

Spring 4-20-2018

## Additions and Revisions to the Presidential Scholars Award Program: A Proposal

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Additions and Revisions for the Presidential Scholars Award Program: A Proposal

Emily Lynn Swanson

Bowling Green State University

## Proposed Four-Year Model of Additions and Revisions for the PSA Program

- Year One**
- Monthly Cohort Meetings
  - Peer Mentorship Program (paired with upper-class mentor)
  - Faculty Mentor Matching
  - Honors Project Seminar (potential enrollment)
  - **All-Cohort Meetings (1 per semester)**
  - **Holiday Party**
  - **Alumni Reunion and Networking**
  - **MLK National Day of Service**

- Year Two**
- Honors Project Seminar (potential enrollment)
  - Peer Mentorship Program (paired with first-year mentee)
  - **All-Cohort Meetings (1 per semester)**
  - **Holiday Party**
  - **Alumni Reunion and Networking**
  - **MLK National Day of Service**

- Year Three**
- Graduate School and Job Search Workshop
  - Networking with Local Businesses
  - Leadership within PSA Programming
  - Enrollment in Graduate Level Courses (if applicable)
  - Honors Project Seminar (potential enrollment)
  - **All-Cohort Meetings (1 per semester)**
  - **Holiday Party**
  - **Alumni Reunion and Networking**
  - **MLK National Day of Service**

- Year Four**
- Enrollment in Graduate Level Courses (if applicable)
  - Leadership within PSA Programming
  - **All-Cohort Meetings (1 per semester)**
  - **Holiday Party**
  - **Alumni Reunion and Networking**
  - **MLK National Day of Service**

\*A detailed description of each of the programmatic pieces is located in the discussion section of this proposal.

\*\*This proposed model includes recommendations that incorporate participation by PSA scholars in the programmatic pieces.

\*\*\*Items in bold represent once-a-year activities that all PSA members will be expected to participate in annually.

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### Additions and Revisions for the Presidential Scholars Award Program: A Proposal

I made the final decision to come to Bowling Green State University when I was notified that I had received the Presidential Scholars Award, as it was an important factor in helping to make getting my degree more financially feasible. This sense of importance dissipated, however, once I came to campus as my involvement with the Presidential Scholars Award program lessened in favor of other curricular and extra-curricular activities that were more involved and demanding, especially the Honors College. I knew that there was potential for this program to be more influential in my collegiate career, but the changes necessary to do so never arose during my time in the program, guiding my decision to pursue this project.

For my Honors Project, I set out to help improve the Presidential Scholars Award (hereafter PSA) program. The PSA program offers its recipients the opportunity to engage in a four-year, co-curricular experience during their time at Bowling Green State University (hereafter BGSU) and during their time in the BGSU Honors College. For this project, I sought to recommend a new four-year model for the PSA program founded on formal, published research and my own qualitative research. This new model includes common experiences for each class level such as regular meetings and yearly events to establish a cohort culture. In completing this project, I advance recommendations that can be utilized to create a well-rounded PSA model that can be implemented in the Honors College for years to come.

### **Background Information**

The Honors College has a long-standing history at BGSU. In 1978, BGSU founded the University Honors Program, which later transitioned to an Honors College in 2013. The Honors College states that its mission is “to create a community of scholars through an emphasis on

personal and intellectual development and preparation for global citizenship<sup>1</sup>.” Emphasizing critical thinking, interdisciplinary connections, original scholarship, and access to leadership and professional development opportunities, the Honors College has a variety of advantages to offer its students. Some of these advantages include priority scheduling, small classes, superior faculty, and greater opportunities for research and learning. More information on the BGSU Honors College can be accessed on its official website: [www.bgsu.edu/honors](http://www.bgsu.edu/honors).

The PSA is awarded to a select-group of incoming, high-achieving, first-year students at BGSU who have been admitted into the Honors College. Students with a 3.8 - 4.0 unweighted grade point average and a 30 (or higher) ACT composite score or 1390 (or higher) SAT score may be considered for the scholarship competition. Potential scholars are invited to the PSA Scholar Weekend which consists of a banquet dinner Friday evening and individual interviews on Saturday that are conducted by BGSU and Honors College faculty, staff, and current PSA scholars. The top interviewees are offered a full-tuition scholarship and the opportunity to be a member of the PSA cohort. More information about the PSA scholarship can be found on the BGSU Honors College website ([www.bgsu.edu/psa](http://www.bgsu.edu/psa)).

Much of the information on the PSA’s history has diminished over the years, but when this scholarship program was originally created, it was called the Centennial Scholarship. The original Centennial Scholarship was awarded to students selected by the Office of Admissions who had a 3.8 - 4.0 unweighted grade point average and a 30 (or higher) ACT composite score or 1200 (or higher) SAT composite score. According to Adrea Spoon, the Director of Admissions at BGSU, the Centennial Scholarship became known as the “Full Centennial Scholarship” when it

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<sup>1</sup> Information on the mission and vision of the BGSU Honors College can be found on the Honors College’s official website: [www.bgsu.edu/honors](http://www.bgsu.edu/honors).

became affiliated with the Honors Program. The Full Centennial Scholarship was a full-tuition award, whereas its new counterpart, the Centennial Scholarship, awarded recipients roughly eighty percent of tuition. Recipients of the Full Centennial Scholarship were Honors Program members who participated in a weekend identical to the current PSA Scholar Weekend. This scholarship was a financial award, so there were minimal requirements expected of recipients upon their arrival to BGSU, such as maintaining a 3.0 GPA.

As the program has developed in recent years, it has undergone multiple name changes and the addition of a four-year program model for students. This model outlines requirements that scholars are expected to complete during their time at BGSU each academic year. The scholarship came to be known as the Award of High Distinction, only to be renamed once again during the 2016-2017 academic year to the Presidential Scholars Award per the request of President Emeritus Mazey. Over the course of the past two academic years during my time as an undergraduate student and PSA recipient, the program has functioned under two different models. The 2015-2016 model (hereafter called model A) can be found in Appendix A and the 2016-2017 model (hereafter called model B) can be found in Appendix B.

Under model A, PSA recipients were supposed to meet regularly after their Opening Weekend gathering for “group training,” but no explanation of these meetings is provided in the model. First-year recipients were also required to participate in the scholarship competition weekend. By the end of their first year, they were to have started working on their I-plan, which is a four-year graduation planner. For the following three years, scholars were to meet once a semester and participate in the Scholar Weekend during the spring semester. In their second year under this model, recipients were to become mentors for the incoming PSA recipients and enroll

in an Honors Seminar or complete an equivalent critical thinking event<sup>2</sup>. In their third year, scholars were to create a personal philosophy statement with an accompanying paper or visual representation. Finally, in their senior year, scholars were to have regular advising meetings to help prepare all necessary career materials (i.e., resumes, cover letters, etc.) or graduate school application materials (i.e., personal statements, resumes, etc.).

Under the current PSA model (model B), additional requirements were added onto the previous model. Requirements for first-year scholars are the same with the addition of a holiday party in the fall and a service activity in the spring. Second-year students are now required to attend the Great Ideas Desserts and Discussion event and to complete a leadership, programming, or service activity in addition to the requirements outlined in Model A. The additional requirements for third-year students include interviewing potential scholars, meeting with professional mentors, attending a forum about research for their Honors Project, presenting a TED talk on their personal philosophy statement, and planning the senior dinner. Lastly, senior PSA recipients are required to create a reflection video and defend their Honors Project in addition to the previously outlined responsibilities. These additions represent the development the PSA has undergone over the years, but this does not mean that the program cannot be enhanced further to better the experience of all recipients.

### **Reasoning Behind Project**

Despite the developments outlined above in the PSA program, there are areas that can be improved to increase the effectiveness of the program. Effectiveness is defined here as the

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<sup>2</sup>An equivalent critical thinking event is an event that is approved by Honors College faculty and staff associated with the PSA to take the place of the Honors Seminar. These events are expected to challenge and further develop the scholar's critical thinking skills. Examples of equivalent critical thinking events in the past have included attending book discussions, facilitating a Great Ideas and Desserts discussion, etc.



programs ability to build a community culture among PSA scholars that promotes their personal, intellectual, and professional development and growth. As a current PSA recipient, I can attest that there are relatively few requirements for which I have been held accountable. For example, both models state that first-year recipients should meet regularly, and second through fourth-year students should meet once a semester. Unfortunately, I have only met with my PSA cohort twice in my academic career at BGSU. The first time was during the kick-off meeting before the start of classes, and the second was during a holiday party hosted at the Honors College Dean's home. In regards to the I-plan requirements, I completed my I-plan during my first semester at BGSU and have not even opened it since. There was no mention of any sort of reflective event for my I-plan, and I am not aware of any reflective event being held. To my knowledge, these experiences I have outlined are the norm for PSA scholars rather than the exception or outlier.

In addition to these inconsistencies between the requirements and their execution, I have heard many of my fellow scholars express concerns regarding the program. One concern includes the sentiment that that the PSA program is presented as a prestigious accolade during the competition process. Upon arrival, however, they feel that this sense of prestige fades. The scholars I have conversed with often attribute this to a lack of community or connection among cohort members. In fact, two PSA alumni that graduated in Spring 2017 expressed in a conversation with me that they only knew two or three other people their age that received the PSA, including each other. I have heard other recipients voice similar concerns about barely seeing, interacting with, or knowing their fellow cohort members.

