

Emerging Leaders in Philanthropy—Making a Difference through the Buckman Fellowship

Marilyn DeLong¹, Colleen Kahn¹, Jane Newell²

¹College of Design, University of Minnesota, Saint Paul, USA

²College of Education & Human Development, University of Minnesota, Saint Paul, USA

Email: mdelong@umn.edu

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Fostering an attitude of giving back is a useful exercise to consider within the academic community. There are many curricula that include leadership or philanthropy, but few that provide opportunities for individuals whose academic focus is neither exclusively philanthropy nor leadership. The Buckman Fellowship offers a unique program for innovative, creative, and motivated university faculty, staff, graduate students, and alumni to gain leadership and philanthropic skills needed to implement projects of their own design and powered by their own passion. Housed within a university, the program cultivates emerging philanthropic leaders, with a formal evaluation of stakeholders to refine its objectives and continually improve its outcomes.

Keywords: Philanthropy; University Setting; Leadership; Fellowship

Introduction

All of us experience moments, people, or events that prompt us to take action to help others. But how do we harness this energy and desire to create social impact, given our constraints of time, money and expertise? In her recent book, *Giving 2.0*, Arrillaga-Andreessen (2012) explains that we must find ways to harness the generosity and passions of budding philanthropists. Andreessen defines a philanthropist broadly, as anyone giving time, money, experience, skills or networks to create a better world. With this more expansive concept of philanthropy comes the notion that we all have the potential to become more philanthropic. Philanthropy should not be viewed as full time fund-raising and courting donors to write out the check with no expectation of further involvement, but instead as a way of engaging people's expertise and passions for changing the world.

The Buckman Fellowship for Emerging Leaders in Philanthropy has just such a goal, with its year-long program of monthly seminars that educate a small and select cohort of "Fellows" in numerous aspects of philanthropy. Receiving training and networking opportunities in pertinent areas of philanthropic leadership, each Fellow engages in a philanthropic project that he or she chooses to focus on throughout the year. These projects vary in topic and scope depending upon the goals of the participants, who come with a diverse range of interests and expertise in design, education and human services.

Since its inception the Buckman Fellowship has been a work in progress, and now is in its eighth year of offering Fellowships to philanthropically minded academics. This research focuses on evaluating the structure, function, philosophic and pedagogic underpinnings of this philanthropic program.

From our perspective, the social constructivist framework of the program is essential and effective because it allows for a wide range of Fellows with disparate and diverse life, academic, and project experience to grow together on a yearlong journey

into the world of philanthropic leadership. Social constructivist methodology allows for and supports autonomous growth within a group of people. Fellows are selected not only for the probability of successful implementation of a project of social significance to them and their community, but also because of their commitment to obtaining leadership and philanthropic skills within a cohort of divergent learners.

These kinds of outcomes are possible because of the environment created through the interaction and development of each cohort of participants over their year together. The Fellows work independently to design, develop, and implement their projects outside of their monthly meeting time. However when they come together they engage with one another to share their trials and errors, their ideas and questions, as well as their successes and breakthroughs. Through this process, their projects evolve and begin to take form, sometimes taking a completely different direction than what they first imagined. These changes over time, resulting from group process and social construction, are often noted by the Fellows as being significant learning experiences they would not likely have discovered on their own. Examples of projects highlight this process of philanthropic leadership development and demonstrate the commitment and passion of Fellows to make a difference in that part of the world that is important to them.

Project Examples

Buckman Fellows vary widely in their interests, academic pursuits, affiliation with the University, and leadership goals. Encompassing the fields of design, social science and applied sciences, projects also vary widely in scope, mission, and intended impact. The following project examples are typical of each Buckman cohort, reaching internal, local, national, and international stakeholders. All projects are initiated by specific interests with some projects a one-time event ending at a specified time, while others launch a new professional pathway.

Connecting Children

After a successful career in the apparel design field, including work in major US and Asian cities, Di sought a humanitarian project. She began by hosting benefit fashion shows where proceeds from sales were distributed to international adoption organizations in multiple countries. By the time she entered the Fellowship program, Di had expanded the number of organizations and countries to twelve, with each organization doing philanthropic work on behalf of children.

