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### Democratically Engaged Assessment on Civic Learning for Bonner Scholars

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# Civic Learning for Bonner Scholars

CREATING A DEA-CENTERED ASSESSMENT AND CURRICULUM  
ALIGNMENT PROCESS

LESLEY BOADU & MEREDITH BACON

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# Executive Overview

This report will cover the multi-step process to identify and define the most critical civic learning outcomes for Bonner Scholars at the University of Richmond (UR). We will detail a democratically engaged assessment (DEA) involving diverse stakeholders to gather perspectives and insights. We do this by highlighting the work that has taken place and then making suggestions to improve the overall process. Some of this work includes using surveys to capture community experiences, involving students in creating definitions and implementing reflective journaling.

We will also discuss the revision of reflection essay assignments to align with the identified outcomes and the recruitment of Bonner alumni to improve the scoring rubric. Additionally, we will introduce self-assessment components, workshops for preliminary feedback, and peer review processes. The curriculum integration of civic learning outcomes across various courses and activities will be examined. Finally, we will present the results of meaning-making discussions with the student engagement team (SET) staff and analyze the impact of COVID-19 on civic engagement, highlighting the need for continuous improvement in the Bonner Scholars program.

## Process Summary

### Step 1

*Identify the 3 civic learning outcomes that are most critical for Bonner Scholars.*

Suggestions to improve DEA and overall recommendations:

Recognizing the importance of allowing fluidity and freedom in assessing one's experiences and critically expressing the motivations ("why") behind civic engagement seems crucial. It might be more effective to avoid predefining civic learning outcomes and instead let participants define them based on their own experiences.

To gather these insights, sending out a survey to UR's internal community involved with general civic engagement, including community partners, faculty from Arts & Sciences, Business, and Jepson School of Leadership Studies would be an effective strategy. The survey could ask respondents to provide a two-word description that outlines their achievements or performance in civic engagement. This approach would aim to capture the essence of their experiences without biasing them with predefined terms.

Distributing surveys in the summer before the academic year and considering including this survey in the initial application process for new Bonner Scholars could ensure a broad and inclusive understanding of civic learning outcomes from the very beginning.

Once the civic learning outcomes are gathered and analyzed, it will be helpful to give new Bonner Scholars the freedom to choose one or two learning outcomes to focus on during their first meeting. This approach would empower students to personalize their civic engagement journey based on their interests and strengths, fostering a more meaningful and impactful experience.

## Step 2

*Create student-friendly definitions for these 3 civic learning outcomes.*

Suggestions to improve DEA and overall recommendations:

A helpful approach would be to involve the students in defining these terms themselves. Asking them what these words mean to them based on their experiences with civic engagement could provide valuable insights and make the definitions more relevant and meaningful.

To enhance understanding and retention, consider implementing Airtable journaling for each class meeting, especially once new Bonner Scholars have been assigned to a site. These journals would serve as a reflective tool, allowing students to review their entries to better understand their impact, timeline, and connection to the learning outcomes.

Involving students in the process of defining civic learning outcomes and implementing reflective journaling could significantly enhance their engagement and understanding of their civic responsibilities. These strategies will help create a more personalized and impactful learning experience, fostering a deeper connection to their community engagement work.

### Step 3

*Revise 1st & 4th year student reflection essay assignments to align with the 3 learning outcomes.*

*Develop a draft rubric for assessing student reflection essays*

#### Suggestions to improve DEA and overall recommendations:

It might be beneficial to allow fourth-year students to start their reflection essays in the summer, providing a one-month deadline for each learning outcome. This approach would give students ample time to reflect on their experiences and engage with their community partners or supervisors. Onboarding community partners by informing them about these learning outcomes and encouraging regular meetings with their Bonner Scholars to build on these outcomes will further enhance the reflection process.

Organize introductory workshops and seminars at the beginning of the academic year (or during the summer) to brief community partners about the civic learning outcomes. These sessions can cover the importance of these outcomes, how they align with the Bonner Scholars Program, and the role of community partners in supporting these goals.

Establish a schedule for regular check-ins between community partners and Bonner Scholars. These can be monthly or bi-monthly meetings where students and partners discuss progress, challenges, and reflections related to the learning outcomes. Encourage joint reflection sessions where students and community partners can discuss their experiences and insights. These sessions will help students articulate their reflections more deeply and receive feedback from their partners.

Offer ongoing training sessions for community partners throughout the year to keep them updated on best practices in civic engagement and reflection. Implement a feedback mechanism where community partners can share their observations and suggestions regarding the student's progress and the effectiveness of the learning outcomes.

At the beginning of the placement, encourage community partners to work with students to set specific goals related to the learning outcomes. This collaboration ensures that both parties are aligned and working towards common objectives. Design projects and activities that explicitly incorporate the learning outcomes. This approach ensures that students can directly apply what they are learning in a practical context.