I have also heard concerns that the yearly requirements are not clear or well-publicized. I served as a first-year scholar mentor this past academic school year (2016-2017) and my mentee came to me multiple times worried about requirements that she "didn't even know existed." Both

my mentee and the Dean of the Honors College stated that there was a miscommunication about the Honors Seminar requirement for second-year scholars<sup>3</sup>. This presented scheduling issues for many students that could not fit an Honors Seminar into their course schedule for the Fall 2017 semester, and eventually the scholars got other members of the administration involved.

If anything, I believe that these inconsistencies in the models, their execution, and the thoughts expressed by recipients demonstrate a need to revise and edit the PSA program model. I know I am not the only one who has experienced a sense of isolation or confusion as a member of the PSA program. In fact, I think that my own experiences and the opinions expressed above are widespread throughout the PSA program. To combat this, a clear, concise four-year model must be developed to ensure that scholars are not only aware of but are held accountable for the requirements of being a PSA recipient. I believe that there are additions and revisions that could be made to the current model or could serve as a basis for a new program model that would positively impact the experience of the PSA scholars and strengthen the program as a whole.

### **Goals and Objectives**

In order to determine what revisions and additions would best benefit the program, I used formal, published research and my own qualitative research, which served as sources of reference and guidance for the recommendations. In terms of formal research, I looked at both theoretical research and practical research, which I define as research that incorporates an element of practice (i.e., interviews, surveys, observation, etc.) into its methodology and results. My qualitative research consists of information I have gained from current PSA students during

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<sup>3</sup> Scholars finishing their first year were reminded of the Honors Seminar requirement following class scheduling. Many scholars were unaware of this requirement in the active model (Appendix B) and felt that this “late notice” was unfair as they were unable to fit a seminar into their schedule.

focus groups pertaining to their thoughts and opinions about the current PSA program, as well as areas of improvement for the program. I then utilized the information I gained from both forms of research to guide the proposed model and its recommended revisions and additions.

Completing this project promoted my individual growth personally, academically, and professionally. Part of my desire to complete this Honors Project was to leave my impact on the BGSU Honors College, and more specifically, the PSA program, both of which have been a defining feature in my undergraduate career. I wanted to give back to both the PSA program and the Honors College, which have enriched my time here at BGSU. Academically, I have little experience with conducting qualitative research, so this project gave me the opportunity to learn about and conduct such research. Professionally, I hope to pursue a career in Student Affairs. Analyzing and providing program recommendations for the PSA program helped me to expand my knowledge of higher education research and theories while providing me with hands-on experience in various functional areas of the student affairs field.

Completing this project was not only intended to impact myself, but the very institutions it is a part of—BGSU and the BGSU Honors College. The Honors College will have the ability to make use of the recommendations in this proposal to guide the creation of a four-year model that can be used for the PSA program for years to come. Doing so will also help the PSA program promote the intellectual and personal development that is a key component of the Honors College's mission. My hope is that improving the PSA program will also benefit BGSU. By helping to grow this program, the university will be able to continue to use this scholarship program as a promotional and recruitment tool for the Honors College by targeting high achieving students.

### **Research Questions**

In order to provide the best possible recommendations for the PSA program, I sought to determine: 1) the effectiveness of the current PSA model; and 2) potential programs and activities that could meet the needs and desires of students while filling the gaps of previous models. To help address these two research concerns, I sought to answer the following guiding research questions: What are the current strengths and weaknesses of the PSA models? What improvements would current recipients like to see? What activities can be implemented in the PSA program to foster growth in first-years? Sophomores? Juniors? Seniors? How do students develop (individually, academically, socially, and professionally) during their time at college? How does college foster this development in students? How can the natural development of college students be fostered and supported? What activities can be created to foster this growth? How can a sense of community be built within and between PSA groups? How is a sense of community established within and between groups? How can an effective cohort model be established within the existing and future PSA recipient groups? What are the components of an effective cohort? What programming can the Honors College accommodate in terms of staffing and budget? What does a manageable, enriching, and effective program look like within the BGSU Honors College?

### **Methodology**

In order to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the thoughts and experiences of current PSA scholars, I conducted qualitative research, specifically relying on aspects phenomenological research. Phenomenological research is based on the use of first-hand experiences in understanding an event or series of events, such as membership in the PSA program. According to Adams and Van Manen (2017), phenomenological research is a practice commonly used in

psychology, education, counseling, and other related fields to help find meaning in everyday experiences. Ellis (2016) defines phenomenological research as the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from a first-person point of view. In both articles, the authors stress that the first-person perceptions and experiences provide valuable insight on the impact and effect the experience being studied has on the individual.

I believed that phenomenology was the best research method suited for this project due to its emphasis on the person's experience during the event, or sequence of events, called the "lived moment" (Adams & Van Manen, 2017, Ellis, 2016). Current members of the PSA program have had their own unique experiences in the program. By focusing on those experiences, I believed that current PSA members could help me determine what desires and needs from the PSA program were, and that these, in turn, would serve as guidance for the additions and revisions I wanted to propose for the new program model. A fundamental principle of phenomenology is that individuals who have experienced the event(s), such as PSA programming, are the greatest source of information for improvement. Current scholars have the most knowledge about the experiences that have resulted from the current program model (model B) and its predecessor (model A). I believed that the opinions and experiences expressed in the focus groups would represent a norm of the PSA program experience overall. I believed that this information would allow me to target the needs of both current and future scholars. The scholars represented the full spectrum of program participants, from new students to graduating seniors. Each class level was asked to discuss and/or speculate on specific issues incurred each year that the PSA program could address in order to help strengthen it for current and future students.

Traditionally, post-reflective thoughts and opinions, or the thoughts and opinions generated by reflecting upon a past experience, are not normally included in phenomenological

research. Ellis (2016) as well as Adams and Van Manen (2017) state that phenomenological research does not include the post-reflective thoughts and opinions of the participants because it is believed that these post-reflective thoughts and opinions stray from and even change the meaning of the lived moment from its “organic meaning,” or the meaning of an experience while it is occurring. However, I believed that the elimination and lack of focus on the post-reflective components of the interviewees’ experiences would have left much to be desired for my project. I believed omitting post-reflective thoughts would have created unnecessary holes in the project, as I did not just want to know what participation in the program looked like from a member’s standpoint. I wanted to determine what students felt was lacking from the program, and what areas of their college experience they felt the PSA program could assist them in. To do so, I needed to move beyond trying to solely understand what participation in the program was like at the time it was experienced, and instead, take their opinions into account. This would allow me to address any issues or concerns they might have in the new four-year model, including the implementation of any recommendations they made after reflecting on their experiences. I felt that excluding their opinions and thoughts would minimize the information I had available in crafting the proposed programs, possibly reducing their effectiveness in potential future implementation.

The use of interviews and focus groups to gauge student opinions for program analysis and improvement has been utilized by other honors programs in the past. An article by Young III, Story, Tarver, Weinauer, Keeler, and McQuirter’s (2016) served as a point of reference for my project, as they explained a similar research project done at the University of Southern Mississippi’s (USM) Honors College. The researchers stated that they made use of aspects of phenomenological research to analyze current students’ perspectives on programming and

experiences among current Honors students. They made use of the subjective experiences described by the participants in focus groups to redesign and reshape the direction and procedures of the USM Honors College. According to the researchers, these changes had a positive effect on the student experience. For me, this paper served as a source of inspiration in my decision to use fundamental aspects of phenomenological research with the inclusion of subjective experiences as the results of this research study had a positive impact on the perceived experiences of the Honors College participants in terms of connectedness and opportunity. I believed that replicating a similar methodology would allow me to consider all of the potential additions and revisions for the PSA program that would have the greatest positive impact on the experiences of scholars in the future.

In August 2017, I began the necessary process to gain the approval of the Institutional Review Board (hereafter IRB) at BGSU to proceed with my research study. I applied to conduct my focus groups under an exempt application, as these focus groups held minimal risk to participants of the study. I received approval on October 28, 2017, from IRB and began the necessary steps to recruit for and host my focus groups. I planned to host a total of five focus groups, one for each cohort as well as a focus group for members of all of the cohorts (which was not attended by any participants). By organizing my focus groups in this way, I hoped to achieve a sense of each cohort's shared experience in the program as my goal was to craft revisions and additions that would contribute to the shared experience of cohorts. In hosting an all-cohort focus group, I hoped to encourage cross-cohort conversations to determine if there were any similarities or differences in the experiences individual cohorts had and the desires they had for the program. An IRB-approved email was sent to all members of the PSA program inviting them to participate in the focus groups, as well as providing them with details about the

times and dates of each focus group, the purpose of the focus groups, and their rights as participants. Scholars were invited to fill out a Google Form in order for me to gauge the approximate number of participants so that I could purchase pizza for them, which was an incentive advertised as part of their participation.

In November of the Fall 2017 semester, I began holding focus groups with each of the PSA cohorts. Adams and Van Manen (2017) recommend making use of individual interviews to attain these lived moment descriptions. While Ellis (2016) states that either interviews or focus groups can be utilized to obtain this data, he recommends the use of interviews over focus groups as focus groups tend to result in a discussion that incorporates post-reflective thoughts, and thus deviates from what an experience at the time of participation was like. For the purpose of my research, I opted to utilize focus groups. Billups (2012) stated that collective and shared experiences of participants foster discussions that promote self-disclosure. These discussions, in turn, allow researchers to identify important views and themes related to the issue. I believed that there were important ideas and opinions that would become apparent through the conversations of PSA recipients about their experiences. My decision to host these as focus groups, rather than as individual interviews, was based off the idea that the conversations that I hoped would spur from the focus group environment would provide me with the largest and broadest range of data possible. I believed a focus group setting would promote a discussion that would tease out ideas, experiences, and opinions that may not have been expressed otherwise as individual interviewees may not have thought of topics brought up in the focus group session on an independent basis. In Young III et. al's (2016) research, focus groups were utilized to collect data. The purpose of their research aligns with the purpose of my project—program advancement and enhancement. This similarity in research purpose also influenced my decision to utilize focus groups. Lastly, focus



groups were more practical for the timeline of my project. I was cognizant of the fact that I would not have time to hold individual interviews for my target sample population (roughly 40 scholars total, 10 from each cohort) with my current course load.

