

EXPLORATION SUMMER 2022

October 2021

TO: Prospective Exploration Summer Coaches
FROM: Vicki B. Stocking, Ph.D., Summer Programs, stocking@robertsonscholars.org
RE: Supporting a Robertson Scholar's Exploration Summer project

I have prepared this document for Robertson sophomores to share with potential summer Coaches. We know from experience that Robertsons (and often their Summer Coaches) benefit from articulating and reformulating ideas and plans.

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. In fact, these processes are critical to our understanding of ourselves and our purpose. The Exploration Summer, following sophomore year, provides a unique opportunity to question, explore, consider new paths and perspectives—essentially, to be *curious*.

Summer Coaches can play a powerful role during Exploration Summer. We're encouraging Robertsons to open their minds and hearts to new experiences, and this is not easy right now. It is exactly during these kinds of conversations with our Scholars that we see the impact of the significant social, physical, and emotional restrictions of the ongoing pandemic. Of course it's hard to "think outside the box." We've all been in the box for a long time. We know that it's not enough to simply instruct these students to generate lots of ideas. . . we must invite them to ask questions, and they need a coach to help with that.

Obviously, we're still impacted by COVID-19, and we don't know, specifically, which opportunities will be available for Robertson Scholars in terms of travel. We won't wait for those answers, however. At this point, we're asking Robertsons to start with curiosity well before they consider specific internships or locations.

Please contact me if you have questions or concerns about our process or about specific Robertsons who may contact you.

Sincerely,



Vicki

Overview of Robertson Summer Programs

The Robertson Scholarship offers up to three summers of programming. The first--the *Community Summer*--focuses on community-building, cultural immersion, and service-learning. After sophomore year, the *Exploration Summer* encourages Scholars to get "out of their comfort zones" through individually designed projects and extensive reflection on identity and purpose. Finally, the *Launch Summer* provides Scholars with the missing piece(s) of their academic and/or pre-professional puzzle to "launch" them into senior year and beyond. Our summers are designed to foster increasing responsibility and leadership outcomes as the Scholars progress.

Because of COVID-19, most Robertsons participated in Community Summer based in the Triangle. They lived together and took on individual projects and internships, some community-based and some remote. We also created innovative programming to facilitate community and set the Scholars on a path of self-knowledge, intentional commitments, and leadership development. This cohort is uniquely poised to develop fascinating avenues for Exploration of many kinds.

What is an Exploration Summer Project?

Scholars work with us (and you!) on early ideas and submit a series of “proposals” for review. What does Exploration mean for each Scholar? What are the possibilities? Scholars will request funding later in the process. Projects can be completed alone or in groups, in the US or abroad, depending on the coronavirus situation. At the end of this document, I have listed some sample projects completed over the past few years (pre-pandemic) for illustration.

Roles of the Exploration Summer Coach

Because the second Robertson summer involves a type of independent work we have not emphasized to this point, we ask our Robertsons to be guided by an *Exploration Summer Coach* from a university or a relevant local or international organization. Advisors such as this play a key role in guiding a student’s intellectual and personal development; their connection and relationship with students can significantly influence student engagement. This structured arrangement can be especially helpful for students during times of uncertainty and unrest.

The specific involvement of the Coach will depend on the Robertson’s individual circumstances and on the nature of his or her project. Robertsons have asked Coaches for help with the following. We expect that most Coaches will:

- Affirm Scholars’ questions and desire for exploration;
- Advise on proposals, including brainstorming or identifying possible organizations, locations, etc.;
- Connect during the summer if needed and debrief post-summer.

Robertson Program Procedures

Each Robertson is expected to provide the name and contact information of his or her Exploration Project Coach by **November 1**. The first basic proposal “draft” is scheduled for **November 15**. We will not allow a Robertson to proceed with Exploration Summer planning until we are sure a willing Coach is in place.

Why be an Exploration Project Coach?

In my role as Summer Programs director, I work with every Robertson Scholar over the four years of college. Sophomore year is a challenging time for Robertsons and, simultaneously, an exciting time to support them. They are, alternately, excited, confused, open-minded, and frustrated. They are reflecting on goals and life choices and are asking questions about not only the past and upcoming summer, but much larger issues. COVID-19 has certainly illuminated this characteristic! The role of Exploration Coach is a chance to interact with a talented, enthusiastic Robertson who is interested in learning along with you. Please contact me (stocking@robertsonscholars.org) if you’d like to talk about this.

Examples of recent Exploration Summers (pre-pandemic):

- 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.