BONNER ORIENTATION 2013

The TCNJ Bonner Center welcomed back its Bonner Community Scholars and ushered in its newest cohort of Scholars during a five-day orientation. On Monday, August 19th, site leaders, interns, and other program leaders participated in a training with staff while the rest of the Scholars moved back onto campus. In the evening students heard a welcome address by community partners Rob Fiorello of PEI Kids and Denise Reil of Visitation Home, and learned about this year’s theme of “Leave Your Mark.” The next day, Bonner Scholars participated in a massive, team building scavenger hunt across campus, and a workshop titled “Writing on the Wall” with Crystal Leigh Endsley, Ph.D. and Marla Jaksch, Ph.D. In the evening Director Paula Figueroa-Vega presented to the group about the importance of Bonner here at TCNJ and the national network of Bonner schools that are connected through the Bonner Foundation, located in Princeton, NJ. On Wednesday, August 21st, the Bonner Center welcomed its large network of deep community partners to campus to meet with the Bonner Community Scholars and participate in planning for the year. Students worked closely with staff from their community partner sites as well as their Bonner staff manager to develop detailed plans for the year. These planning sessions are important for setting the tone for the entire year and a good opportunity for the Scholars to work closely with their community partners to develop strategies and goals for building the capacity of the organization. This includes providing direct service, research, social media support, fundraising, policy analysis, and other activities. In the evening students and staff participated in the annual talent show. The event allows everyone to showcase their interests and gifts, such as singing, stand up comedy, acting, and other various talents. Thursday’s programming included more
Bonner Orientation cont... 
more workshops as well a safety training from Agent Jason Salvatore from the Mercer County Sherriff’s office. On the final day of the orientation, the Bonner Scholars Corps delivered a presentation to the entire First Year class about the Community Engaged Learning (CEL). The Bonners also led individual meetings with each freshmen floor to educate the First Year students about the CEL graduation requirement, civic engagement, and the needs of Trenton. First Year Students also made plans for their CEL experience during this session. This year’s orientation was hugely successful and set an exciting tone for the coming year of great work.

CEL Kick Off

The Bonner Center began its Community Engaged Learning (CEL) activities with the new academic school year during the last week of August. The Center mobilizes all 1,400 First Year Students each year to complete eight hours of community engagement throughout the year. Half of these students complete the graduation requirement through class-based projects while the rest participate in full day CEL projects. Some exciting class-based projects this semester include the Youth Development Institute, Socrates Cafe in Mercer County Correctional Facility, and Farm to Table work in community gardens.

Move to Forcina

The Bonner Center moved its offices from Holman Hall to Forcina Hall on TCNJ’s campus. The new space is located on the third floor of the building, and includes office space, a conference room, and a large lounge for the Bonner Scholars. The main office is located in Room 337.

New AmeriCorps VISTA Members

The TCNJ Bonner Center welcomed three new AmeriCorps VISTA members to its office in August.

The Bonner Center is happy to have three new AmeriCorps VISTA members join its office. As part of its objective to address poverty-related issues in Trenton as well as build the capacity of its partners, the Center is leading a team of over 20 NJ Bonner VISTA members who are placed at various community partner sites within the greater Trenton area. Three of these members are placed within the Center's office to focus on two major initiatives: Community Engaged Learning (CEL) II and PolicyOptions.

Leah Cohen and Adams Sibley will be focusing on expanding the CEL II initiative on TCNJ's campus. Their service will primarily focus on matching the needs of the community to innovative class-based projects that promote the learning and teaching goals of the College. For example, a Design Perspective for Interactive Multimedia class that will work with the Trenton Downtown Association and develop projects that respond to the needs of inner city businesses.

Keith Tofte will primarily focus on the PolicyOptions project, which seeks to fill the information gap that exists at the local level concerning policy. Through community-based research, Keith will help build the capacity of local networking collaboratives as well as nonprofit organizations.

The other New Jersey Bonner AmeriCorps VISTA Fellows are placed at several TCNJ Bonner Community partners including the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, the Rescue Mission of Trenton, PEI Kids, Henry J. Austin Health Center, the Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness, Trenton School District Shiloh CDC, and the Attorney General’s Office of Community Justice Programs.

The Bonner Center is currently recruiting for open VISTA positions to begin in November 2013. To learn more, visit http://bonner.pages.tcnj.edu/special-projects/bonner-vista/.

Patrick Donohue, Assistant Provost for Community Engaged Learning & Partnerships
Paula Figueroa-Vega, Director

The Bonner Center for Civic and Community Engagement
The College of New Jersey
2000 Pennington Road
Ewing, NJ 08628