

Exploration Summer 2022

ROBERTSON SCHOLARS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

*October 29 * Identify Exploration Coach*

*November 12 * First proposal draft*

*December 17 * Second draft*

*February 11 * Third draft and budget*

*April 1 * Final proposal packet*

THE EXPLORATION SUMMER: CURIOSITY AND QUESTIONS

Robertson Scholars have access to three Summers designed to promote leadership development. The processes of questioning and exploring, along with reflection and making or renewing commitments, are essential to the Robertson Scholars model of leadership development. These processes are critical to our understanding of ourselves and our purpose. The Exploration Summer provides a unique opportunity to question, explore, consider new paths and perspectives—essentially, to be *curious*.

Community Summer was based on questions, too.

Community Summer 2021 and the Complex Issues Project gave you good exposure to the power of questions and curiosity. These four questions framed our experience, and we referred to them many times:

- Who am I?
- What am I committed to?
- What choices am I making, and are they aligned to who I am and what I'm committed to?
- What are the results of my choices?

Here are a few of the reflections you offered to these questions at the end of Community Summer:

- These questions invoked a confused frenzy in my brain at the beginning of the summer. My commitments to social & environmental justice have not changed, but I sometimes fear that I'm too small to affect any real change in this arena. This fear was a lot greater at the beginning of the summer, but rest, play, and community have vastly improved my mindset. The question, "What choices am I making, and are they aligned to who I am and what I'm committed to?" resonates deeply with me. I've been asking myself this question a lot and I see clear areas where I want to improve. I'm grateful that this clarity is motivating me to engage with the communities around me.
- It was at the conclusion of summer, that I finally made sense of the questions that served as the foundation for community summer. The question that resonated me with the most was "Who am I committed to?" I found that I am committed to 4 things: my Faith, my Family, my Friends, and School. My goal for this upcoming school year is to not lose track of what I am committed to and be intentional in how I navigate my commitment to each of the aforementioned things. I never reflected on questions like this until this summer so this is the first time I have been able to give a concrete answer in regard to these 4 questions.
- Although my initial answers to these questions were thought out, I have a new perspective on some of them, particularly what am I committed to. I've been exploring different passions and balancing jobs, school, and activities, and I've realized that some of my previous commitments, while interesting, were not truly passions that I wanted to pursue fully. As a result, I think now I have a better sense of self, why I make certain decisions, and what my interests really are, but this process is far from over.
- The questions make clear sense to me in the way they suggest that you ARE what you're committed to and what those choices reflect. In learning about myself and others this Summer I realized how much there is to learn by seeing what someone is passionate about. The first question resonates with me the most because it takes me back to the beginning

of community summer at our first leadership dinner when we literally asked this question to each other. It's such a tricky question but after the Summer I have realized part of who I am is what I'm committed to and what I'm passionate about.

Be curious first, and *then* think about Exploration Summer.

Exploration Summer is another chance to grapple with these familiar questions. You'll expand the boundaries of your passions and commitments through curiosity, initiative, and engagement in the deep, personal questions that emerge. And you are ready! Through Community Summer, you grew as individuals and as a cohort through group living, time spent with community leaders, and deep engagement with meaningful activity. Your cohort reported practicing and strengthening a wide variety of specific leadership skills, such as:

- Communication in listening, speaking, and writing
- Dependability/accountability
- Honesty/integrity/authenticity
- Flexibility/adaptability/ stepping out of comfort zone
- Time management/organization
- Relationships: empathy; patience; supporting others
- Collaboration and teamwork: delegation; community building; loyalty/commitment to the group
- Commitments/decision-making

These skills are absolutely relevant for Exploration Summer. For example, you will *honestly* identify how you want to grow and *communicate* your ideas via proposals. Also, you will be *flexible* because challenges will undoubtedly arise, and you will keep *commitments* in mind as you adjust your ideas.

Since Exploration Summer is based on questions, return to the four questions above, and go from there to open your mind to curiosity. What do you want to learn about now? What experience are you craving? Language like this reflects the true nature of Exploration Summer. Regardless of what you end up doing, the motivations and the process are crucial.

What *is* an Exploration Summer project?

Exploration Summers are highly individualized. No one Exploration Summer project is exactly like another. The lists posted on the [resource page](#) reflect the diversity of approaches and experiences. (Read the Launch lists, too!) You may pursue research, travel, service, entrepreneurship—whichever activities are most likely to help you address those four guiding questions as you grow toward your leadership goals. Exploration can take place domestically or abroad (if travel is allowed!), and alone or with others. Scholars have pursued their curiosity through these general types of arrangements:

- Duke and UNC summer offerings, such as Story + (Duke) or projects through UNC's Journalism or Business schools.
- Opportunities organized by Robertson alumni. Some of these [2021 offerings](#) might be continued for Summer 2022.
- Opportunities provided through an organization outside the universities (e.g., [Connect 1-2-3](#); [Student Action with Farmworkers](#)).
- Pre-professional internships.
- Self-designed independent projects.

Examples of recent Exploration Summers:

- Patrick Clinch spent half the summer working in Congress and the other half studying the roots of satire and democracy in Greece and Rome.
- Annie Evans learned about gerrymandering and ways to create more equitable districts through an internship with a non-profit in Richmond
- Nick Johnston reflected on industrialization through a trek on horseback through Mongolia
- Lawton Ives pursued his love of the outdoors and conservation by interning in the Superintendent's Office of Yellowstone National Park. (This was such a powerful experience that Lawton spent the summer after graduation interning at Great Sequoia National Park before starting a consulting job.)
- Sierra Winters participated in the Mindful Cooking retreat in France, earned her 500-hour yoga teacher certification in Dharamshala, India, and explored monasteries of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in northern India.

