the moderating variables. Stepwise regression analyses tested the contribution of character attribution, empathy induction, and efficacy statements to the Bonner Scholars’ post-test scores.

Bonner Scholars' pre-test scores were forced into the equations first, followed by age, gender, and father's educational level and the three characteristics of experience.

## Short term effects of the Bonner Scholars Program

After controlling for pre-test scores, the Bonner Scholarship variable significantly predicted subjects' post-test scores on Factor 3 (Social Obligation) motives for service. Bonner Scholars made significantly greater gains than volunteers in their tendency to agree that service was a way to meet a requirement of a job or class or was performed out of a feeling of obligation to a group. Bonner Scholar students were also more likely than volunteers to endorse one item assumed to be a negative indicator of citizenship values: "It is important to me personally to be financially well off." The Bonner Scholarship variable significantly contributed to subjects' scores on the item "Most misfortunes that occur are the result of lack of ability, laziness, ignorance, or all three." Bonner Scholars made greater gains in their tendency to agree with this statement than volunteers.

Participation in the Bonner Scholars Program significantly predicted post-test scores on several measures of the impact of hypothetical role performance failure as a community servant on students' self-esteem. Bonner Scholars were less likely to predict that their self-esteem would be negatively affected if they felt bored or impatient during a community service experience or became ill. The Bonner Scholarship variable also significantly predicted total self-evaluation scores. That is, Bonner Scholars were less likely to agree that they would think less of themselves across all hypothetical situations involving failure in role.

**Table 1**  
**Short term effects of the Bonner Scholars Program**

Variables predicted by the Bonner Scholarship variable	Standardized regression coefficient
MOTIVES FOR SERVICE: Social Obligation	.201***
CITIZENSHIP: Misfortunes result of lack of ability, ignorance, laziness	.127*
CITIZENSHIP: Important to be financially well off	.114**
BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENT: If bored at site: would feel embarrassed, less positive self-image?	.114*
BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENT: If became ill at site: would feel embarrassed, less positive self-image?	.168**
BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENT: Self-image summary score	.139**

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

## Long term effects of the Bonner Scholar Program

Regression analyses testing the predictive value of linear and quadratic models of years as a Bonner Scholar revealed significant relationships between years and participants' pre-test scores on several variables.

A linear model significantly negatively predicted one measure of citizenship confidence—students' belief in community efficacy. The longer students had been in the Bonner Scholars Program, the less likely they were to endorse the statement, "An impact on the world can be reached by most individuals." A linear model was also significantly negatively associated with students' tendency to agree that "It is important to me personally to influence the political structure." Students who had been Bonner Scholars for a longer period were less likely to agree with this statement.

Number of years as a Bonner Scholar significantly negatively predicted students' tendency to attribute social problems to factors external to the individual. Students who had been in the program longer were less likely to agree that "Most misfortunes that occur to people are frequently the result of circumstances beyond their control."

**Table 2**  
**Long term effects of the Bonner Scholar Program**

Regression on using linear model	Standardized regression coefficient
CITIZENSHIP CONFIDENCE: Community Efficacy	-.142*
CITIZENSHIP VALUES: Important to me to influence political structure	-.174*
PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: Misfortunes beyond individuals' control	-.144*

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

## Effects of Characteristics of Experience

A final purpose of the study was to examine the moderating influences of characteristics of the service experience (character attribution, empathy induction, and exhortations) on indicators of internalization in Bonner Scholars. Results revealed that character attribution was negatively related to Factor 3: Social Obligation. That is, Bonner Scholars who had heard themselves described as generous and caring were significantly less likely than other Bonner Scholars to attribute their community service to a job or class requirement or a feeling of obligation to a group. Character attribution as an altruistic person also negatively predicted Bonner Scholars' scores on the Knowledge Acquisition motive factor.

Empathy induction was significantly positively associated with Knowledge Acquisition Factor scores. Scholars who frequently learned about service recipients' situations were more likely than others to agree that service was a way to experience growth or

gain knowledge or information about a career. Empathy Induction also negatively predicted agreement with the Citizenship item, "The most important service is to change public policy." Significant associations were found between Empathy Induction and several measures of the effects of hypothetical role performance failure on self-esteem. Scholars who had heard about service recipients' lives were more likely than other Bonner Scholars to report that their self esteem would suffer if they became bored or impatient during their community service and if they went to their site and found they were not needed that day. Additionally, Empathy Induction significantly negatively predicted Bonner Scholars' summary Embarrassment and Cognitive Self-Evaluation scores. Scholars who had heard details of service recipients' circumstances were more apt than other Scholars to say they would feel embarrassed and think less of themselves across all situations involving failure in role.

