



THE CORELLA & BERTRAM F.
BONNER FOUNDATION

COMMUNITY ENGAGED CAPSTONES / SIGNATURE WORK

GUIDELINES TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY LEARNING COHORT

2016-17 Academic Year

Description

The Bonner Program is built upon a four-year developmental model that can be integrated with students' co-curricular and curricular college experiences. Many colleges and universities in the Bonner network (and beyond it) have relevant majors, minors, and certificates in which students can pursue coursework that supports and connects with their community engagement. These academic programs often culminate in a formalized capstone course and expectation, which meshes well with the Bonner Program's conceptualization of a senior year culminating project and senior presentation of learning. However, only a small number of Bonner Programs have incorporated a capstone requirement for their Bonner students.

Capstone projects (also referred to as 'Signature Work' by the Association of American Colleges and Universities) represent an opportunity for integrative and applied learning. In *Signature Work*, students integrate, apply, demonstrate, reflect on, and communicate their cumulative learning in a project or activity lasting at least one semester. Ideally, in such a project students wrestle with complex questions that matter to them and to society. *Community Engaged Signature Work* refers to projects that are connected with (and usually driven by) community-based organizations, with students working in a dynamic, dialectical way to design and carry out projects that both address a real-world issue or problem and that meshes with credit-bearing academic work.

The Bonner Cohort Learning Community will support campus teams interested in making *Community Engaged Capstones or Signature Work* a requirement for all senior Bonner students, beginning with the Class of 2018. This learning community will offer support and connections across the cohort of campuses involved (and their staff, faculty, students and partners), facilitating sharing and success.

The longer-term goal is for your Bonner Program's capstone requirement to serve as a model for broader adoption of *Community Engaged Capstones or Signature Work* across your institution. We're hoping that schools will attract 15-25 percent of its graduating seniors to participate in formalized Community Engaged Capstone or Signature Work courses/projects. To do so involves building a pilot the infrastructure on both the partner and institutional side to sustain that level of engagement.

Expectations for Community Engaged Capstone or Signature Work

While many departments may have a capstone option or requirement, several features distinguish Community Engaged Capstone or Signature Work:

- A community identified need for the student's academic work;
- A reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship that features ongoing dialogue and exchange between the student, community partner, and staff or faculty member helping guide the student;
- Academic inquiry (which may take many forms) that intentionally connects with the intended purpose and project; and,
- Mentoring and/or advisory relationships for the students with a faculty member and (ideally) a community representative.

Preparation and Cohort Sharing

To make this a collaborative process, we will connect campus teams throughout the year to share experiences, research, and resources in developing their capstone project expectation for their Bonner students. We envision cohort sharing will play a critical role in building and sustaining momentum and a community of practice for each cohort.

As you think through your plan and then complete the RFP, we suggest that you consider the following:

- Who will be part of your team? We suggest that your team include students, faculty, administrators outside of your center/office, and community partner(s).
- A key aspect of this project will be to work intentionally with community partners to identify capstone level projects. The Foundation will provide some models (such as focus groups) for these purposes. However, we anticipate that each campus needs to develop a formal way that meetings and involvement of community partners as a central part of the process.
- Other strategies that we anticipate will emerge from the strategy session at the Summer Leadership Institute and other conversations will include:
 - Fostering collaboration and planning involving faculty, partners, and students
 - Team vs. individually based capstone projects
 - Sequencing or scaffolding experiences
 - Capstone courses and syllabi through curriculum mapping
 - Training and engaging faculty
 - Working on related institutional policies and supports (i.e., faculty load, credit)

Expectations/Timeline for Campuses that Participate

These learning communities will meet and share ideas primarily via email, discussion groups, document sharing, conference calls, and at annual national Bonner Meetings (especially Fall

Directors and Coordinators Meeting and Summer Leadership Institute). For this project, the anticipated timeline is as follows:

- **May 2016:** announcement of RFPs and Cohort Learning Communities
- **June 2016:** participate in Strategy Session on Community Engaged Capstones/Signature Work at Summer Leadership Institute
- **July 31, 2016:** submit proposal to the Bonner Foundation to participate in the Cohort Learning Community on Community Engaged Capstones/Signature Work. This should include:
 - *Narrative (see questions and instructions below)*
 - *Budget (see instructions and form below)*
- **September 2016:** announcement of Cohorts to network and first monthly conference calls
- **November 2016:** cohort strategy session at the Fall Directors and Coordinators Meeting.
- **February 1, 2017:** first progress report due to Foundation
- **May 15, 2017:** Annual Reports due to Foundation which will include a section to report on progress from this and other Cohort Learning Communities
- **June 2017:** sharing sessions and presentations (including to other campuses) at the Summer Leadership Institute
- **July 31, 2017:** submit 2017-18 proposal to the Foundation for 2nd year workplace

Reading and Resources

The following resources provide additional background about the focus of this Cohort Learning Community and will be helpful to review as you develop your plans.

Association of American Colleges and Universities Overview of Capstones and Signature Work. See: <https://www.aacu.org/search/node/signature%20work>

The Signature Work initiative, part of The LEAP Challenge, is the next frontier in AAC&U's ongoing educational change initiative, Liberal Education and America's Promise, or LEAP. The LEAP Challenge calls for all college students to pursue their own "signature work," integrating and applying their learning to complex problems and projects that are important to the student and important to society. All students, not just the most fortunate students, can and should be afforded the opportunity to produce capstones and signature work throughout their undergraduate experience.

Taking Stock of Capstones and Integrative Learning *by Jillian Kinzie, Associate Director, Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research; researcher with the National Survey of Student Engagement Institute*

The article discusses the positive contributions of capstone projects in improving student outcomes and desired learning in the U.S. It provides an overview of the research on culminating experiences through the findings of the National Survey of Student

Engagement (NSSE). It also describes the important elements of an effective capstone and integrative learning and suggests strategies on how to leverage results in such programs.

We have also developed a longer annotated bibliography of articles and resources and a suggestion for how campuses use them in a reading group. These articles will be available on the [Bonner Wiki](#).

Instructions for Proposal to Participate

Please submit a 2-3 page narrative proposal to participate that addresses the following questions.

- 1) Why is your institution interested in joining the Cohort Learning Community for *Community Engaged Signature Work*?
- 2) Who are the *key leaders* who will be on your team, including administrator(s), student(s), faculty, and community partner(s).
- 3) What existing programmatic or institutional commitments will you build on in this effort? What relevant strategies — such as a strategic plan, faculty, existing courses, credit options, student leadership, graduation requirements, and community partnerships — do you believe can contribute to successfully moving this initiative forward?
- 4) What do you believe are the biggest challenges or areas in which learning and support from the Foundation, cohort, and other peers would be most helpful?

Budget Guidelines

It is not clear what start-up funding may be needed to move this initiative forward on your campus. Possible budget categories include:

- Project Grants
- Stipends for Summer Internships
- Faculty Mini-Grants or Course Release
- Partner Mini-Grants or Honorariums
- Meeting Expenses (e.g., food, printing, etc.)

To meet these possible costs, about a third of our schools have existing Bonner Program funding they may be able to draw upon, while the other two-thirds don't. We are exploring the possibility of providing some mini-grants from the Bonner Foundation to support cohort initiatives in the coming year. However, we do not know yet how much or what size funding we can provide. So, for the purposes of your proposal, please submit a proposed budget and indicate the source(s) of these funds if already available to you or what you are seeking if you need additional financial support.