In terms of hosting the focus groups, I based the organization and execution of the sessions on the suggestions made in Billups' article. Billups (2012) provides multiple suggestions for hosting focus groups with college students, including: hosting three to five sessions with six to ten participants each, limiting session length to a maximum of 60 minutes, holding the sessions in a familiar environment to students, and including a note-taker in each session separate from the facilitator. Based on these recommendations, my goal was roughly ten scholars in each focus group and for each session to last no more than an hour. Each session was held in the Honors Den, as it was an area that was familiar to all of the scholars as a result of their membership and participation in the Honors College. Originally, I intended to include a separate note-taker based on the suggestion made by Billups (2012). Given IRB's strict confidentiality policy, I decided that this component was not necessary as it would prolong the IRB approval process. Each session was recorded on an external recording device based on the recommendation of Billups (2012) and Kinzie (2012), who stated that audio recording the session allows for more precise and accurate data analysis and/or documentation after each session. Participants of the focus groups signed consent documents in accordance with IRB policies prior to the commencement of each session. These documents granted me permission to record the session and utilize any information they provided in my proposal with the stipulation that their identity would remain confidential and not be published in the proposal.

Following each session, I re-listened to each recording and reviewed my notes from the session to write up a summary of the session. The notes were taken on my private computer

during each session. The primary focus of these summaries (located in the “Focus Group Summaries” section of this proposal) are the themes, or common thoughts and opinions expressed by the participants, from the focus group. Kinzie (2012) calls this “inductive analysis,” a process in which a researcher looks at the specific statements of all the participants to derive common ideas or themes. This idea of inductive analysis is a key component of phenomenology according to Adams and Van Manen (2017), as well as Ellis (2016). The purpose of inductive analysis is to determine thematic threads, or common experiences or opinions expressed among participants. In conducting inductive analysis and summarizing the themes of all of the focus groups, I feel that I was able to determine the greatest strengths and weaknesses of the current program. This style of analysis also allowed me to determine the similarities that existed in the participants’ experiences and recommendations for the program, helping me to determine what revisions and additions would benefit the current model and/or future models. Following the write-up of each of the focus group summaries, the recordings were permanently deleted from my personal computer and the external recording device upon which they were housed.

### **Focus Group Summaries**

The focus groups took place on November 14 (2014 cohort), November 16 (2015 cohort), November 28 (2016 cohort), and November 30 (2017 cohort). There were a total of seven scholars involved in the focus groups (2014: 2, 2015: 1, 2016: 3, 2017:1), with five of the participants being female and the other two being male. The focus groups lasted no more than 30 minutes. The participants were asked the questions found in Appendix C and were given the opportunity to converse with their peers about their responses. Each session was recorded on an external recording device until I was able to write-up a thematic analysis and summary of each

focus group. The summaries of these focus groups will serve as the primary support for the proposed items found in the discussion section of this proposal.

### **2014 Cohort Session**

Attended by two scholars (one male, one female) of the 2014 PSA cohort, this focus group was held on November 14, 2017. Both participants emphasized that the financial component of this scholarship was the primary reason for their interest and ultimate participation in the program. While both participants cited Scholar Weekend as a significant and enjoyable experience in the program, they also stated that this recruitment event was the only significant event they participated in. Neither scholar knew the mission and identity of the PSA program, but felt that it possibly emphasized academic excellence due to the credentials required to receive and maintain membership. When asked what the mission and identity of the program could be, both scholars were enthusiastic about the idea of further engaging PSA recipients in the Honors College recruitment process and focusing the program around recruitment and academics.

When asked about the personal development that occurs in each year of college, both scholars were eager to draw on their own personal experiences. Both agreed that the first year of college primarily revolved around independent living, making connections, building relationships, and finding their niche within the university. They believed that the second year revolved more around building their self-esteem and confidence. One of the scholars also stated the second year was for cultural exploration as a result of their participation in a study abroad program. Both scholars agreed the third year of college was focused on post-undergraduate life. They stated that much of their time during this phase of their collegiate career centered on resume building, networking, internships, and professional development opportunities. As current fourth-year students, both scholars felt they were more focused on strengthening and

maintaining the friendships they had fostered at BGSU and interviewing for graduate programs and/or full-time jobs. One student felt this year was defined by a sense of stabilization in relation to their chosen career path and current relationships.

The scholars were hesitant to offer suggestions to improve the PSA program, and one of the scholars stated that they believed this was a result of the lack of connection they felt to the program as a whole. In terms of yearly programs, the scholars recommended bonding events for first-year scholars to help them strengthen the connections within their cohort. They also recommended programs geared towards graduate school and job searching for third- and fourth-year scholars to engage in. More broadly, the scholars recommended the implementation of regular (once a semester) PSA meetings to encourage community-building across cohorts, a class/seminar focused on the Honors Project, a yearly alumni reunion and networking event, and a spotlight in the Honors Scroll specifically geared towards scholar activities and achievements. Both participants felt that the program would be better for participants if there was more opportunity for involvement on and beyond Scholar Weekend.

### **2015 Cohort Session**

This focus group was held on November 16, 2017, and was attended by one member of the 2015 cohort (female). This scholar was introduced to the program by an admissions counselor who recommended that she apply due to her GPA and test scores. The primary incentive for her participation was the full-tuition scholarship. This scholar believed that her participation in the program mainly centered on Scholar Weekend and the mentor program, expressing that there were few activities and programs for her to get involved in beyond these two. This scholar was unsure of the mission and identity of this program aside from the financial scholarship but felt the PSA program's identity could revolve around representing the Honors

College as a type of ambassador, or someone who would assist in Honors College outreach seeing as recipients represented the “top of the Honors College.” She stated that the scholars could aid the Honors College with alumni relations, representing the Honors College when alumni and donors visited campus.

When it came to each year of college and her personal development, this student felt her first-year was focused on “survival” and independent living. She believed the second-year was defined by the development of personal independence, including the questioning of the actions, thoughts, ideals, and procedures that she had grown up with. This student stated that her third-year has primarily revolved around taking charge of her academic journey as she is almost exclusively enrolled in courses related to her major. She speculated that her final year would revolve almost exclusively around the transition from college to her career. To aid in this development and personal growth, she felt that it would be beneficial to have regular meetings during the first-year to build a sense of community and to engage scholars in service opportunities. She recommended a revamped mentorship program for second-year students, but added the caveat that mentors and mentees needed to have more opportunities to interact with one another prior to matching to ensure that quality relationships are formed. For third-year students, she recommended implementing extra Honors Project assistance for scholars. Lastly, she recommended a professional development seminar to help scholars market and make their experiences in the PSA program applicable outside of BGSU. Her only other recommendation for the program aside from this year-specific programming was the implementation of an alumni networking event for current and past scholars to talk about their experiences at BGSU and in their post-undergraduate careers.

**2016 Cohort Session**

Three scholars (female) from the 2016 cohort attended this focus group held on November 28, 2017. When asked about their interest in the PSA program, all of them cited the full-tuition scholarship as the primary reason they applied for the program. One student, however, participated in the program because she assumed there would be leadership and professional development opportunities for recipients. Her assumption was based on the perceived prestige of the award, as she felt that a scholarship geared towards high achieving students would incorporate some sort of leadership training. Another student stated that she also accepted the award because she felt it would be a good resume builder for post-graduate work and her future career. All three scholars stated that Scholar Weekend, the opening week meeting, and the mentor program were their sole experiences in the PSA program. Unfortunately, they expressed concerns about the mentor program as many of their mentorship pairings failed to result in productive and supportive relationships.

None of the scholars were able to state the mission and identity of the PSA program, but they speculated that the mission revolved around collaboration, scholarship, and leadership. One of the participants attempted to research the PSA program prior to the focus group and stated that the online presence of the PSA program lacked substantial and/or in-depth information. These scholars felt that the PSA program lacked online image or reputation across campus as the program was almost exclusively contained within the Honors College. One of the scholars brainstormed the following mission statement for the PSA Program: “To provide scholars an opportunity to enhance their development as students and garner experience in leadership and service.” The participants also felt that a portion of the PSA’s mission could be to provide networking opportunities such as research, co-ops, or internships for its participants.

In terms of personal growth and development, the participants felt that the first-year of college centered on independence and finding a personal routine. The second-year primarily focuses on settling into the college lifestyle as all three scholars stated that their coursework increased in difficulty during this year. These scholars speculated that the third-year focuses on research and internships (career preparation), whereas the fourth-year focuses on personal relationships and preparations for life after their undergraduate careers. The scholars felt that matching students with a faculty advisor within their major and engaging students in service would be beneficial in the first-year. For the second year, they recommended engaging students further in volunteering and leadership opportunities. They felt that scholars should be given resources and further assistance in finding co-ops and internships during their third years. One of the scholars also expressed interest in offering graduate-level courses for scholars during their third and fourth years. The last recommendation the scholars made for fourth-year students was a networking program involving students and local business owners. Aside from these year-specific programs, these scholars had two other recommendations for regular PSA programs. First, they recommended a yearly holiday party and/or retreat for all PSA cohorts to help build connections across the cohorts. Second, they wanted to create a lounge space specifically for PSA recipients where they could gather to work on assignments and/or get to know one another.