During her time as a Buckman Fellow, Di attended a number of seminars addressing the “nuts and bolts” of philanthropic fund raising, management, and leadership, and she discovered that she could start her own 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation. Her nonprofit corporation now connects American children with children from other countries as pen pals, friends, and helpers. Di’s philanthropic reach has not only gone global, it’s been globally acknowledged as well: CNN featured Di’s work and organization the year following her Buckman Fellowship.

Dignity & Humanity

Roz, a social scientist, had a son who went to prison for a crime he committed. However, the inequality in the criminal justice system left her stunned and angry, and she decided, as a Buckman Fellow, she could do something about it. Roz started a foundation to help inmates learn to work through their issues and solve their own problems through a re-entry process that starts while the individual is still in prison.

Her newly formed foundation distributes a newspaper free to prisons around the US. Through the paper, Roz stresses that all choices, whether good, bad, or indifferent, have consequences, while inspiring readers to make positive choices for themselves and their families. Evidence from inmate testimonials, counselor comments, and reduced recidivism speak to the effectiveness of the paper and the program. Trying to affect legislation that will change how people are treated when returning home, Roz sees many opportunities to help men and women succeed at living outside of prison, enabling them to complete the parole process and finding a job within 30 days.

International Symposia Legacy

Drew and Steve entered the Fellowship together in their joint commitment to launch an international consortium on rural design. After months of dedicated work on their vision, they held the first International Symposium on Rural Design, positioning their center as a world leader in this area according to feedback from symposium attendees. Their success fulfilled one of Drew’s central goals of leaving a legacy after 35 years as a center director in higher education. He wanted to give back, to share with emerging leaders in his field the knowledge and wisdom he had gained throughout his career, and to empower new leadership in rural design throughout the world. Following Drew’s first seminar with the Fellowship, he commented that “what was going on here was remarkable and should be happening all over the university.” His follow up evaluations confirmed this positive view of the Fellowship.

Program Structure

Each year a committee selects up to ten Fellows from applications of faculty, staff, graduate students, and alumni from three colleges within the University of Minnesota related to

design, education and human services. The applications, solicited and reviewed in the spring for the following year, include a resume, a statement of interest, and a brief outline of a philanthropic project of significance. Applicants hear about the program through newsletters, electronic announcements, but especially through word of mouth from faculty members of the three colleges, and current and former Fellows who become passionate about the possibilities of the Fellowship for implementing long-dreamed-about projects. Many Fellows share their experiences with others they believe would benefit from participation in the interdisciplinary, philanthropically-focused leadership development program.

Administrative Structure

The Buckman Fellowship is a nine-month, non-credit collaboration among multiple colleges and departments within the university. With ongoing support from the three college deans and multiple department heads, as well as directors of graduate programs within the colleges, the program generates engaged participation.

Management

The program director, housed and supervised within the governing structure of one college, facilitates the Fellowship program, including monthly seminars, marketing and outreach, and public events. Interdisciplinary and collaborative skills are required to work with multiple colleges and to respond to each Fellow throughout the implementation of their individual projects, including keeping the cohort up to date with relevant information concerning events and training opportunities.

Financial Resources

The program is funded by an endowed gift from a former faculty member to encourage the development of philanthropic skills and leadership in students. Interest from the endowment provides revenue to spend on administration, guest speaker honoraria, public lectures, and a recognition ceremony. A significant portion of the annual budget goes to the Fellows, who are provided with a stipend to spend on initial project expenses or professional development and training opportunities, such as attending conferences, membership in the local association of nonprofits, or pursuing webinar content focused on grant writing, organizational planning, strategic vision, or others.

Advisory Council

The Fellowship has been guided by an advisory council of community experts in philanthropy and nonprofits, Fellowship alumni, and the respective academic colleges. These volunteers meet regularly to provide input on the curriculum, recruit applicants, create strategy for growth, provide contact names for seminars, and suggest or become mentors. Examples of mentoring include a council member who worked with a Fellow to establish the direction of her nonprofit. Another mentor provided project direction for a Fellow to fundraise on sustainable communities.