## Step 4

*Recruit and train 4 Bonner alumni to participate as readers/scorers of 1st & 4<sup>th</sup>-year student essays and to help improve the scoring rubric.*

### Suggestions to improve DEA and overall recommendations:

Instead of focusing only on first and fourth-year students, incorporating end-of-year two-page essays or five-minute presentations during class meetings for second and third-year students might be helpful. This ongoing reflection can prepare them for the comprehensive fourth-year narrative essay and ensure continuous engagement with the learning outcomes. Additionally, starting the “Presentations of Learning” artwork in junior year, focusing on the learning outcomes and using their journal entries, could be integrated into the junior exchange activities. Starting the “Presentations of Learning” artwork in junior year would provide a structured way for students to focus on the learning outcomes and use their journal entries effectively. This process could be integrated into the junior exchange activities to ensure students are continually reflecting on their experiences.

Before finalizing the rubric, organizing a meeting or discussion with the chosen four Bonner alumni can help standardize the scoring process and eliminate the need for rescoring. There was a noticeable discrepancy between the scores of first and second graders, with some graders appearing more stringent than others. In the “Guide for First Readers,” this issue was partially addressed: “By the timeline date shown in the next section of this guide, each first reader will meet for a second time with CCE staff via Zoom to carefully review the Reflection Rubrics and discuss the Tips for using the Reflection Rubric in this guide so that they clearly understand their assignment.” However, including the readers in the rubric creation process would have been



more effective. Their firsthand experience as Bonner Scholars provides valuable insights into how Bonners should be assessed through the lens of the learning outcomes.

## Step 5

*Bonner alumni and CCE staff score all 1st and 4th year Bonner student essays & meet to discuss how to improve the rubric/assessment process.*

### Suggestions to improve DEA and overall recommendations:

Introduce a self-assessment component where students evaluate their essays using the rubric before submission. This exercise will promote deeper reflection and self-awareness, and the results can be compared with the alumni and CCE staff scores to identify any gaps in understanding.

Organize workshops where students can bring drafts of their essays for preliminary feedback from alumni and CCE staff. These workshops will serve as an opportunity for students to refine their reflections and for scorers to identify common areas of confusion or weakness that the rubric might need to address more clearly.

Incorporate a peer review process where students review and provide feedback on each other's essays before final submission. This step will help students gain different perspectives on their work and understand the rubric better through evaluating their peers.

## Step 6

*Bonner curriculum review was conducted to identify touchpoints where the 3 civic learning outcomes are (and could be) taught &/or discussed.*

### Suggestions to improve DEA and overall recommendations:

Integrate the three learning outcomes into BSP 101 to ensure they are taught and reinforced during Bonner meetings. This foundational integration will help students grasp the significance of these outcomes early in their Bonner journey. Collaborate with faculty members who incorporate civic engagement in their courses to enhance workshops and discussions, offering students diverse perspectives on civic learning and engagement.

Include community partners in the curriculum integration process by having them conduct regular progress checks with their Bonner Scholars. Encourage partners to ask students to reflect on the learning outcomes during these check-ins, reinforcing the connection between academic learning and community engagement. Develop workshops and training sessions focused on the three learning outcomes, facilitated by both faculty and community partners. These sessions will provide practical examples and case studies, making the outcomes more relatable and actionable for students.

Embed reflection activities related to the learning outcomes throughout the curriculum. Use journaling, group discussions, and presentations to encourage continuous reflection and deeper understanding. Promote an interdisciplinary approach by integrating the learning outcomes across various courses and activities. Encourage collaborations between different departments and community organizations to provide a holistic view of civic engagement.

## Step 7

*Meaning making discussions with SET staff & participating students to improve the overall process for the 2024-2025 academic year.*

### Suggestions to improve DEA and overall recommendations:

To enhance these discussions, involve a larger and more diverse group of students to gain a broader range of perspectives. Including a faculty member outside of the CCE who is involved with civic engagement can provide additional insights and expertise. Additionally, extending the duration of these discussions beyond one and a half days would allow for more in-depth conversations and thorough analysis of feedback.

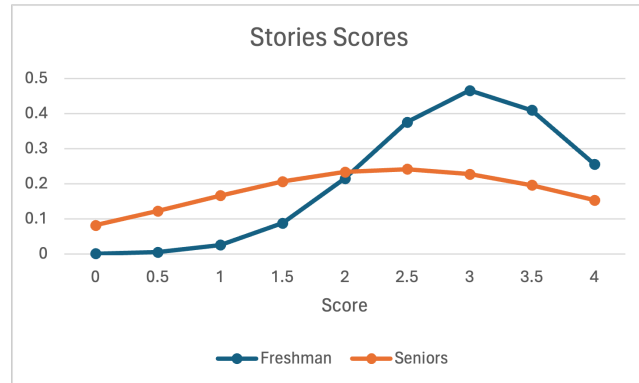
## Results summary

These results are taken from Bonner scholars' scores on a written reflection. Reflections were graded based on a rubric (Step 3) by Bonner alumni and staff (Step 4). These results are derived from 16 new Bonner or “Freshman” scores and 14 senior Bonner scores.