### **2017 Cohort Session**

This focus group was attended by one member (male) of the 2017 PSA cohort on November 30, 2017. When asked the reason for his participation in the program, this scholar stated that his participation was solely because of the full-tuition scholarship as “nothing aside from the scholarship was advertised.” The student stated that he has not had any experiences with the PSA program since coming to BGSU. When asked about the mission and identity of the

PSA program, he stated that there was not a mission because the program lacked any activities or structure. He believed that the mission and identity should revolve around community service, academics, and critical thinking, citing the Honors Scholars as a model that this program should mimic and adapt. When asked about his thoughts on the personal growth students experience during their time in college, this student simply stated that the first-year seemed to be academically focused on “growth of thought,” specifically as a result of the Critical Thinking components of the Honors College requirements. He did not want to speculate about any other academic years, but he recommended an event for PSA scholars that focused on the practical application of the skills they are taught in their Critical Thinking courses. His only other recommendation for the program was regularly-scheduled meetings for scholars to engage in critical conversations with one another. The student appeared extremely anxious throughout the session and expressed on multiple occasions that he did not feel like he knew much about the program at all, despite his membership.

### **Discussion of Recommendations for the Program**

After reviewing the recommendations and comments made by the participants of the focus groups, I came to the consensus that revisions and additions needed to be made in future models of the program to enhance the scholar’s overall experience. In this section, I will further explain and develop the recommendations made by the scholars and the supportive research that exists for these recommendations. I will first discuss the need for the PSA program to develop and brand a clear mission and identity for the program moving forward and propose potential options for each. I will then discuss and elaborate on specific programs and activities that could be implemented in the PSA program that compose the proposed four-year model found at the beginning of this proposal.



### **Mission, Identity, and Branding**

A major component of any successful program or organization is its mission and identity, with which everything else is aligned. While the PSA program has successfully sustained itself since its development, it lacks a firm foundation in terms of its mission and identity, as well as the branding of these two elements. While the PSA may have a specific mission statement of which I am unaware, none of the focus group participants were able to articulate the mission and/or identity aside from the financial scholarship of the program. When asked to speculate as to what they could be, their speculations were inconsistent and broad among and across cohorts. The 2017 cohort participant believed that no such mission or identity existed because the program lacked any activities or structure. One of the reasons behind this could be the lack of branding that exists for the PSA program, especially in terms of its online presence. One of the 2016 cohort members stated that she had attempted to research the scholarship prior to the focus group. Unfortunately, her online search came up empty as she said the only real information online is how to apply and/or be considered for the scholarship. The fact that participants of the program could not articulate or access information on the PSA program demonstrates a clear issue in terms of the program's mission, identity, and branding.

To remedy this situation, I believe that one of the first revisions that needs to be made in the PSA program is the creation and branding of a clear identity and mission statement. Seeing as most mission statements are drawn from a program's identity, the first step will be to create a distinct identity for the PSA program. My proposal for the new identity of the PSA program would be **self-authorship of engaged and global citizenship**. In looking at the mission

statement and objectives of the Honors College<sup>4</sup>, members can expect to “...enjoy a lifelong commitment to engaged citizenship...[and] expect to engage in leadership and professional development opportunities which lead to self-authorship.” The Honors College goes on to define “self-authorship” as “...the capacity to internally define a coherent belief system and identity that coordinates engagement in mutual relations with the larger world.” I believe that the PSA program should focus in more detail on the elements of self-authorship, engaged, and global citizenship of the Honors College’s objectives and mission in creating its own unique identity. To me, self-authorship of engaged and global citizenship is defined by an individual’s internal determination and coordination of how their values, beliefs, ideologies, and goals will coexist and guide the manner in which they contribute to their local, national, and global societies. This could be done by providing scholars with leadership, academic, and service opportunities where they could explore and determine what type of citizen they want to be after graduation in a local, national, and global context. This identity would also align with the overall mission of BGSU<sup>5</sup>, which states that “Students are prepared for lifelong career growth, lives of engaged citizenship and leadership in a global society.” I believe that this identity would help to differentiate the PSA program from other programs on campus, such as the Alumni Laureate Scholars or the President’s Leadership Academy, providing scholars with a firmly-founded identity that aligns with the mission of both the Honors College and university at large.

In addition to an identity, the PSA program also needs to institute and brand its mission statement, which would directly coincide with and support its identity. Participants of the focus

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<sup>4</sup> Information on the mission and vision of the BGSU Honors College can be found on the Honors College’s official website: [www.bgsu.edu/honors](http://www.bgsu.edu/honors).

<sup>5</sup> Information on the mission of BGSU can be found on its official website: [www.bgsu.edu/about/mission](http://www.bgsu.edu/about/mission).

groups made multiple recommendations of what they believe components of this mission statement should be, including Honors College recruitment, ambassadors for alumni relations, academics, leadership, community service, and critical thinking. A participant from the 2016 cohort drafted the following mission statement as a potential example: “To provide scholars an opportunity to enhance their development as students and garner experience in leadership and service.” Seeing as there was overlap in the ideas and suggestions made, I feel that these ideas should be considered in the formulation of a mission statement and discussed further by Honors College staff, faculty, and PSA scholars. Maher (2005) stresses the importance of including students in the decision-making process for cohort programs to be successful. Seeing as the mission statement will directly impact the future of the program, I believe that scholar involvement should be incorporated in the development process of the mission statement. Once this mission and identity are established, it is essential that they be published in all online and physical media pertaining to the scholarship program so that current and potential scholars have a clear understanding of the purpose of the scholarship and their involvement in the program, something that has been lacking thus far. I firmly believe that if the PSA is to continue in the future and develop into a cohesive program, then it is essential that it develops a unique identity and mission statement that is branded across campus, as well as online and its various physical advertisements.

### **Recommendations for Additions and Revisions to the Program**

The following section is intended to explain the proposed additions and revisions to the PSA programming model based on the recommendations of the focus groups participants in greater detail. The four-year model at the beginning of this proposal is composed exclusively of the programs that the participants expressed they would like to have added or revised. In

presenting these recommendations in this way, I hope to demonstrate where the participants and I felt that the programs would be most effective in the four-year model. While presented exclusively and outside of any of the previous models, these recommendations can be considered for implementation in the current PSA model (see Appendix B), or as a basis for a new four-year model.

For the purpose of clarity and ease of access, the recommendations found in the model are presented in three tiers. These divisions were made based on how quickly the recommendations could be implemented into the program in relation to the resources and personnel required, as well as the extent of the network necessary in order to implement them. Tier One is comprised of program additions and revisions that would require a minimal amount of personnel and resources and could therefore be implemented the soonest. All of the first-tier recommendations are programs that already exist within the Honors College or would exclusively incorporate Honors College personnel and resources. Tier Two is comprised of program additions and revisions that would take a longer amount of time to implement due to the resources and personnel that would be required in implementing them. These second-tier recommendations would require the use of resources (largely financial) that I have limited knowledge of and/or access to, but would largely remain within the Honors College community<sup>6</sup>. Tier Three is comprised of program additions and revisions that would either require resources and logistics I am not knowledgeable about or already exist elsewhere on campus for reference and/or utilization. These third-tier recommendations extend outside of the Honors College community and require a greater expenditure of resources and personnel, thus requiring the

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<sup>6</sup> The Honors College community refers to current members and alumni of the Honors College and/or PSA program, as well as the affiliated faculty and staff.

greatest amount of time to integrate and implement in the PSA program. The recommendations are divided into these tiers as follows:

Tier One	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Regular Meetings             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) First-Year Monthly Cohort Meetings</li> <li>b) All-Cohort Meetings</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Yearly Holiday Party</li> <li>3. Honors Project Seminar</li> <li>4. PSA Spotlight in the Honors Scroll</li> </ol>
Tier Two	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Revised Mentorship Program</li> <li>2. Volunteering and Leadership Opportunities (MLK Day of Service)</li> <li>3. Alumni Reunion and Networking Event</li> </ol>
Tier Three	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Graduate School and Job Search Workshops</li> <li>2. Graduate Level Course Enrollment</li> <li>3. First-Year Faculty Mentor Matching</li> <li>4. Networking with Local Businesses</li> <li>5. Designated PSA Lounge</li> </ol>

### **Tier One.**

#### *Regular Meetings: First-Year Monthly Cohort Meetings and All-Cohort Meetings*

The most common recommendation across the focus groups was that the PSA program should have regular meetings for all its members so that scholars could get to know their cohorts and cohorts could get to know one another. This component of regular meetings is also missing from either of the previous models (Appendix A and Appendix B). I believe that building a sense of community within and between the cohorts is essential in fostering further scholar engagement and involvement in the PSA program. More specifically, I propose that once-a-month meetings be instituted for first-year scholars and once-a-semester all-cohort meetings, when the upper-class scholars (first- through fourth-years) meet together, be instituted program-wide.

The importance of community within cohorts has been heavily researched. Maher (2005) found in her study that the meaning and influence of cohort membership was fluid and evolved

throughout the years, but that the first year of cohort membership is crucial in the development of a close-knit group. This finding supports the necessity of fostering more frequent meetings for the first-year cohort as the first year is instrumental in developing a cohort's sense of community. Martin, Goldwasser, and Galentino (2016) found that students involved in cohorts experienced closer bonds with their peers, and a statistically significant, positive correlation exists between the close bonds experienced by students and their self-reported satisfaction and engagement. Martin, et al. (2016) continues to state that institutions should use cohort formats to improve the bonds, satisfaction, engagement, and persistence of students. The scholars who participated in my focus groups expressed a desire for a greater sense of community, and research has found that regular meetings are not only essential in doing so, but that a close-knit cohort community has positive implications for the students involved, including satisfaction, engagement, and persistence.

