



Ron Brown Scholar Program

Ron Brown Scholar Program: Impact Assessment

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At a recent RBS Family Reunion, I caught up with scholars of my year and the year behind me. We all shared our plans for the upcoming year. I was overwhelmed by what we all had in store. Some scholars were starting internships in the White House, others were going abroad to study another language. Being around and speaking with the other scholars always gives me the energy to fearlessly juggle academics with advocacy and strong community engagement. Every time I communicate with a RBS or alumni, I am re-focused and I feel unstoppable. We have all agreed that we are going to change the world.

--2012 Scholar

One of my fellow RBS Scholars connected me to a Professor at Harvard Business School with whom I could do research with. It was hard to navigate and find a professor that would take on an amateur researcher. Because of Jason's help, I was able to gain research experience and apply (and receive) a travel grant to live in India for a year after my graduation. Literally life-changing Jason's support was in that moment!

--2001 Scholar

I distinctly remember having only 3 hours left before my senior sociology thesis was due and I had spent months focusing on the 120 pages I typed and I had not touched by bibliography. I hadn't slept nor done anything else but work on my thesis in weeks and I was at a real mental low point. There was an RBS friend that I reached out to who stopped what she was doing at the time and helped me complete my bibliography. And complete it well. Would not have completed my thesis in time if it had not been for her. That is a memory I will keep with me for the rest of my life.

--2004 Scholar

**We change lives,
We change minds,
We change the
world,
One person at a time,
Through the Ron
Brown Scholar
Program**

Having positive peer role models who know my background and who are willing to help me was invaluable to my success in college. For instance, one RBS in particular helped me get through a few personal issues by meeting up with me for meals and just being someone who was there to remind me that I was known, heard, and valued.

--2006 Scholar

Having fellow RBS here at Harvard has made my experience that much smoother. I feel comfortable here, and I know that a lot of the things I want to accomplish have already been accomplished by those ahead of me. I am very grateful for the opportunity.

--2013 Scholar

I don't think my undergraduate experience would have been the same without the influence of my fellow Scholars. They inspired me with their gifts and showed me new ways to explore my curiosities and interests. It felt wonderful to be part of a community such as this, and I brought that sense of pride with me to college that Fall.