Exhortations significantly predicted Bonner Scholars' scores on Other-Based Salience. For Scholars who heard community service described as a way of solving social problems, others' expectations about their service became increasingly important. In addition, exhortations significantly predicted gains on one measure of behavioral commitment to role-proselytizing behavior. Bonner Scholars who more often heard community service described as a vehicle for addressing social problems reported more efforts to recruit others into service.

**Table 3**

<b>Regression on</b>	<b>Characteristic of Experience</b>	<b>Standardized regression coefficient</b>
MOTIVES: Factor 1 (Knowledge Acquisition)	Character Attribution Empathy Induction	-.989* .818**
MOTIVES: Factor 3 (Social Obligation)	Character Attribution	-.873*
PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: Importance of changing public policy	Empathy Induction	-.613*
BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENT: RESPONSE TO FAILURE IN ROLE: Bored Summary Score	Empathy Induction	-.657*
BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENT: RESPONSE TO FAILURE IN ROLE: Needed Summary Score	Empathy Induction	-.580*
BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENT: RESPONSE TO FAILURE IN ROLE: Embarassment Summary Score	Empathy Induction	-.579*
BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENT: RESPONSE TO FAILURE IN ROLE: Cognitive Self-Evaluation Summary Score	Empathy Induction	-.632*
OTHER-BASED SALIENCE	Exhortations	.681*
BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENT: Proselytizing	Exhortations	1.064***

\* p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the short and long term effects of one stipended community service program—the Bonner Scholars Program—on participants' internalization of an ethic of community service. Comparisons of Bonner Scholars with highly involved volunteers and between Scholars with varying lengths of participation revealed negative effects for stipended service on some measures of internalization.

Analyses of results after one semester revealed a significant increase in Bonner Scholars' tendency to cite social obligation motives for community service when compared to volunteers. This finding is consistent with Piliavin and Callero's discovery (Piliavin 1989; Piliavin and Callero 1991) that paid blood donors were more likely to attribute blood donation to social pressure than voluntary donors.

Short term Bonner Scholarship participation was also associated with higher scores on two items which, according to Eyler and Giles (1999), are negatively related to citizenship development. The first, "It is very important to me personally to be financially well off," is from the CIRP (Cooperative Institutional Research Program) survey for college students. Students who endorse the importance of being well off financially are the least likely of any college students to volunteer (Astin 1996). Thus, although the purpose of the Bonner Scholars program is to strengthen other-oriented values and motivation to serve, participants in the Program appear to gain a more materialistic orientation in the short term.

A Bonner Scholarship also predicted a second item assumed to be a negative civic disposition: the tendency to attribute misfortunes to factors within individuals. Eyler and Giles (1999) note that a primary goal of college service programs is transformational learning, "a questioning of assumptions about how society is organized and how these assumptions underlie social problems." One aspect of transformational learning is a shift in the perceived locus of social problems, from individual failings to external, structural causes. In their national study of college service-learning programs, Eyler and Giles (1999) found that 34 percent of students who participated in service-learning experienced such a shift in problem locus. The finding that Bonner Scholars were less likely than volunteers to experience this shift suggests that receiving a stipend may have interfered with the learning processes associated with service, perhaps by shifting the attentional focus of service from the recipient to the stipend. Alternatively, external attributions for their service activity may have undermined Scholars' intrinsic interest in service and made them less motivated to engage in the demanding work of searching for explanations for service recipients' life circumstances.

With respect to role identity, results revealed no effects for short term participation in the Bonner Scholars Program on either the self-based salience of the community servant role or the perceived importance of social norms for service (other-based salience). While these findings differ from those of Piliavin and Callero (Piliavin 1989; Callero 1983; Piliavin and Callero 1991), Bonner Scholars did score lower than

volunteers on one measure of behavioral commitment to role—the response to hypothetical role performance failure. The finding that Bonner Scholars were less likely to anticipate that role performance failure would diminish their self-esteem suggests that they had not internalized the community servant role to the same degree as volunteers. As Piliavin (1989) has noted, in the absence of a role identity, “to fail at the role...has no implications for the self, so why would one feel embarrassed or think less of oneself?”