# Analysis

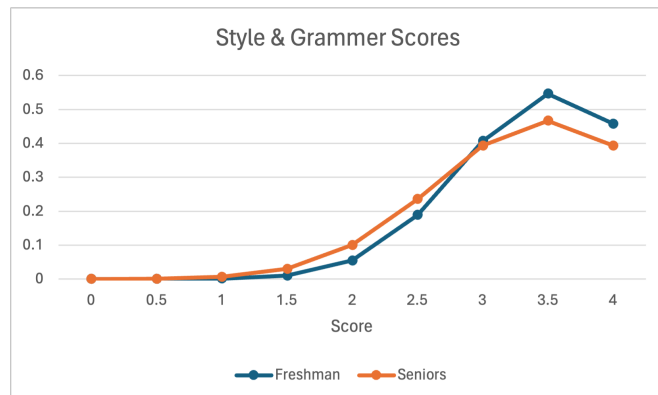
## Stories

- Mean (4 points possible)
  - Freshman: 3.06
  - Senior: 2.43
  - Overall: 2.76
- Standard Deviation
  - Freshman: 0.8539
  - Senior: 1.6508
  - Overall: 1.3047



## Style & Grammer

- Mean (4 points possible)
  - Freshman: 3.56
  - Senior: 3.5
  - Overall: 3.53
- Standard Deviation
  - Freshman: 0.7274
  - Senior: 0.8549
  - Overall: 0.7761



## Civic Learning Goals

## Civic Identity/Commitment

- Mean (10 points possible)

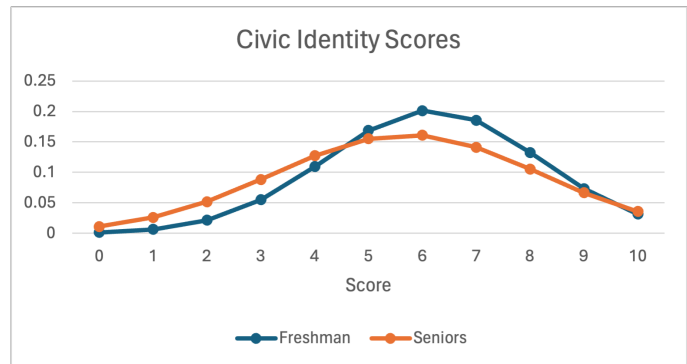
- Freshman: 6.19
- Senior: 5.71
- Overall: 5.96

- Standard Deviation

- Freshman: 1.9737
- Senior: 2.4691
- Overall: 2.1891

- Trends

- Freshmen have a slightly higher average score compared to seniors. There is more variation among senior scores.



## Strengths Orientation

- Mean (10 points possible)

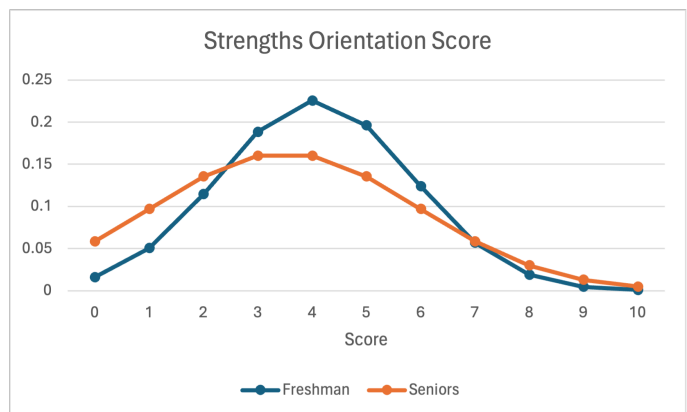
- Freshman: 4.06
- Senior: 3.5
- Overall: 3.8

- Standard Deviation

- Freshman: 1.7689
- Senior: 2.4416
- Overall: 2.0910

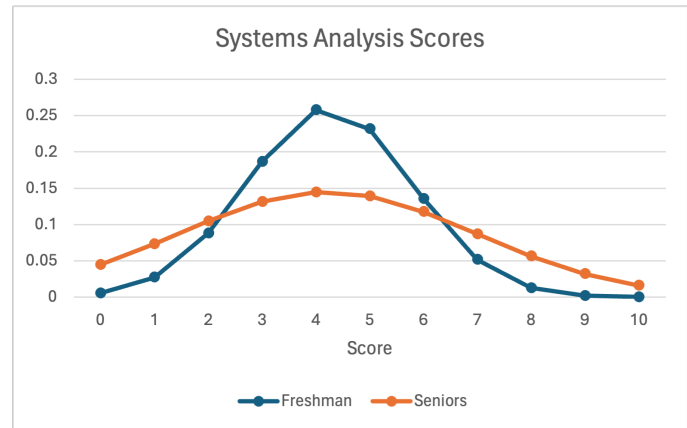
- Trends

- Freshmen have a higher average score compared to seniors. There is more variation among senior scores.