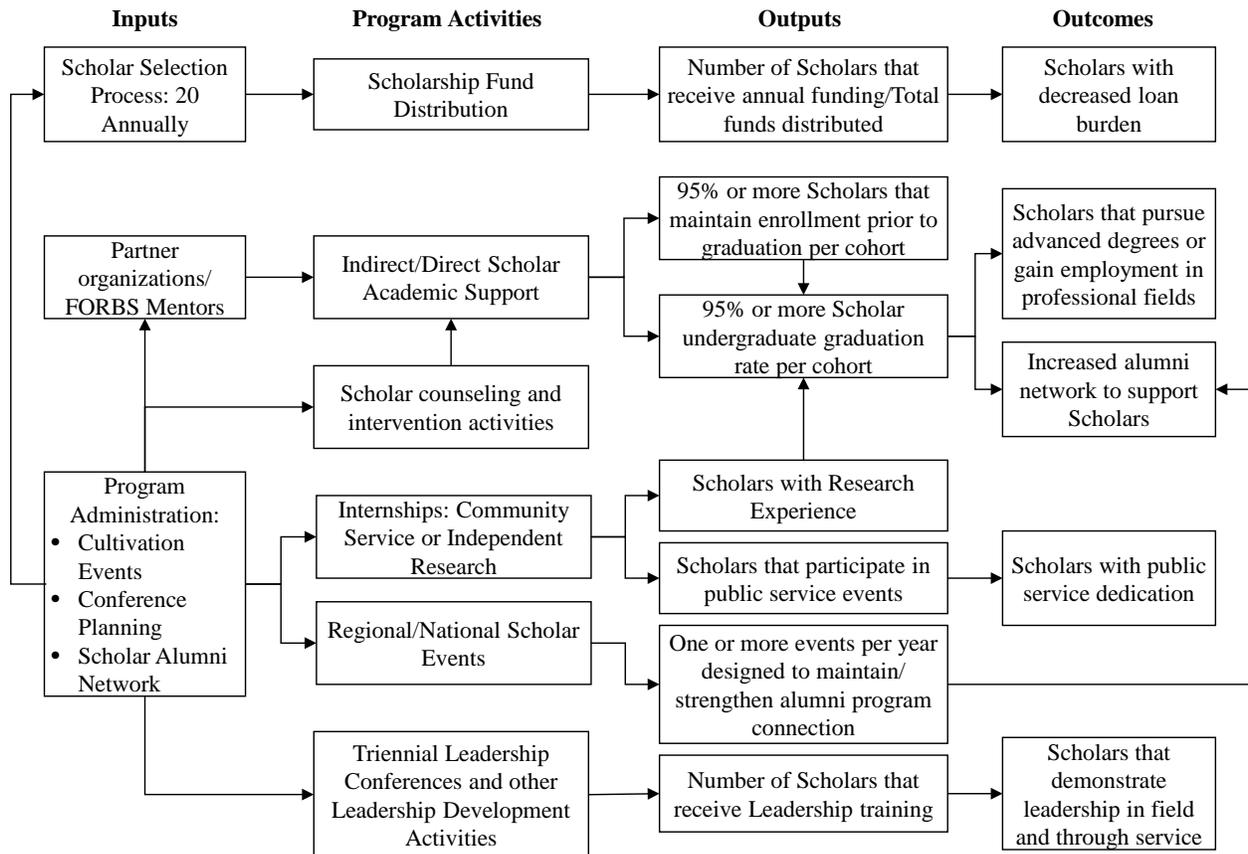
--1999 Scholar

Throughout my undergraduate career, the Ron Brown Scholar Program allowed me to have a piece of home wherever I went... I met a scholar during my freshman year, who attended a university across the country from mine and just so happened to be studying a similar type of Engineering as I did. Despite attending a different institution than I, this scholar provided me with moral support as I dealt with the challenges of a rigorous Engineering curriculum. He also pointed me towards opportunities outside of my university to get involved in STEM research and amazing national black engineering organizations, namely the National Society of Black Engineers. Needless to say, this scholar was one of the main reasons I chose to stick with Engineering! Without his support, and that of other scholars & the RBS staff, there is a good chance that I would have fallen into an all too common trend for minorities and leave engineering.

--2006 Scholar

Executive Summary

The Ron Brown Scholar Program (RBSP) was established in 1997 that is designed, according to the program internet site, for “academically-talented, highly motivated African-American high school seniors who have demonstrated financial need, social commitment and leadership potential.” RBSP has five specific outcomes: Scholars pursue advanced degrees/gain employment in professional fields, Scholars dedicated to public service, Scholars that demonstrate leadership in their fields and through service, Scholars have decreased loan burden, Scholars develop active alumni network to support current Scholars. Multiple strategies are employed to achieve these outcomes. A base strategy is a \$40,000 college scholarship distributed at \$10,000 a year. Leadership focused strategies include a Triennial Leadership Conference, other leadership development activities, and regional/national Scholar events. Internships with a community service or research intent are a program strategy. Last, academic support and counseling are included in the program through mentors and staff. The program logic model represents the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes



An evaluation was conducted to determine the program success at achieving its intended outcomes and further determine its impact. The questions guided the assessment.

1. Personal Impact: To what extent are Scholars realizing or have realized their educational and career goals?

2. Program Impact: To what level are Scholars achieving the program mission in terms of leadership and service?
3. Societal Impact: What impacts are Scholars making at the professional and service levels?

Scholar surveys served as the primary data source for all evaluation questions. Program Scholars and a statistically equivalent control group completed the survey. Data collection occurred from January 22, 2014 to March 10, 2014. To better understand the longitudinal program impacts, the study population was divided into three groups. The first group was the Current Scholar level. This group represents students that started the program between 2010 and 2013. For the control group, individuals that graduated high school from 2010-2013 were included. The next group was Mid-Term Alumni which represents students that started the program between 2003 and 2009. For the control group, individuals that graduated high school between 2003-2009. The last group was Mature Alumni which represents students that started the program between 1997 and 2002. For the control group, individuals that graduated high school between 1997-2002 were included. The inclusion of a statistically equivalent control group enabled a determination on whether there was evidence that RBSP was influential in Scholar development.

There is evidence that the program is first attaining its outcomes. Comparisons with the control group provide compelling evidence that RBSP is an influential factor in four of its five outcome areas.