In addition to post-semester effects, the study also examined long term impacts of Bonner Scholar participation on measures of internalization. Analyses showed a negative effect for number of years as a Bonner Scholar on community efficacy. This finding conflicts with studies which have shown significant gains in community efficacy for participants in service-learning (Eyler and Giles 1999). It may be that failure to attribute their service to intrinsic causes interfered with Bonner Scholars’ tendency to see a relationship between their actions and the outcomes of service, and, thus with their sense of efficacy in solving community problems.

Analyses of long term effects also revealed a negative linear relationship between years as a Bonner Scholar and the likelihood that students would attribute misfortunes to factors outside of individuals’ control. The longer students had been in the Bonner Scholars Program, the less likely they were to locate sources of social problems outside the individual. Although Bonner Scholarship participation negatively predicted performance on some measures of internalization, aspects of the service experience did moderate the influence of this participation on students. Bonner Scholars who had heard themselves described as generous or caring were less likely to attribute their community service to motives based on social obligation. This finding is consistent with Grusec and colleagues’ (1978) discovery of a main effect for character attribution on children’s prosocial behavior. Attribution of altruistic traits to individual character may have increased the salience of internal motives for service, making individuals less likely to attribute their service to external or self-oriented motives.

The empathy induction variable was also associated with higher scores on several measures of internalization. Although Bonner Scholars in general were less likely than volunteers to anticipate that role performance failure as community servants would negatively affect their self-esteem, Scholars who heard details of service recipients’ lives were less apt to show these effects. Results of studies in which empathy has been experimentally manipulated (Batson, et al. 1981; Coke, et al. 1978; Toi and Batson 1982) indicate that individuals who experience empathy tend to persist in helping others even when escape is easy, presumably because they are motivated to alleviate others’ distress. It seems likely that Bonner Scholars who heard details of service recipients’ lives felt more committed to altering clients’ circumstances and improving their well-being. When presented with cases of hypothetical failure to reach these goals, they logically anticipated feeling greater self-dissatisfaction.

Empathy induction also positively predicted Bonner Scholars’ endorsement of knowledge acquisition motives for service. This outcome may reflect the fact that in

sharing information about service recipients, site supervisors added to Scholars' understanding of people and social systems, making the knowledge acquisition benefits of service more apparent.

We expected that Bonner Scholars who heard their supervisors or others commend service as a means of ameliorating social problems (exhortations) would be less likely than others to experience the undermining effects of reward. Exhortations did significantly predict the variance on one behavioral indicator of commitment to service—proselytizing. However, Bonner Scholars who more frequently heard exhortations also assigned higher ratings to social norms regarding service (the importance of their service to others). This result is inconsistent with previous findings showing that exhortations enhance the internalization of norms for generosity in children (Rushton 1975; Grusec, et al. 1978). However, it may be that for older individuals who have theoretically internalized norms for service, statements about its value function less as information about how to behave than as cues to others' attitudes and beliefs.

## Conclusion

As concerns about declining social and civic involvement of the American public have grown, various programs, including those to remunerate community service, have been adopted in order to strengthen young people's sense of personal and social responsibility. However, results of the present study raise questions about the effectiveness of these programs. Our discovery that participation in a stipended service program—the Bonner Scholars Program—was associated with short and long term declines in certain motives, role identity variables, and social attitudes associated with the internalization of a community service ethic suggest that service programs in higher education should avoid linking payment to service. Instead, these programs need to build on young people's existing motives for service and their identity as socially responsible persons. Clary and Snyder (1991) have identified several functions that can be served by prosocial behavior, ranging from knowledge acquisition to the expression of values. Their list of functions might provide community service organizers with a framework for assessing students' entering goals for performing service, as well as a guide for assigning students to placements or projects which may be inherently rewarding to them. Community service organizers should provide and create mechanisms for site supervisors to provide feedback and social reinforcement related to students' existing goals, but should also strive to give tasks and feedback which challenge students to develop additional and more complex goals for service. If campus service programs do implement stipended service, they should ensure that incentives are used in conjunction with experiences that heighten students' empathy and self-definition as community servants.

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