

## **Jefferson State Community College--Beta Lambda Delta Chapter**

### **Scholarship Hallmark**

#### **1. Summarize your chapter's goals for involvement in the primary and secondary focuses of the Scholarship Hallmark.**

Like other chapters, Beta Lambda Delta found itself in flux as we finished our study of Popular Culture and began our study on the Global Dynamics of Power. To maximize our studies, our first goal was to create a dynamic scholastic experience for other Phi Theta Kappans at our Regional Convention. Our second goal was to improve our presentation of the Satellite Seminars in terms of attendance by and significance to students. Our third goal was to help prepare Jefferson State students as they transition from the two-year setting to four-year colleges and universities by providing a university transfer workshop. As our local focus on "Gold, Gods, and Glory," we chose to focus on a local sub-topic of our own, studying about poverty and centering several of our activities around this theme. We set out to discuss and try to understand what poverty actually is in its definitions, effects, causes, economics, and power struggles. By creating new options for single mothers and by tutoring kids, we tried to affect our circle of influence with the greatest tool we know to affect poverty—generational change through education. Therefore, our fourth goal was to share our academic skills with school-aged children in our community. Our fifth goal concerned studying our topic at a personal level but sharing it broadly through interviewing and filmmaking. Our sixth goal was to study the intersection of poverty and day-to-day experiences dealing with civil rights.

#### **2. Describe your chapter's Honors Study Topic projects that contributed to fulfilling your chapter's goals for the Scholarship Hallmark.**

Our Regional convention was scheduled for Birmingham, our hometown. We volunteered to host the convention and were determined to use our hometown's assets to provide a dynamic scholarly experience for the attendees. The officers contacted original MTV "VJ" host Alan Hunter, a Birmingham native, to speak about pop culture. Hunter was a perfect speaker for this topic, and he taught the crowd about his experiences returning home to bring something back to his community. Hunter's creation of a working theater, lounge, office, and artists' studio called Workplay and his efforts in creating the Sidewalk

Moving Picture festival helped students see creative ways to use the skills and talents they learn through education. Hunter also emphasized the power of popular culture as MTV revolutionized the planet. In fact, most Phi Theta Kappans in the audience could not remember a time when MTV did *not* exist! Hunter encouraged all of us to engage with the popular culture in ethical ways to produce artistic greatness instead of “white noise.” Hunter also answered many questions about making film, and he encouraged everyone to go beyond simply studying and to instead go out and **do**.

Another local asset was the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame. Our chapter members helped facilitate a hands-on learning experience through the examples of music and history in this city steeped in African-American history, civil rights events, and cultural and musical development. We arranged for all of the participants of the convention to travel to the Hall to hear not only a lecture but an impromptu concert from the legendary “Doc” Adams, a Birmingham original who has performed with the likes of Elvis Presley and Duke Ellington. As Doc explained how he persevered to be a musician even as he faced racial prejudice, we realized that this experience was the perfect transition into the new honors study topic: “God, Gods, and Glory: The Global Dynamics of Power.” Power invades every aspect of culture, even popular culture; so we were ready to move on to our new study topic.

We wanted to take full advantage of the Satellite Seminar series as a great opportunity to provoke thought and discussion on topics of “Gold, Gods, and Glory: The Global Dynamics of Power.” Our chapter enhanced the seminars with the talents and resources available to us. While Beta Lambda Delta has subscribed to the Satellite Seminar program in the past, this year we wanted to do something more. To make the most of this opportunity, Beta Lambda Delta officers developed strategies to add to the program and aim for maximum attendance. To promote the Satellite seminars, Phi Theta Kappa member Steve Hallman utilized his background in marketing to design professional quality, full color “movie posters.” Officers took the initiative to make instructors aware of the series and asked them to offer points to students in related disciplines for participating and integrating the seminar topics in class. Chapter members also made contacts with instructors and outside speakers to have local town hall discussions after each seminar topic. For instance, we contacted Marty Conners, a former Alabama Republican Party Chairman and lobbyist, to come and speak with the group after the seminar on lobbying in Washington. Jefferson State Western Civilization instructor and Liberal Arts Department Chair Kyle

Irvin led a discussion after Dan Senor's seminar on the historical perspective on war and the nature and complications of democracy.

The most exciting idea to come out of the promotion discussion was a scholarship contest to be based on an essay submission. We crafted rules and essay topics and even secured a private donation of \$500 for the scholarship. The contest rules were posted on the new Beta Lambda Delta website and required participating students to attend all four seminars and submit an essay for judging by a faculty panel. This project was exciting because it prompted Jefferson State students *outside* of Phi Theta Kappa to go in depth with the Honors Study Topic. Additionally, many participating students truly enjoyed a scholastic experience for one of the first times in their lives. Several commented on their resolution to continue their studies and even expressed interest in joining Phi Theta Kappa! Our innovation with the Satellite Seminars created a long-term love of scholarship in many students. Additionally, by awarding the scholarship to a non-Phi Theta Kappa student, we expanded opportunities for scholarly recognition on campus.

Our chapter received a jarring introduction to our sub-topic—poverty—when we traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana, to participate in post Hurricane Katrina cleanup. During our service trip to New Orleans, chapter officer Justin Epps began filming locations in the Lower Ninth Ward and other areas still left in disrepair a year after the hurricane; he also filmed the glittering newly rebuilt casinos. At the end of our trip, we visited the grassroots organization “Common Ground,” located in the Lower Ninth Ward. None of us expected to be interviewing a Katrina survivor who barely escaped the rising waters by climbing to the top of his attic, but that is exactly what happened. Serendipitously, chapter officer Justin Epps had his video camera running! While filming this moving interview, he began to form an idea of creating a longer film. Justin used his computer and his artistic talent to create a short film called “Spaceship Earth” from his video, still images, statistical figures, facts, and quotations. Justin's film highlights the comparison of a lifestyle we take for granted with the prevalence of poverty around the world. For example, Justin's film shares: “If you keep your food in a refrigerator, your clothes in a closet, and sleep in a bed, you are richer than 75% of the worlds population.” Justin posted his film on his MySpace account to share it with students from all over the world, and it has received thousands of hits!