Monthly Seminars

Guest presenters are engaged who are expert in the funda-

mentals of fundraising, proposal writing, constructing case statements, as well as areas of specific interest to each cohort group. One year a number of Fellows held positions of leadership that required them to fundraise so one of the academic development directors responded to the specific issues of fundraising in an academic setting. Matching cohort interests with seminar topics demonstrates social constructivist pedagogy where methods match knowledge needs of each cohort. After each seminar, Fellows have time for reflection and application of the information. Through these fundamental topics, Fellows share learning and transition into a cohort group.

Group Processes

The second half of each monthly seminar provides an opportunity for Fellows to report on their progress, challenges, ideas and questions. Frequently, Fellows exchange information and resources and occasionally one Fellow who shares an interest in a peer's vision will volunteer time to work on another Fellow's project. Each monthly session includes some form of feedback loop for on-going assessment of progress toward their goals.

Each Fellowship year begins with an exercise that helps Fellows clarify the values they hold and how these values can help guide their project. When Fellows get stuck in logistical difficulties, returning to the values that matter most to them can inspire continued leadership development. One Fellow recalled her precise values selected during an introductory exercise several years after her Fellowship.

The one presentation that struck me the most was the (values exercise). I don't remember all the words, but these were the ones I chose. We had to choose 10 words, and (from those 10 words) these were my final three: faith, because it's very important to me, compassion, and a balanced life.

This highlights just how important the identification of these values was to the Fellow, and the impact they had on her subsequent efforts.

Project Implementation

Fellows work toward project implementation between monthly scheduled seminars. Often Fellows need time to become comfortable deciding just how to proceed with their project. In the early part of the year their work is research-oriented, discovering who else is doing similar work, creating mission and case statements, deciding on funding strategies, and learning about best practices. This work is foundational for the later steps such as locating partners, and establishing communication and media requirements. Fellows often follow a common pathway, starting with a personal and theoretical project, and moving towards greater visibility with measurable community impact.

Course Website

To support and facilitate on-going knowledge building among Fellows, an internet site was established for the cohort, separate from the informational web page. This site represents an application of the model for knowledge building (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006), with many students contributing to the development of one project. While Fellows do not have a single joint project, they do share their separate projects on the website and ask for critique from their cohort. In this way, Fellows contrib-

ute to the knowledge generation of their own and their cohorts' projects.

Public Lecture

After five years, the program expanded to include sponsorship of a Public Lecture for general university audiences as well as the non-profit and philanthropic communities. This affords a networking opportunity for Fellows as well as the opportunity to inform and educate the non-profit and philanthropic community about the Buckman Fellowship. Programs have included the president of a national foundation, a panel of local philanthropic leaders to address critical issues, and a workshop with a nationally recognized expert on how to work effectively across multiple generations. The public lecture is combined with the presentation of an acknowledged demonstration of philanthropy, followed by an annual Fellowship Alumni Reunion. For one Fellow, the lecture became a momentous event:

"It's interesting, the first time that the Buckman sponsored the lecture a couple years ago, we happened to have an object that was being donated (to the university museum) at the same time. We made it a corresponding demonstration of actual philanthropy that was occurring along with the lecture on philanthropy. It was an interesting demonstration to be able to say 'What is philanthropy? What does philanthropy look like?'"

The reflections of this Fellow capture a perspective that combines both the theoretical and practical applications from the Fellowship experience. Her thoughts about the nature of donating are further deepened by the concurrence of philosophical discussion and real-time action.

Annual Recognition Ceremony

Each year all Fellows from the current cohort, incoming newly selected Fellows, administration and staff for the Fellowship program, as well as deans, department heads, and the advisory council gather for a recognition celebration and dinner. Graduating Fellows present their projects during an informal reception period, where incoming Fellows, council members, and guests interact and ask questions.

Social Constructivist Framework

Social constructivist pedagogy provides the theoretical framework that undergirds the curriculum development and delivery processes of the Buckman Fellowship. At the heart of social constructivist pedagogy is the notion that we construct knowledge in groups. Ideal for the goals of the Fellowship program, this theoretical framework enables faculty, staff, graduate students, and alumni to build philanthropic skills collectively through the implementation of a self-designed project. According to Scardamalia & Bereiter (2006) there has been an evolution of thoughts about learning and how knowledge advances, suggesting that our civilization is a knowledge-creating civilization where the advancement of knowledge is seen as "essential for social progress of all kinds and for the solution of societal problems" (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006: p. 97).