- Abby Gay went from financial consulting with Oliver Wyman to a hands-on experience as a marketing intern for a new clothing company in Bali ([Kenny Flowers](#)) founded by an alum.

The Steps

We've split the complex process into manageable steps. Documents will be posted on the Summers resource pages for guidance:

I. **Return to curiosity and questions!** Talk to other Scholars in your cohort, with older Scholars and Alumni, and with Program staff members about your early ideas. If you're having trouble thinking about what you're curious about, here are some ideas:

- Go to a bookstore (virtual or not) and browse. What are you drawn to? If you had all the time, what would you want to read? You can follow a similar process with movies or shows.
- Think about how you spend your free time. What brings you joy and/or a sense of purpose? Why?
- Go to Vicki's office at UNC and look at the travel guides. Or look at a map. Remind yourself of the places you wish you could go. (Some of us have forgotten, during COVID). Why do you want to go there?
- When you're with other people, notice what catches your attention in the conversation. What do you like to talk about or learn about with others? Maybe it's politics, or cooking, or the ethics of financial technology. Notice when do you say, "Tell me more about that!" Pay attention to your own level of interest.
- Go outside and walk around long enough to free yourself of whatever you were doing when you felt stuck. Or do something that makes you uncomfortable. Disrupt yourself and see what questions arise.
- Talk to your friends! What do they think you're curious about? Frequently, the people around us have good ideas about what we want to learn and experience.

II. **Invite a Coach.** As you're thinking about curiosity, invite someone to join you. Who would you like to include in your questions? Because the Exploration Summer involves a type of independent work we have not emphasized to this point in Summers, you will invite an *Exploration Mentor* to participate. A Coach involvement will depend on the nature of your questions. The following are some of roles Coaches have played:

- Affirm your questions and desire for exploration.
- Advise you on proposals, including brainstorming or identifying possible organizations, locations, etc.
- Assist with conceptualizing and implementing research, particularly Research with Human Subjects.
- Consult during the summer if needed and debrief post-summer.

III. Conceptualize and Design a Project

You will begin to write your questions and ideas into a coherent form that you can shape into a project. You'll start to reason through what kinds of experiences can help you answer your questions.

IV. Proposals and Budgets

Finally, you'll write and revise a series of proposals. This system of successive proposals + feedback is a powerful learning experience that spreads project development over several months, allowing for revisions and new ideas and a deeper connection with your Coach.

What to do RIGHT NOW

Let's get started:

1. Review your Community Summer Reflection, and Vicki's comments, as a reminder of what you learned during Community Summer.
2. Think about your experience with the Complex Issues project and Sophomore Retreat. Do you have new questions you want to address during Exploration Summer? *What are you curious about?*

3. Consider the four guiding questions. How are they connected to your own curiosity and subsequent questions?
4. Read the earlier projects on the [resource page](#) for inspiration and identify Alumni you might want to contact. Then contact some of them.
5. Talk to peers to see if anyone wants to collaborate on a summer plan.
6. Approach potential Coaches—someone you want to invite into your questioning. A Mentor can be a faculty person, someone connected to a relevant organization, an alum—there are many possibilities. A separate document to share with potential Coaches is on the [resource page](#).
7. Talk to Vicki! 😊

A few parameters

To address frequent questions and concerns:

- Exploration Summer takes place between Community Summer and junior year. It can be as long or short as makes sense. Exploration Summer doesn't have to include every day of the summer.
- Safety and cost are the primary boundaries. Scholars who ask for funding must follow existing COVID-19 and travel safety protocols. Scholars can request up to \$6300 for Exploration Summer activities. Money that is not "spent" during Exploration Summer 2022 cannot be saved for a later date.
- Many Scholars propose and complete more than one activity during Exploration Summer.
- Scholars are welcome to pursue paid opportunities. Robertson funding will be adjusted accordingly. Scholars can apply for funds that are not provided to them by someone else.

Summer is what you make of it

In the end, *it be up to you to create and "make the most of" your summer experience.* Although we will support your project as much as is appropriate, the Exploration Summer will require initiative and commitment from you long before you actually set foot wherever you plan to go. Like all Robertson summers, *no one has the exact summer that he or she planned.* Your summer experience will evolve and unfold--which is precisely why it is such a special growth opportunity. In fact, many Scholars tell us that managing on-the-ground ambiguities and adapting to unplanned changes is an important aspect of their leadership development--even though it can also be confusing and stressful.

Advice from older Scholars

- *Approach the summer with a very open mind and be ready to carve out your own path. YOU can make the summer successful if you chose. Search for the opportunities ... constantly with an open mind, and you can find ways to make it happen.*
- *Exploration is not an excuse for lack of vision. Pick a clear path and then wander off it, don't just go into the woods with a pocket knife and a water bottle hoping to survive.*
- *Don't be afraid to do what's right for you, even if it's not the same kind of experience all of your peers are choosing.*
- *Please don't pick something because of how it will look on your resume or how "prestigious" it is.*
- *This is the EXPLORATION SUMMER! As you plan, really focus on this theme. Take this unique opportunity to design your own project to explore something about which you are passionate. Take the initiative now and start planning early. The time and energy you invest in your summer now will absolutely pay off.*