- The program does decrease loan burden. Over 60% of the Scholars have no or expect no student loan debt.
- Scholars graduate at a nearly 100% rate. Scholars participate in experiences that support educational and career growth such as internships and undergraduate research experiences. At the time of data collection, 85 scholars have earned at least one advanced degree. Regarding professional employment, 90% of Scholars report that their first professional position is related to their career goals.
- There is evidence of a strong alumni network. Scholars report strong peer support in social and personal ways. This type of support is associated minority student academic achievement. Scholars also report they use the Scholar network to seek or provide guidance/advice, networking, and problems they may be having at work.
- Over three-quarters of the Scholars perceive that they embody the RBSP mission of dedication to leadership and public service. When discussing what leadership means to them and how they demonstrate leadership, Scholars stressed that leadership means being an example for others, empowering others to meet goals, and serving as a change agent.

There is partial evidence that RBSP is the influential factor in the public service area. Nearly 70% of the Scholars report being involved in volunteer activities. This is dramatically higher than the 18.5% rate for all black or African American adults in the US. Scholars most participate in youth mentorship and tutoring. Nearly 30% of the Scholars donate 5% or more of their income to charitable causes. It was determined that RBSP was partially impactful as the control group

also participated in public service at high levels. Scholars, however, donate at higher levels when compared to the control group.

Evidence of outcome attainment supports a more thorough investigation of program impact in the personal, program, and societal levels. Related to personal impact, the evidence suggests that the personal impact of the RBSP increases over time. For current students, the only impactful area is student loan debt but only at a marginally significant level. For the mid-term alumni, the impact area is student load with trends towards higher employment levels. The greatest personal impacts are observed with mature alumni. In this case, there is statistically significant evidence that the mature alumni have achieved higher employment levels when compared to the control group. Current Scholars, mid-term alumni, and mature alumni perceive that the program has impacted them in terms of helping to shape their career goals and having a more extensive professional network. These perceptions may be a factor in why the personal impacts from RBSP participation increase over time.

Related to program impact, at all levels, RBS are demonstrating a commitment to public service. While overall this commitment is not statistically significantly more than the control group, Scholars do have high levels of participation in public service. This dedication is greater than the general population. An additional note is that the mid-term alumni demonstrated a greater commitment to public service than their control group. In terms of leadership and public service, all program levels perceive that they embody the program mission of “a strong dedication to leadership and public service.”

Societal impact focuses on the areas Scholars chose to dedicate themselves to. The evidence suggests that Scholars dedicate their public service in education related areas. Mentoring youth is an important public service for all RBS program levels. Tutoring or teaching is important at the current Scholar and mid-term alumni levels. The tutoring or teaching service evolves for mature alumni and likely matches the advancement in their careers. Mature alumni engage more in professional or management assistance rather than tutoring or teaching. The important factor, however, is that the societal impact is still education related.

Several recommendations were forwarded for RBSP representatives to consider. The recommendations directly related to program improvement were as follows:

- **Increase Operationalization of Program Outputs/Outcomes:** Program stakeholders can work to make more clear the program outputs and outcomes to ensure that they are measurable. This would first enable program stakeholders to more specifically communicate the intended program outcomes. It would also enable program stakeholders to ensure that all program resources are being allocated towards the accomplishment of intended outcomes. Lastly, it would better enable the program to benchmark performance.
- **Consider Adjustments to Leadership Training:** There is a dichotomy in the feedback from the Scholars and their perceptions on what has developed their leadership. There is evidence that the Scholars embody what the program is trying to develop related to leaders with a focus on service. Open-ended question responses sometimes directly relate to what was learned at events such as the Triennial Leadership Conference. When asked, however, to identify influential sources on the development of their leadership styles, Scholars most often cite

former supervisors rather than RBSP representatives. This may not be an issue for program stakeholders as there is evidence that the Scholars embody what the program is trying to develop in its leaders. This may, however, represent a possible improvement area so that the training the program does provide is more impactful and becomes more relevant in the minds of the Scholars when they are forming their identities as leaders.

- **Consider Mentorship Improvements:** Scholars have positive views on their mentors but do not utilize them at high levels for internship site identifications, graduate school references, employment references or other areas where a mentor may serve as a positive resource. This may represent a program component that can be strengthened so that mentors are more consistently used as resources.
- **Public Service Emphasis:** The evidence suggests that RBSP maintains the dedication the Scholars have to public service. There is not, however, strong evidence that it increases public service dedication beyond what Scholars had when entering the program. If program stakeholders perceive that maintaining this dedication fulfills the program mission, no changes would be necessary. It is an area, however, where improvements may be possible.

Further recommendations were made on continuing studies on the survey results and strengthening program documentation.