Buckman Fellows engage in a process of creating knowledge together with their cohort because they hope to find solutions to societal problems. Scardamalia & Bereiter (2006) propose a set of themes to bring about a "shift from treating students as learners and inquirers to treating them as members of a knowl-

edge building community” (Scardemalia & Bereiter, 2006: p. 99). These themes are:

- Knowledge advancement as a community rather than individual achievement.
- Knowledge advancement as idea improvement rather than as progress toward true or warranted belief.
- Knowledge of, in contrast to knowledge about.
- Discourse as collaborative problem solving rather than as argumentation.
- Constructive use of authoritative information.
- Understanding as emergent.

These themes capture the goals of a socially constructed, knowledge-building environment and provide a philosophical perspective, advocated by the faculty member who oversees the Fellowship program for each cohort of Fellows.

Discussing constructivist pedagogy in the university setting, Tenenbaum et al. (2001) emphasize approaches with the objective of maximizing student’s construction of their own knowledge and control of their own learning. Pedagogy that allows for diversity of learning and application of knowledge, while supporting and creating the context for knowledge generation is imperative. Tenenbaum et al. (2001) make a curious discovery in their examination of courses said to be operating from the social constructivist pedagogy, namely that “integrating constructivist principals...seems to be a harder task than that of establishing and theorizing these principals” (Tenenbaum et al., 2001: p. 108). An assessment tool may be used as a benchmark for examining constructivist practices and principles in teaching and learning: 1) Ethos/environment is learner-centered; 2) Authenticity of content is realistic/real world versus theoretical; 3) Learner’s personal experiences are sought or offered and utilized; 4) Learner—learner interaction is encouraged; 5) Learner “thinking aloud” is encouraged; 6) Feedback on contributions is positive and encouraged; 7) Development of thinking skills and understanding is dominant; 8) Learner contributions to tutorials is publicly valued (Tenenbaum et al., 2001: p. 96).

To accomplish these goals in a typically designed classroom can be challenging and attempts to do so have often been met with a lack of evidence that students have actually engaged in constructivist practices. The Buckman Fellowship program does not involve a typical classroom setting, nor are the Fellows “typical” students. Each of the Fellows is highly engaged in their area of scholarship (or emerging scholarship) within the university, and each applies for acceptance into the Fellowship program for an opportunity to further develop needed skills. Buckman Fellows are highly motivated to implement a self-designed project that is important to them, and this demands pedagogy where the learner is, as outlined above, clearly at the center of the learning experience. All eight identified indices above are achievable through the environment created by the Buckman Fellowship program. The environment is intentionally designed to facilitate a Fellow-centered ethos—this is accomplished by individualized projects created by each of the Fellows that are then supported to implementation through consecutive seminar sessions and stimulated by on-going cohort discussion. Subject matter derived by individual and cohort problem-solving and applied to real world problems is what guides the entire learning process, as the Fellows themselves design and execute their projects over their time while in the Fellowship (and beyond) to address emerging issues and social concerns.

Ongoing interaction of each unique cohort is further facilitated

by the structure of the seminars and group processes designed to engage Fellows with one another. Consistently, with each successive seminar, Fellows are encouraged to “think aloud” by a check-in and update to their cohort on progress made toward the completion of their projects. Emphasis is placed on what they are learning about themselves and their project in their learning process, while leadership skills are developed over the Fellowship year. The design and nature of the program encourages, even necessitates, Fellows’ development of critical thinking skills and understanding as they attempt to implement their initial plans for their project. By so doing, leadership skills are further developed and shared with others through a public presentation of their Fellowship experience.

Program Assessment & Evaluation

Assessment is on-going for the program to continue to provide a relevant and meaningful experience. The program director engages with Fellows on an individual basis prior to acceptance into the program, within the first month of starting the program, mid-way through the program, and at the end of the Fellowship year. The primary forms of annual assessment include:

Seminar evaluation. Fellows evaluate each session to assess the value and relevance of the seminar presenter’s material for their needs.