First-year scholars are required to attend a meeting prior to the start of their first semester wherein the PSA coordinator and some second-year students discuss the expectations and requirements of the program. I believe that this meeting should remain intact in addition to the proposed regular meetings, acting as the first monthly meeting for first-year scholars. At this meeting, the days and times of the other monthly meetings for the remainder of the year should be presented so that these dates may be entered in their calendars. The purpose of these meetings would be to encourage and promote a sense of community among first-year scholars by giving them the opportunity to get to know one another. If the proposed identity is adopted, these meetings would also provide scholars with an opportunity to explore and think critically about engaged and global citizenship. These meetings could also focus on key developmental changes that occur during the first-year. In the focus groups, the scholars outlined the following as major

developmental changes they experienced in their first year: independent living, making connections, building relationships, finding their niche within the university, developing a routine, and growth of thought/critical thinking. While these topics do not necessarily directly relate to engaged and global citizenship, they might be utilized in the first meetings to establish communication amongst the scholars. First-year scholars could also be given the opportunity to think critically about each of these developmental changes and why they feel they are of such importance at this stage in their collegiate career. Given the size of the cohorts (roughly 18-25 scholars), these meetings could take place in the Honors Den or the Honors Classroom.

An alternative to the monthly meeting schedule proposed here would be to enroll all first-year scholars in a BGSU 1910H course. All first-year Honors students are required to take a one credit hour BGSU 1910H seminar as part of their transition to college. PSA scholars could be scheduled for a PSA-specific BGSU 1910H seminar wherein similar critical thinking topics pertaining to engaged and global citizenship could be explored. This would negate the necessity and potential scheduling difficulty of setting aside a specific monthly time for scholars to meet, as it would already be part of their course schedule. This alternative recommendation is currently being considered by the PSA coordinator for implementation in the upcoming academic school year.

For the upper-class cohorts, a regular meeting could be scheduled at the same time as one monthly first-year meeting each semester so that scholars have an opportunity to mingle and interact across cohorts. The focus of this meeting could once again be on engaged citizenship should this brand identity be adopted. To further differentiate this from the first-year meetings, however, these all-cohort meetings could be structured similar to the Great Ideas and Desserts event in order to incorporate the critical conversations component, as recommended in first-year

focus group. Given the larger scale of these meetings, reservations in a larger academic space would need to be arranged to accommodate all of the scholars. One alternative would be to schedule this all-cohort meeting on a separate day from a monthly first-year meeting. A second alternative would be to open the BGSU 1910H seminar for upper-class scholars to attend when available, allowing for the upper-class scholars to engage in the conversations taking place in this class. Further thought would need to go into scheduling seminar attendance for upper-class scholars and space allocations with this alternative.

There will be challenges in implementing the first-year and all-cohort regular meetings, but research suggests that regular meetings are essential in creating close communities. The biggest challenge will come in instituting these meetings and finding a day and time that fits everyone's schedule. One way to combat this would be to release the meeting schedule prior to the school year and to schedule the meetings at times when classes are not in session. More specifically, meetings could be scheduled for a generic time each month (example: the first Friday of every month at 4 p.m.). In doing so, the planning process for these meetings would be a one-time thing as this schedule could be utilized in subsequent years because of its vague, and thus reusable nature. Seeing as it is impossible to avoid scheduling conflicts, further thought should go into a potential absence policy. For example, first-year scholars may have permission to miss two meetings per semester and second- through fourth-year scholars must attend at least one of the all-cohort meetings in the year. To better aid in scheduling meetings and establishing an absence policy, further research should be conducted on similar cohort-style scholarship programs.

The other consideration that needs to be made prior to adding these regular meetings to the program is the planning and execution of the meetings themselves. While the easiest answer



would be to have the PSA coordinator plan and conduct these meetings, their schedule may not permit an appropriate amount of time to devote to this. For that reason, I also recommend the institution of PSA upper-class internships, wherein third- and fourth-year scholars could apply for a position where they would work with the PSA coordinator to plan and conduct these meetings themselves (denoted in the proposed model as “Leadership within PSA Program”). The interns would need to meet with the PSA coordinator regularly (weekly or bi-weekly) to discuss their progress on the upcoming meetings and events. This position would likely be a volunteer position, similar to an organization’s executive board position, as the Honors College likely does not have the funds to pay these individuals. These interns could also be assigned a variety of other tasks within the proposed model, and I will note these opportunities throughout the remainder of the discussion section. The PSA coordinator could also consider hiring another individual or adding this responsibility to another Honors College staff member’s requirements. This would require financial and contractual knowledge of which I am unaware.

An alternative to having the PSA coordinator or upper-class scholar intern plan the meeting would be to have first-year scholars plan the meeting agendas. The PSA coordinator and/or upper-class scholar intern could be responsible for planning the first meeting agenda to demonstrate the expectations for these meetings. From there, first-year scholars could be given the opportunity to sign up as individuals or in groups to lead the meetings, which would be overseen by either the PSA coordinator or intern. This would provide the first-year scholars with a sense of ownership and responsibility for the growth of their cohort. In addition, this would also give scholars an opportunity to explore leadership within their cohort. Considerations would need to be made for the plausibility of this option. First-year scholars may lack the confidence and/or knowledge base to be able to comfortably lead a meeting of their peers.

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*Yearly Holiday Party*

One component of the current PSA model (Appendix B) is the yearly holiday party that takes place in December, prior to winter break. Scholars in the 2016 cohort focus groups mentioned this as an enjoyable event in the year. They also expressed interest in revising the event to be more comfortable for scholars. According to two of the members, having this event at an Honors College faculty/staff member's house can create a tense and uncomfortable environment for the students. The participants stated that being in these individuals' homes made them feel like they had to be overly professional, barring them from having the opportunity to converse freely with their peers and get to know them. While I feel that this event is beneficial in creating a sense of community, I believe that revisions are necessary to increase its effectiveness in building the bonds between scholars and the faculty/staff.

In studying cohorts, many researchers have determined that meetings outside of an academic context are extremely beneficial for developing the bonds between students. Lei, Gorelick, Short, Smallwood, and Wright-Porter (2011) emphasize in their article that the experiences students have outside of the classroom as a cohort are just as important in building a sense of community as those in the classroom. Similarly, Maher (2005) recommends designating times and activities to strengthen relationships within the cohort. Thus, the fact that programs such as holiday parties are not academically focused actually aids in the development of cohorts, demonstrating the importance of retaining this event in the future models.

While this event should be retained, I believe revisions need to be made to ensure the comfort of students. To do so, I believe that this event should take place in a neutral location, such as the Bowen-Thompson Student Union (hereafter Union) Ballroom or Olscamp Hall, or in

a place that is more comfortable for the scholars, such as the Honors Den. This event should also be expanded to include all of the cohorts, rather than just the first-year cohort which has been the norm. This would allow for the cohorts to continue to get to know one another, deepening the bonds and relationships across cohorts. There is potential for this event to have a theme, such as foods from different holiday traditions or traditional holiday foods for the scholars themselves. The proposed identity of engaged citizenship could also be infused into this party. Scholars could discuss the origins of the food that they brought and/or the significance of their family's traditional holiday food they contributed to the event. Another example of infusing the identity into the holiday party could be adopting a family and having the cohorts come together to purchase and deliver gifts to the adopted family.

The resources required for this event would vary based on the way this event is planned. The main monetary expenses to be considered include the costs of food, supplies for activities, and space reservations (specifically if the Union Ballroom or Olscamp Hall is reserved). By moving the holiday party to an on-campus location, I believe that the financial allocations for catering and space reservation would need to be taken into account. Hosting this event at an off-campus location negated both costs, which is one benefit of hosting the party at a faculty/staff member's private residence. Another consideration that would need to be made is the actual planning of the event. This is another program that the upper-class PSA interns could potentially be assigned to. Another option would be to invite a Tourism, Leisure, and Event Planning major at BGSU (preferably one also enrolled in the PSA program or Honors College) to do a practicum wherein they could gain experience planning the holiday party. Lastly, further research needs to be conducted to determine if there is greater potential for community development in on-campus

versus off-campus settings. Research should also be done to determine if student comfort contributes to community building.

Personally, I feel that this event should continue to be included in the PSA program model as I feel it helps to build a sense of community in the program. That being said, it could be argued that having a holiday party is not necessary to build this community and that a separate gathering could be planned outside of the holiday schedule. Further research needs to be done to consider the origins of this holiday party and its intentions, in addition to how its goals might align with those of the PSA program more broadly. Meeting at the holidays may be considered more convenient, as the winter holidays mark the end of one semester and beginning of another. Further consideration should be taken in analyzing the assumptions made in planning this gathering around the holidays and whether this time frame is truly the most convenient and effective in fostering a sense of community.

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### Honors Project Seminar

One of the requirements for all Honors College students, and thus the PSA scholars, is the completion of an Honors Project. There are specific courses that students enroll in to complete this project (HNRS 4980 and HNRS 4990). However, many of the participants in the focus groups stated that they would like to have a course specifically geared towards aiding them in preparing for these courses and the Honors Project as a whole. The Honors College currently offers such a course which focuses on helping students establish a process prior to entering the research process. Seeing as the majority of students complete their projects in their third- or fourth-years, I believe that students should be required to enroll in this Honors Project seminar course offered by the Honors College prior to enrolling in the Honors Project courses.