He continues to work on his film and plans to conduct more filming and interviews focused on efforts to clothe and feed the homeless locally.

As part of our discussion on poverty, we agreed that the more affluent have different experiences with the law and judicial system than the poor. Aside from access to high-dollar legal help and different types of crime linked to each area, those in upper economic brackets tend to know and exercise their rights to their full advantage. Many do not know their rights, waive them, or conflict violently with police because they simply do not know what their rights are or how and when to exercise them. To help foster a discussion on citizens' rights and what to know when involved with the police, our chapter contacted David Gespass and Thomas Diasio of the Gespass & Johnson Law firm. Gespass and Diasio came to speak at a special "Know Your Rights" town hall meeting sponsored by Beta Lambda Delta. Students from many backgrounds came to listen, and many shared experiences they once had in instances such as routine pullovers, checkpoints, and police requesting entry to the house without a warrant or probable cause. The speakers made the format very easy-going and non-intimidating. Everyone left with a fuller knowledge of the rights they possess regardless of their socioeconomic status.

**3. Discuss up to three projects unrelated to the Honors Study Topic that recognize and encourage scholarship.**

Beth Germek and Swaty Singh initiated a fundraising program to coincide with the construction of an additional building on campus. With the announcement of a new building to expand the Shelby campus, these officers saw the opportunity to create a powerful fundraising program that would go beyond popcorn sales and raffle tickets. They proposed selling engraved bricks to students, alumni, and local businesses to lay with the construction of the new building. The proceeds will fund a scholarship for the school's New Options program, which provides scholarships for young mothers returning to school to improve their career choices. Beth and Swaty created a written proposal and a visual display and presented their proposal to Dr. Joe Morris, the Vice President of the school. We were thrilled when Dr. Morris not only accepted our proposal but also encouraged us to expand it to other Jefferson State campuses! This project is important because it will foster scholarship long after the current members of Beta Lambda Delta have graduated from Jefferson State.

As part of our effort to promote scholastics, we have taken on a principle of marketing and sales, which is to remove all obstacles. Understanding the whole college process, transfers, majors, credits, and scholarships can be confusing, especially to part-time students who live off-campus or adult students returning to school after many years. To help keep students from getting discouraged or missing a semester by overlooking important deadlines, Beta Lambda Delta hosted a university transfer workshop on campus. We contacted Landon Waid, an admissions counselor at the University of Montevallo, who specializes in recruiting transfer students. We arranged for two workshop times in order to allow both day and night students to attend. Mr. Waid did not simply discuss how to transfer to Montevallo; he covered the transfer process for *any* four-year school. Because Beta Lambda Delta sponsored this seminar, students at the college will complete the transfer process with more confidence and, ultimately, more successful outcomes.

Finally, we reached beyond the school to the future college students who will take our place. Several chapter members, including Fauzia Khan, Swaty Singh, and Cindy Harmon, tutored elementary school students in churches, schools, and community groups. Cindy even put her former basketball experience in play as she coached an elementary age basketball team every weekend! Not only did these members tutor, they served as academic and personal mentors for students desperate for positive role models in their lives. Beta Lambda Delta looks forward to inducting some of these students in the years to come!

**4. What were the specific outcomes of your chapter's involvement with the Scholarship Hallmark, including the impact your activities had on chapter members and others?**

By facilitating the seminar series and the Regional Convention, we made full utilization of existing resources and leveraged additional components to make the programs even better. These efforts helped Beta Lambda Delta officers and members, Jefferson State students, PI Pi members from our north campus, and members from other regional chapters whom we invited to attend. As a result of the Satellite Seminar scholarship program, integration with courses, and invitations to other campuses, attendance at the seminars was full-house capacity; and one deserving student received \$500 to help with his tuition. Justin Epps' film project embodied what Alan Hunter taught us at the Regional Convention: If you love something, be your own study guide, teach yourself, and then go do it. One person can use technology to

study a topic that he is passionate about and create something that can reach out and be available for people around the world.

The "Know Your Rights" forum provided a place that made it easy for all students to feel comfortable asking sticky questions. Discussion was high-spirited, and we had a good debate over the balance of freedom and rights versus the safety of the public and the ability of the police to arrest and prosecute criminals. Beth and Swaty helped promote scholarship by showing the school administration the direct application of Phi Theta Kappa's focus on creating new educational opportunities for non-traditional students. Their efforts also helped raise awareness for the New Options program.

At the transfer workshops, Landon Waid answered questions pertaining to the transfer process in general and helped students plan the timing of their last semester, including how to decide which classes to take now or after transfer. He also provided general information about scholarships and how to save money, referred students to other resources for specific schools, and highlighted the advantages of Alabama's STARS system, which facilitates easy transfers among in-state schools. By working with young students, chapter members brought the face of Jefferson State to the children, schoolteachers, church members, and parents and let them know what Phi Theta Kappa is all about. Through the enjoyment and success of these individual programs, we have made plans to institute a unified Phi Theta Kappa tutoring program based at Jeff State to help area kids and help with incoming college students during their first and most crucial semesters. Many college students see studying as a necessary evil required to obtain a lucrative degree. Beta Lambda Delta's devotion to scholarship promoted intellectual curiosity not only for college students but as a life-long pursuit.