Self-assessment. Fellows also complete a self-assessment at the beginning of their year-long Fellowship, refer to this assessment at mid-year check-in, and conduct a post self-assessment at the end of their Fellowship year to determine their growth and development.

End of year evaluation. Fellows assess the overall value of the Fellowship for the advancement of their individual philanthropic plan.

Assessment of the overall program was conducted seven years after inception with the intention of evaluating effectiveness. Brief questionnaires were sent to those various stakeholders affiliated with the Fellowship: current and former Fellows; current and former advisory council members; deans and department heads. All stakeholders were asked the same questions and responded through a qualitative, narrative response format about the perceived benefits, program strengths and motivation for engagement. The following summary highlights responses from each of the stakeholders polled. Refer to **Tables 1-4**.

Perspectives of Fellows and Former Fellows

Some Fellows recognized the opportunity to change their horizons in the following comments:

“It changes how you think about what’s possible.”

“The experience gave me the confidence to try something new, because I had already done it (try out new things) while a Fellow at the Buckman. The Fellowship allowed me to see that new things weren’t scary, and I could try something out. Even if it didn’t work out in the end, it was the trying that mattered.”

Former Fellows named many of the same benefits as current Fellows. Several former fellows made clear declarations such as:

“I want to invite others to pursue their passions”

“I want to be effective at influencing change”

“(I’m interested in) how as individuals we can take a role in helping to facilitate philanthropy, both through helping others to achieve philanthropic acts or by modeling that so there is an

Table 1.
Summary of current fellows' responses.

Perceived benefits for fellowship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking action/producing desired outcomes • To build & use skills • Program aligned with personal values/beliefs • Meet new people • Have structured time & support for project.
Program strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Format, program design, and process • The quality of people (Fellows, advisory board, and inherent network) • Seminars and professional development opportunities • Having an experienced coordinator
Motivation for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased effectiveness in project/help achieve desired outcomes • Values the role of philanthropy in helping people • Flexibility of program design that provides an "exemplary environment" for learning about philanthropy • Has a vision or dream

Table 2.
Summary of former fellows' responses.

Perceived benefits of serving the fellowship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection with leaders in philanthropy • Networking opportunities the Fellowship provided • The structure of the program that allowed for dedicated time to their project • The learning experience and skill building that occurs through seminars and professional development opportunities • Opportunity for alumni to reconnect
Program strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The design of the program: it is situated in an innovative community, speakers knowledgeable and events are customized for members of the cohort • A willing community to provide support • Program allows individualized design of outcomes • Individual attention • Experience of being in a cohort

understanding that you don't have to be (wealthy) to participate in a philanthropic environment."

Current and former Fellows noted their commitment to engage in a training process that would allow them to implement a project of personal value and significance and that would make a contribution to the well-being of others, as a way for them to make a difference.

The cohort effect is a core principle of the Fellowship. Fellows learn from and with one another—everyone benefits collectively as they engage in the Fellowship. Projects move through with greater velocity when individuals are processing through their learning and implementation of their projects in conversations with their cohort. Fellows reported that having monthly seminars with cohort time built in is one of the most valuable features of the Fellowship experience. Fellows, while initiating innovative projects of their own design, do not have that "I'm alone" feeling; they are able to share their successes

Table 3.
Summary of advisory council responses.

Perceived benefits of serving the fellowship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of connecting to others interested in learning about philanthropy • Strengthening one's own philanthropic skills • Gaining a greater understanding of the composition and impact of the program. • Acknowledging a sense of service to community • Advancing a broader and more integrated sense of philanthropy in the community
Program strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design of the program where Fellows become a learning cohort, in a non-threatening, very learning friendly environment that can be tailored to the individual needs of each Fellow. • Outcomes produced by Fellows as the program evolves and builds sustainability over time, reflected in the following statements, • Strong local philanthropic community from which to draw candidates and speakers, association with the University building the collegiality
Motivation for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The topic of philanthropy is important to the respondent • Desire to be a part of a process that allows further connection to the college • To give back in areas where expertise or insight may assist in the growth of the Fellowship • Pleased to be able to do something innovative that is good for the colleges as well as the community • Enjoyed mentoring those who are interested in philanthropic/serving their communities • This is an excellent model for encouraging community engagement

and their challenges together.