The Honors Project is viewed as the culmination of an Honors student's collegiate career wherein they have the opportunity to apply their critical thinking skills in an area that interests them. For PSA scholars, much of the rationale in having them enroll in this course is that it would help prepare them for the demands of the Honors Project. Many of the PSA scholars do not have to take the General Studies Writing (GSW) courses due to transfer credits from high school Advanced Placement or College Credit Plus courses. Those who do often find that these courses are lacking intellectual challenge and stimulation and fail to prepare them for the Honors Project itself. Thus, in instituting the Honors Project seminar as a requirement for members of the PSA program, I feel that the scholars would have the opportunity to learn more about time management, self-accountability, the role of faculty mentors, available resources, and funding opportunities.

In their discussions of fostering community among cohorts, many researchers have mentioned the benefits of having cohorts enroll in courses together. Lei, Gorelick, Short, Smallwood, and Wright-Porter (2011) found that having cohort members take the same course contributed to group cohesion, increased academic networks, shared purpose, and support amongst members. Having scholars enroll in the Honors Project seminar would allow them not only to further their connection as a cohort, but also to develop a shared purpose as Honors students and develop a sense of support through their shared classroom experience. Similarly, Laufgraben (2005) states that the purpose of any learning community is to enhance curriculum, support the student transition by helping them develop connections, extend the learning opportunities beyond the classroom, and empower students to be active in their own learning and academic careers. Seeing as Maher (2005) defines a cohort as a type of learning community, this purpose of enhancing the curriculum and empowering students in their academic career also

extends to cohorts such as the PSA program. By providing scholars with the opportunity to take a class to prepare them for their Honors Project, this addition to the program would empower scholars in their academic careers as honors students while also developing their connections with one another.

There would be little to no resource considerations that would need to be made in adding this course to the program model. In the 2017-2018 academic school year, the Honors College began offering this Honors Project seminar for its students to help them better understand the Honors Project requirements and begin the brainstorming process. Seeing as the class is already offered and staffed, there would be no additional expenditure of resources (monetary or personnel) aside from registering the scholars for the course. One challenge to consider with this recommendation is the addition of coursework for scholars, as this seminar would constitute an elective requirement. The majority of PSA scholars do not need additional elective credits, so an alternative would be to offer a workshop for scholars that covers similar material to the Honors Project seminar. Another alternative I considered in making this recommendation was to have scholars enroll in this seminar as a cohort during their second year, assuming there are enough sections to accommodate everyone. This alternative would introduce a multitude of issues, primarily in trying to schedule roughly 18-25 scholars from a variety of majors for a single course time. By requiring students to take the course at some point in their collegiate career prior to starting their project, I assert that the scholars will still have the opportunity to engage in shared classroom experiences, potentially with scholars from multiple cohorts while simultaneously avoiding major scheduling conflicts.

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*PSA Spotlight in the Honors Scroll*

The Honors College releases a regular publication to all of its students via email called the “Honors Scroll.” These communications include important dates for students as well as upcoming events in the Honors College and Honors Learning Community. During the focus group with the 2014 cohort, one of the participants made the statement that it would be nice to know what events and activities the other scholars were a part of so that they could potentially go and support them. Based on research conducted on developing and sustaining cohorts, I believe that providing PSA scholars with information about their cohort-mates and fellow scholarship recipients will allow them to strengthen their bond, not only as a cohort, but a full PSA community.

A multitude of research has been conducted relating to cohorts. Maher (2005) found that cohorts help to fulfill students’ need for affiliation in educational environments and can create strong emotional ties that reduce attrition in students and increase their sense of emotional support. In doing so, however, Maher (2005) recommends designating times and activities to strengthen relationships within the cohort. By providing scholars times and locations of events that other scholars are a part of, I believe that the scholars would be able to strengthen their shared sense of emotional support amongst the group. Similarly, Lei, Gorelick, Short, Smallwood, and Wright-Porter (2011) state that group cohesion, or the idea that social interdependence encourages individual goal achievement, is one of the primary factors in the positive institutional outcomes of cohorts. This addition to the program can then help to build the group cohesion of the cohorts as it will encourage social interdependence by providing scholars with information on their peers’ activities and events.

The “Honors Scroll” starts with a table of contents that lists all the included upcoming events for the Honors College and Honors Learning Community. These events receive their own specific subsequent pages that provide more information. For this proposed addition, I think another page should be added weekly entitled “PSA Spotlight,” which would give information on events and activities that PSA scholars will be involved in during the upcoming week. These events could be submitted by scholars via an online submission such as a Google Form. This PSA page could also include any important notes or news that PSA scholars would like to share with one another between the proposed regular meetings, such as life updates, interesting articles, etc. If this were adopted by the PSA program, however, the Honors College would need to consider whether similar spotlights should be designated for other Honors groups, such as the Honors Scholars and the Alumni Laureate Scholars. An alternative to the PSA Spotlight in the “Honors Scroll” would be to have a separate list serve for PSA scholars with similar information or a separate newsletter specifically for the PSA scholars.

The “Honors Scroll” is currently managed by the graduate student in the Honors College, so this individual could potentially take on the responsibility of incorporating the “PSA Spotlight” into the complete document. Another alternative would be to allow a PSA scholar to volunteer to create and send the “PSA Spotlight” page to the graduate student, or to have this be one of the responsibilities of the proposed upper-class intern positions. Seeing as this is a completely online publication that is already instituted into the PSA scholars’ regular communications from the Honors College, this proposed addition would not require any additional resources aside from additional time and/or personnel. An important consideration that needs to be taken into account with this recommendation is the frequency at which the “Honors Scroll” is viewed. Many Honors students fail to review the “Honors Scroll,” so analyzing the



effectiveness of the PSA Spotlight is an area for future research. One option might be to have a time allotted in the regular first-year and all-cohort meetings wherein scholars could discuss the events they attended and what they took away from the event.

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## **Tier Two.**

### *Revised Mentorship Program*

The mentorship program that currently exists between the second- and first-year PSA scholars was mentioned as one of the main programs of involvement by scholars in two of the four cohorts. I believe that the purpose of this mentorship program is to offer scholars an opportunity to foster more intimate relationships with upper-class students who can assist with their transition to BGSU, the Honors College, and the PSA program. Ideally, mentors and mentees should benefit from the opportunity to participate in meaningful mentorship relationships and the opportunity to learn from the experiences of one another. Unfortunately, scholars expressed that the pairings created within this mentorship program often fostered dysfunctional or completely nonexistent mentorship relationships as either (or both) the second-year mentor or first-year mentee failed to put effort into the relationship. This may be a result of the lack of mentorship training offered to second-year scholars as being a good mentor is a learned skill. While it could be argued that the ineffective nature of this current program is grounds to eliminate it completely, researchers Jeske and Rode (1999) found that strong mentoring relationships have been found to improve student performance, enhance self-confidence, increase satisfaction with college experiences and life, and increase student retention rates at the university. Thus, I believe that revisions need to be made to the current PSA

mentorship program to ensure that positive relationships are fostered between mentors and their mentees.

In looking at revising this mentorship program, I believe that the PSA program should keep the requirement of (bi)weekly meetings between first-year mentees and their second-year mentors. In their focus group, the 2015 cohort participant recommended that scholars have more opportunities to engage with one another prior to the matching process so that they might have an opportunity to get to know one another and make informed preferences. Seeing as I have proposed that first-year scholars have regular meetings, these meetings could be open to second-year scholars to attend. Another alternative would be to have a specific meeting devoted to a speed-date style of interaction wherein first- and second-year scholars could converse with one another. The matching process should be pushed back to the middle or end of the fall semester so that organic relationships can take root and guide mentorship matches.

Specific attention should also be given to the mentors prior to the matching process. Jeske and Rode (1999) state that the role of a mentor is to give specific comments, nurture confidence, and assist students in locating resources, so scholars could be briefed/trained in one of their final meetings of their first year on what mentorship looks like to guide their interactions the following year. In addition to these recommendations, further research needs to be conducted in analyzing mentorship programs that exist at the collegiate level. Another consideration that would need to be made is who would conduct the matching process. Seeing as the PSA coordinator and upper-class scholar interns may lack expertise in leadership and mentorship, the program should seek to find individuals within the Honors College and/or larger institution to

utilize for the matching process. One potential campus resource could be BGSU's Center for Leadership<sup>7</sup>.

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*Volunteering and Leadership Opportunities – MLK National Day of Service*

One of the current provisions of the current PSA program model (Appendix B) is that first-year scholars participate the MLK National Day of Service<sup>8</sup> event on campus. While this event has been classified as mandatory, none of the PSA scholars who participated in my focus group cited this as a memorable experience with the program. Despite this, participants did state that they would like to have greater opportunities for leadership and service with the program as they were under the impression that these were two significant portions of this scholarship program. Seeing as this was already a component of the PSA program model and participants asked for greater opportunities directly relating to this event, I believe that the MLK National Day of Service should be revised in future PSA models.

Within the confines of the proposed identity of self-authorship of engaged and global citizenship, I believe that scholars should be challenged to answer the following questions: 1) what does service mean to me? and; 2) how do I see myself impacting the community? Prior to the MLK National Day of Service, scholars could be posed these questions, potentially in their regular meetings during their first year. The Center for Community and Civic engagement could potentially be invited to attend a meeting and discuss the various opportunities within the

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<sup>7</sup> More information about the Center for Leadership can be found on their official website: <https://www.bgsu.edu/center-for-leadership.html>

<sup>8</sup> More information about this specific event can be found on the events page of the BGSU Center for Community and Civic Engagement's official website: <https://www.bgsu.edu/center-for-community-and-civic-engagement.html>.

community, both on the MLK National Day of Service and throughout the calendar year. The way students answer these questions could then influence their assignment for the MLK National Day of Service, and depending on their experience, extended their volunteering activity following the event. By providing scholars with this opportunity, I believe that they can begin to gauge what methods and manners of service fit within their self-defined depiction of engaged and global citizenship.