## Systems Analysis

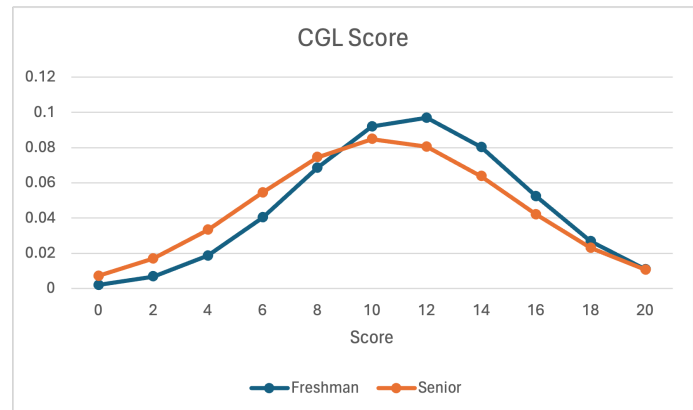
- Mean (10 points possible)
  - Freshman: 4.25
  - Senior: 4.21
  - Overall: 4.23
- Standard Deviation
  - Freshman: 1.5275
  - Senior: 2.7506
  - Overall: 2.1445
- Trends



- While freshmen and seniors have a similar average score, there is much more variation among seniors.

## CLG Score

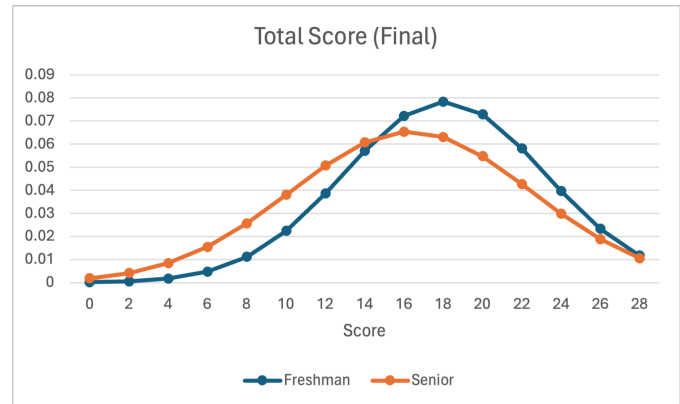
- Mean
  - Freshman: 11.44
  - Senior: 10.43
  - Overall: 10.9667
- Standard Deviation
  - Freshman: 4.0820
  - Senior: 4.6857
  - Overall: 4.3270
- Trends



- Freshmen have a slightly higher average score compared to seniors. There is more variation among senior scores.

## Total Score (Final)

- Mean
  - Freshman: 18.06
  - Senior: 16.36
  - Overall: 17.26
- Standard Deviation
  - Freshman: 5.0920
  - Senior: 6.0967
  - Overall: 5.5518
- Trends
  - Freshmen have a higher average score compared to seniors. There is more variation among senior scores.



## Description of Learning

*What do these results mean when combined with what we have learned throughout the process and the relationships we recognize?*

Based on the analysis, seniors generally had high variation among their scores. While freshman scores tend to have a defined median on the graph, in categories such as stories, strengths orientation, and systems analysis, the standard deviation among seniors is very high causing a flatter graph. This could indicate that while most freshmen are at the same point in their understanding of the learning outcomes, senior understanding is much more irregular. This could be caused by a variety of factors such as the impact of COVID-19 or the lack of the Bonner 101 course offering.

COVID-19 has been a significant factor in why senior Bonner Scholars' scores are lower compared to first years. Community building, which is crucial during the first year of college, was severely impacted, leading to a disconnect between seniors and civic engagement. The shift to virtual engagement was challenging, as most Bonner Scholars defined civic engagement through in-person interactions that provided immediate reflection and response. As a Bonner alum who started the program during the pandemic, it is evident that the cohorts below us are more connected and understanding of their sites because they now have more options and opportunities for engagement.

Additionally, the senior class scores are more spread out because advisors unexpectedly change every year and sometimes during the semester. This inconsistency left senior Bonners constantly adapting to their new advisors, which disrupted continuity and support. The frequent changes hindered the development of strong, lasting relationships and a stable support system, which are crucial for effective civic engagement and consistent performance. As a result, senior Bonners faced challenges in maintaining a steady focus on their projects and learning outcomes, contributing to the variability in their scores.