Perspectives of Advisory Council Members

Current and former advisory council members provided their perceptions of the benefits to serving on the advisory council, perceived strengths of the program, and their motivation to serve on the council. Comments from the Advisory Council include recognition of the program's value to both the Fellows and the community as follows:

"We have only scratched the surface of what this can become."

"This program is perceived as "a great opportunity to introduce people to philanthropy and to make their dreams a reality."

"We are enticing people to participate in the program and to learn about leadership and philanthropy in a way that is not readily available in the marketplace."

"Our Fellows learn so much in taking the leadership role and learning what it takes to accomplish what at first appears easy."

Perceived benefits for advisory council members highlight the nature of individuals who are drawn to and interested in serving in this capacity: they are philanthropically-minded themselves and this service is meaningful to them personally and professionally. They appreciate the development of the

Table 4.
University administrators' summary of responses.

Perceived benefits of fellowship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I believe this is an outstanding program that brings a sense of ethics and caring. Personally, it truly warms my heart to see people involved in the program. The benefit to me (as dept. head) is that the participants seem to have a stronger connection to the college/program because I perceive the Buckman experience to be such a positive professional development activity for them. It can be a transformative experience that offers incredible opportunities for Fellows.
Program strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity and mentoring Devote structured time to projects The projects seem to reach a higher level than they would have otherwise because of the investment of the participants in this program. Provides a structure that lets Fellows pursue their interests in a community of peers, while giving them chances to learn what it will take to realize their goals
Motivation for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nurtures an innate caring for mankind Seeds are planted and this program nurtures them to grow The results seen of past participants It can be a transformative experience that offers incredible opportunities for Fellows

next generation of leaders, and acknowledge the challenges and commitment it takes to become a philanthropic leader.

Perspectives of Deans and Department Heads

To gauge perspectives of deans and department heads in three colleges and multiple departments, our evaluation invited participants to describe the perceived benefits and strengths of the program, as well as motivations for constituent participation.

Significance of the program to deans and department heads is seen in the ability of the Fellowship to provide a context inside which incoming Fellows are supported to design a project that is uniquely and specifically their own creation. Those individuals who take on such a level of commitment not only impact their communities but impact their academic departments and the university as a whole through their advanced leadership skills.

Conclusion

Stakeholders offered many positive comments and thoughts about the future that were unique to their point of view. These responses indicate evidence of a holistic transformational lead-

ership experience that is inspiring, not just for the Fellows, but for stakeholders who know them and are committed to their success: everyone benefits from an individual empowered to envision, design, and implement their unique projects.

The Fellowship has been effective in fulfilling its stated goals of developing philanthropic leaders. This objective has been carefully cultivated in the socially constructed environment dedicated to creating a safe place for learning where Fellows are free to talk through ideas and share wisdom from other perspectives. Across the board, stakeholders saw the program's strengths in the opportunities it provided the Fellows for structured training and time to devote to a project or leadership development goal. The cohort of Fellows provided an opportunity to brainstorm, discuss, analyze and decide upon options for projects. More than that, the cohort of members helped each Fellow work through unforeseen difficulties, making deep and meaningful relationships one of the most important aspects of the Fellowship.

Recommendations for the longevity of this program include the following: consider expanding the program to more people/departments within the university, as well as building strategic partnerships within and without the university with local philanthropic partners; highlight success stories of former Fellows to draw more awareness to the program and as a networking opportunity. Programmatic recommendations include securing stakeholders within the university, securing funding to expand the program, as well as time and money to fine tune the recruitment process to attract and provide programming for a competitive group of applicants.

Opportunities to be explored include expanding the program beyond its current audience. For example, one administrator suggested "the Fellowship reaches a small cohort of individuals annually; can this information be more broadly disseminated to enhance a wider number of grass-roots organizations?" Building long-term-growth partners and strengthening communication with not-for-profit constituents in the local area was noted. Other possible opportunities include considering increased access such as through webinar delivery to reach larger groups of interested professionals.

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