In looking at what revisions could be implemented, I believe the first would be ensuring that students are aware of this requirement from the start of the semester as awareness has been a critical issue for the program, as demonstrated by the fact that the 2017 cohort participant stated he did not believe that the PSA program had any requirements. PSA scholars could be divided into volunteering groups wherein the cohorts would be mixed, potentially on the basis of their volunteering interests. Upper-class scholars could be offered the opportunity to be a group leader for each of the different groups, providing leadership and volunteering opportunities across the cohorts. While I am aware there is no cost to participants associated with the event, I am relatively unfamiliar with the MLK National Day of Service registration process. Further research would need to be conducted to determine how the PSA program could have regular participation in this event for years to come. Depending on the process, registration could fall on the PSA coordinator, upper-class scholar interns, or individual scholars themselves.

Considerations should also be made for alternative opportunities for leadership and service. As discussed earlier in this proposal, the PSA coordinator could create internship positions for third- and fourth-year scholars looking to take on greater leadership roles within the PSA program. Research could also be conducted on non-profits in the area looking for regular volunteers to determine if the PSA could have a greater impact with a specific organization

within the community. Thus, I would recommend that the PSA continue to utilize the MLK National Day of Service as a primary leadership and service opportunity while additional opportunities are researched, seeing as this event is already in place and PSA participation has occurred in the past already.

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#### *Alumni Reunion and Networking Event*

Participants in both the 2014 and 2015 cohorts expressed interest in creating a completely new program in the PSA model wherein current scholars would have the opportunity to talk with and network with alumni of the PSA program. This event would give current scholars the opportunity to hear about the experiences of their predecessors and the impact that the PSA and BGSU had on their lives after graduation. In addition, this event would give current scholars the opportunity to network with alumni who are potentially in the same field as they are, which could assist in the job and/or graduate school search down the road. The alumni would also have the opportunity to re-engage with their alma-mater, which may provide them with incentives to consider donating to BGSU, and more specifically, the Honors College. While networking is not an explicit component of the PSA program's proposed identity, I believe that it plays a crucial role in the identity of self-authorship of engaged and global citizenship. The ability to collaborate with others has become an increasingly important skill within modern society, and one element of collaboration is the ability to network with others and bring together various networks to complete a task. By giving the scholars the opportunity to network with past scholars, I believe they would not only have the opportunity to network with the alumni and build their collaborative skills, but to learn about how these individuals have become engaged global citizens following their undergraduate careers.

In looking at this event holistically, I think that the networking event could be held in a large meeting space such as the Bowen-Thompson Student Union Ballroom, providing attendees appetizers and/or dinner. Selected alumni could be given the opportunity to speak in front of the attendees, while separate time could be set aside for mingling. In planning this event, I believe that considerations could also be made for having small groups established based on similar majors, career interests, and extracurricular involvement between alumni and current scholars. A multitude of considerations about resources will need to be made prior to implementing this event, including the cost of the event (food, venue, travel expenses for alumni, etc.) and personnel (planning event, inviting alumni, etc.). The PSA coordinator could consider inviting a Tourism, Leisure, and Event Planning major looking for event planning experience to assist in the process, especially if the student is a part of the PSA program or the Honors College. Planning this event could also be the specific role of one of the proposed upper-class scholar interns.

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### **Tier Three.**

#### *Graduate School and Job Search Workshops*

This program would center on engaging third- and fourth-year PSA scholars in professionally led workshops to assist and prepare them for the job search process or finding and applying to graduate programs. These workshops are recommended for third- and fourth-year scholars based on the recommendations of the participants of the focus group who felt the job search and post-graduate work were the central focus of these two years. This is supported by the research findings of McCaffrey, Miller, and Winston, Jr. (1984) who determined that the majority

of career maturity, or growth in terms of career aspirations and preparation, occurs between junior and senior year, but that this career development begins to slow between senior year and post-graduate work. Based on these findings, I believe that providing students with these workshops will prevent this stagnation in career development, allowing scholars to have a firmer grasp on their career aspirations prior to graduation. These workshops would also give scholars further opportunity to determine how they see themselves fitting into society as an engaged citizen, aligning with the proposed identity for the PSA program. For this program addition, I believe that the PSA program should look at utilizing the services provided by the BGSU Career Center. The Career Center at BGSU provides free speakers and workshops on a variety of topics, including graduate school preparation, career exploration, and full-time job search strategies.

More information about these events can be found on their official website:

[www.bgsu.edu/career-center](http://www.bgsu.edu/career-center).

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### *Graduate-Level Course Enrollment*

This addition to the PSA model is based on the recommendation of a 2016 PSA scholar who expressed interest in enrolling in graduate-level courses during their undergraduate career as part of the program. While I believe that this would be a beneficial addition in challenging the scholars academically, colleges differ in their policies on taking graduate-level courses as an undergraduate student, making it difficult to require this for all scholars. In addition, BGSU lacks a multitude of graduate programs that may be of interest to scholars, and not all scholars may express interest or have time in their schedules to accommodate graduate classes. As a result, I believe that this addition should be offered to scholars as an option as it may not be applicable to all scholars in the program. Prior to implementation, the financial differences between

undergraduate and graduate courses and the PSA contract would need to be analyzed as the scholarship funds provided to all PSA scholars is solely reserved for undergraduate-level courses.

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### *First-Year Faculty Mentor Matching*

This program was recommended by the 2016 cohort participants. They felt that it would be beneficial for first-year students to be matched with faculty members in their major during their first-year to serve as a mentor throughout their collegiate careers. Lei, Gorelick, Short, Smallwood, and Wright-Porter (2011) found that cohort relationships with faculty members were beneficial to students' and faculty member's overall experiences. It should be noted that their study focused on the advising that occurred in the professor-student relationship, not the mentor-mentee relationship. Nevertheless, I feel that matching scholars with a faculty mentor would create mutually beneficial relationships to assist scholars during their collegiate careers. Before this program could be implemented, the coordinator of the PSA program would need to consider the financial obligations and compensation that may potentially be required by faculty members. There is also potential that no financial compensation would be required as many faculty members volunteer their time to Honors students in a variety of forms, such as Honors project mentorship/advising. It would also be necessary to communicate across colleges to find willing faculty members to participate in the program. One alternative could be to challenge PSA scholars to find their own faculty mentor within their first-year, eliminating the PSA program and coordinator as the go-between in the process. Another alternative would be to pair this mentorship relationship with the second-year and first-year mentorship program already instituted in the PSA program. First-year scholars could be paired with second-year scholars based on their majors, and they could then also share a faculty mentor who not only mentored



both of them, but oversaw the mentorship relationship between the first- and second-year scholars.

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*Networking with Local Businesses*

This recommendation was made based on the thought that local businesses may be a beneficial source of information and job experience for PSA scholars, especially those interested in business management, non-profit work, and human services. This would provide scholars with an opportunity to experience what engaged citizenship looks like from the perspective of an individual working directly within and/or for a community. Unfortunately, this would require extensive networking by Honors College faculty in reaching out to local businesses. I believe that this addition should be considered on an individual basis, as there may not be any businesses whose purpose aligns with the interests of any of the PSA scholars. An alternative method of implementation would be to have the PSA coordinator reach out on behalf of the scholars who express interest in meeting and/or working with a specific local business. Further research should also be conducted to determine if this is a program that the Career Center could assist with.

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*Designated PSA Lounge*

This proposed addition to the PSA program is focused on physical space rather than programming. Participants of the focus groups expressed interest in having a designated space for PSA scholars where they could meet to converse with one another, do homework, and host activities. This space could eventually be used to host various programs outlined in this proposal, including the regular first-year cohort meetings, all-cohort meetings, and the holiday party. This designation of specified space has been implemented by other scholarship programs across

campus, including the ACTION<sup>9</sup> and AIMS<sup>10</sup> scholarship programs who recently built a lounge space in University Hall. With the Honors College's consideration of expanding their office and Honors Den space for students, a designated lounge could be proposed in the drafts of the new space layout. Prior to implementation, space permits and financial provisions would need to be analyzed to determine if this designated lounge space was feasible. Potential contacts about designated lounge space process on campus include ACTION Director, Dr. Daniel Brahier (phone: 419-372-0339, email: [brahier@bgsu.edu](mailto:brahier@bgsu.edu)), and AIMS Director, Dr. Robert Midden (phone: 419-372-0563, email: [midden@bgsu.edu](mailto:midden@bgsu.edu)).

### **Conclusion**

As with any formal project, there are strengths and limitations to this proposal. In terms of its strengths, I feel one of the greatest strengths of this proposal is the agreement that is exhibited by published research studies and the recommendations made by current scholars. Many of the proposed revisions and additions were supported by published higher education research (Jeske & Rode, 1999, Laufgraben, 2005, Lei et al., 2011, Maher, 2005, Martin et al., 2016, McCaffrey, 1984), which affirms the credibility of these recommendations. Another strength of this proposal is its three-tiered structure. As stated before, this proposal is intended to serve as a guideline for revisions to the PSA program. In creating and categorizing all of the revisions and additions in tiers, the PSA coordinator has the capability to strategically implement these recommendations as they see fit. The tiered structure is also a strength of this proposal as it

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<sup>9</sup> ACTION refers to the four-year scholarship program at BGSU, Science and Math Education in Action. More information about this program can be found on their official website: [www.bgsu.edu/action](http://www.bgsu.edu/action).

<sup>10</sup> AIMS refers to the four-year scholarship program at BGSU, Academic Investment in Math and Science. More information about this program can be found on their official website: [www.bgsu.edu/aims](http://www.bgsu.edu/aims).

outlines which recommendations would be the easiest and quickest to implement with the least strain on resources, as well as those that would take the most time and/or resources. A fourth strength of this proposal is that the research was conducted and reviewed by individuals directly involved with the PSA program, including myself. I feel that this working knowledge of the program allowed us to have a better understanding of the thoughts and opinions expressed by the participants and craft recommendations that were attainable within the PSA and Honors College's budget and current staffing resources. Lastly, this proposal is based on the thoughts and opinions of current PSA scholars across all class-standings. As a result, the recommendations (many of which were repeated in at least two focus groups) demonstrate the desires of real scholars who have experienced the program in some capacity and can thus make informed judgment based off of their experiences.

While I believe there are many strengths to this research, I recognize the inherent weaknesses within it as well. While the proposal is based on the recommendations of PSA scholars, the low attendance of the focus groups is one limitation of the study. This proposal functions on the assumption that the opinions and thoughts voiced in these focus groups were indicative of a normative experience for all the scholars. Because there were a limited number of participants in each focus group, it is important to recognize that some of the opinions and experiences shared may not be representative of the shared experience of the majority of the scholars. Similarly, another limitation of my research is my focus on experiences within cohorts rather than across cohorts. While I attempted to mediate this issue in hosting an all-cohort focus group, this session was not attended. There is potential that different opinions and experiences may have been expressed in cross-cohort conversations, as scholars from various cohorts would have had the ability to compare and contrast their experiences, thus limiting the breadth of my

data. An additional limitation is that as a PSA scholar myself, there is potential for bias on my part as I may have paid attention to specific ideas and recommendations over others given my own experiences and opinions. Thus, the recommendations may have been different had a party who was not familiar with the PSA program conducted and/or reviewed this proposal. Lastly, while formal and reviewed research was referenced in this proposal, little research was done in reference to higher education developmental theories, which may or may not support the recommendations made in this proposal.

Further research can be conducted in the future to remedy these limitations. First, this proposal could be reviewed by a party outside of the PSA program and the Honors College to determine the legitimacy of the recommendations in this proposal. This individual would lack any potential for bias, and thus be able to fairly evaluate the recommendations made in this proposal. In addition, more focus groups and/or interviews could be conducted with a larger sample population of PSA scholars to determine if the thoughts and opinions expressed in my focus groups are the norm across participants. It appears that incentives such as food are not enough to encourage participation, so future researchers might want to consider incentivizing participation with monetary rewards and/or course credit of some sort. Additional research should also be done in establishing criteria upon which the effectiveness of each recommendation may be evaluated. These criteria should provide the program coordinator and associated faculty/staff with the ability to determine if these programs are encouraging participation amongst scholars and achieving the mission of the PSA program. Another area for future research would be determining how the proposed identity (self-authorship of engaged and global citizenship) could be interwoven into each of the recommendations to create a cohesive program experience. Lastly, research should be conducted to determine if key theories in higher

education developmental theory support the recommendations proposed in this document. Some potential theories that I feel could be relevant include Chickering's Theory of Identity Development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and Perry's Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development (Perry, 1981).

Ultimately, the PSA program has been a longstanding BGSU scholarship that has consistently recognized the best and brightest high school students entering the University. While this program has provided numerous students with the opportunity to attend college, including myself, the potential for growth in this program is evident. In looking at the formal and published research and my own qualitative research, I feel that the proposed additions and revisions for the PSA program would assist in helping this program promote the development and overall satisfaction of all scholars involved. While the proposed model could serve as the basis for an entirely new four-year program model for the PSA, it could also be gradually incorporated into the current PSA model over the course of several years. Regardless of if and/or when these recommendations are implemented, I feel that it is crucial to recognize that there will be an adjustment period as upper-class scholars will remember the old model and may resist and or question the changes being made.

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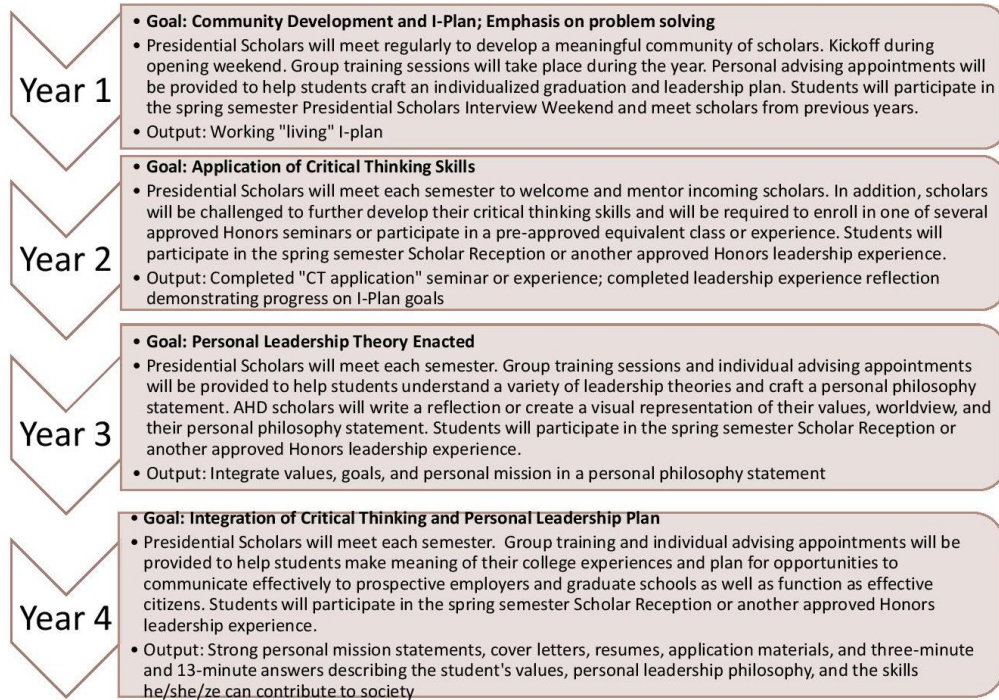
Appendix A

PSA 2015-2016 Four-Year Program Model

**HONORS COLLEGE**

*Honors Learning Community*

**Presidential Scholars Program (formerly the Award of High Distinction Scholarship)**





## Appendix B

## PSA 2016-2017 Four-Year Program Model

**HONORS COLLEGE***Honors Learning Community***Presidential Scholars Program (formerly the Award of High Distinction Scholarship)**Year  
1

- Opening Weekend Orientation - officer elections, work on I-Plan, identify personal values, bullring activity
- Individualized academic advising appointment, work toward finalizing I-Plan (schedule with college advisor first to determine course sequencing, then with Honors advisor to discuss remainder of plan)
- Great Ideas Dessert and follow up (10/17 or 10/20 from 7-9pm)
- Holiday reception (TBD in early December)
- Service activity (MLK Jr Day of Service, 1/16/2017)
- Presidential Scholars Interview Weekend (1/27-28/17)
- Reflection event: string activity connecting I-Plan to personal values (TBD)

Year  
2

- Opening Weekend - mentor activities for 1st year scholars (Wednesday, 8/17/16 from 12:30-4:30pm).
- Ongoing mentee meetings
- Participate in critical thinking application class/experience
- Participate in a leadership, service, or programming activity
- Great Ideas Dessert and follow up reflection (10/17 or 10/20 from 7-9pm)
- Advising check ins
- Reflection event: videos or artifacts showcasing progress on I-Plan

Year  
3

- Plan and enact 1-2 trainings/meetings for 1st years
- Meet professional mentors
- Advising check ins
- Interview Presidential Scholars candidates
- Forum on understanding, discussing, conducting, and presenting research and scholarly work
- Reflection event: TED talk or poster presentation to showcase personal philosophy statement
- Plan senior dinner

Year  
4

- Ongoing paired and individualized advising designed to keep developing personal mission, cover letters, personal philosophy answers, etc.
- Closure activity and reflection - create video which will get integrated into retreats
- Defend Honors project
- Final dinner send off and pinning ceremony

## Appendix C

## Focus Group Questions

Approved by the BGSU Institutional Review Board on October 29, 2017

1. Why did you decide to participate in the Presidential Scholars Award program? What types of experiences have you had as a part of the PSA program during your time at BGSU?
2. Many of the scholarship programs at BGSU have distinct missions and identities. Science and Mathematics Education in ACTION is a four-year scholarship program that focuses on providing innovative opportunities to prepare the best science and mathematics teachers in the state of Ohio. The Alumni Laureate Scholarship is a four-year scholarship program that focuses on providing students with networking opportunities with alumni and professional contacts that serve as mentors. What do you think the current mission and identity of the PSA is? What do you think its mission and identity could be?
3. We all have different educational journeys, but each year of the college experience is marked by personal development and growth that distinguishes it from other years. What development and growth do you think you incurred during year one? Year two? Year three? Year four?
4. Scholarships provide students with financial assistance and opportunities for personal, social, academic, and/or professional growth. This scholarship has the potential to impact you different ways each year you are involved in it. What opportunities do you feel this program could offer you during your first year? Second year? Third year? Fourth year? What impact would these opportunities have on you during your first year? Second year? Third year? Fourth year?
5. If there could be one co-curricular or extra-curricular experience that the PSA could offer, what would you like to see?