



“I wish I could properly express how grateful and blessed I feel for the opportunity to let Berry College change my life these past four years. I’ve found my people at Berry – my forever friends and those who have shaped who I am now. I’ve found my faith, my passions and my values. Everywhere I turn, someone is there beside me, walking with me and having my back. Not many people get to have that experience in college.”

– HANNAH PARKER (18C)



Dr. Stephen R. Briggs

THE VALUE OF BERRY

A healthy community has an identity with its own culture and character. Berry’s identity has always included an emphasis on the personal and vocational success of students. That priority was stamped on Berry from the outset.

One of the earliest Berry stories is that of Clayton Henson (1904H), our first high school graduate. Unsure about Martha Berry’s fledgling school, he questioned just how high she could carry him. Her pledge: “As high as you can go – through the roof and up to the sky.” Together they made that hope a reality. Henson went on to the University of Georgia, becoming an accomplished attorney and long-term supporter of the Berry Schools.

For the past year, we have been studying how best to guide today’s



students toward similar personal and professional success. We have conducted formal research with prospective students and parents, current students, alumni, faculty, and staff, including questions about the college’s reputation, its “brand.” In various ways, we have asked:

When a student walks across the stage at graduation, what do you most want her or him to have accomplished? Deep down, what is most important?

In essence, we are asking, “What is the value of Berry?” What we hear most often across all groups is for graduates to be self-motivated learners – knowledgeable, responsible and resilient – who leave Berry with a sense of direction, conviction about what matters and confidence moving forward.

As we welcome each new class of students, it helps to have this goal clearly in mind. We have eight semesters to guide students through a process of personal

and professional development so they graduate as the type of person they admire and hope to become.

At Berry, this formative process is a shared responsibility between the student and the college, a partnership. Together, we make a compact. Berry pledges to provide a purposeful, highly mentored, four-year journey of intellectual discovery, deliberate reflection and practical learning in a breathtaking, one-of-a-kind place. Students commit to taking ownership of their educational experience: participating fully and openly in the life of this caring community, sharing freely their ideas and experiences, and contributing to the practical work of running and leading Berry, leaving this place better than they found it.

WHAT MAKES YOU

Clayton Henson graduated with just such an experience more than a century ago; Hannah Parker did in May.

Hannah came to Berry from Alabaster, Ala., interested in the study of physical therapy and with an offer to play on the varsity soccer team. She came well-prepared, excited and eager, so from one vantage point it is not surprising that Hannah thrived at Berry, took advantage of opportunities and fashioned an enviable resume of accomplishments.

But Hannah also came with doubts and disappointments. In her junior year of high school, she was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, and life went from normal to forever different. Things that had been natural and easy became a struggle – not just the weakness and loss of energy that interrupted her soccer, but also the cognitive cloudiness that made it difficult to focus and study for some months. What set Hannah apart was a willingness to use the condition that makes her different as a foundation for improving herself and making others better as well. As Martha Berry liked to say, “The troubles you have had are what make you.”

At Berry, Hannah immersed herself in the study of kinesiology, combining rigorous academic work with hands-on learning. By the beginning of her sophomore year, she had earned certification as a personal trainer. As a senior, she was supervisor of the Fitness Trainer Team. According to her staff supervisor, Michael McElveen, she demonstrated a sophisticated ability to blend the best of evidence-based practice with a client’s preferences and her own clinical judgement. For him, Hannah was a colleague functioning at the level of a professional staff person.

For two years, she also worked with Dr. David Elmer on a research study examining how diabetes affects increases in the blood levels of lactic acid during exercise. And after enrolling in a summer course with Associate Professor Susan Conradsen on “Childhood Cancer,” conducted in conjunction with Lighthouse Family Ministries in Atlanta, she spent the next three summers – including the summer after graduation – working with these children.

CARING MENTORS

Hannah attributes much of her success at Berry to the caring community that embraced her. She came to Berry knowing no one. She left with forever friends, the kind who are there when

you fall, helping you to stand up taller, stronger, better than before.

When she totaled her car, then-Assistant Athletic Director Derek Taylor found someone to pick her up and helped her find a place to take the car. McElveen knew when she was having a rough day and would bring coffee, an ear to listen and quiet words of wisdom. Elmer kept his door open for a million questions that didn’t always pertain to class. He was the one who walked around a professional conference looking to connect her with the right graduate programs.

Hannah gave as she received, serving as a mentor for many other students. In her last two years, she participated in the Berry Center for Integrity in Leadership mentoring program, an experience that shaped her profoundly. Interestingly, her mentor, Cecil “Buster” Wright (73C), was one of Hannah’s personal-training clients; their roles of mentor and learner were interchangeable. For Wright, Hannah is “a fabulous personal trainer, always thinking of ways to help an aging wannabe athlete get better and not get hurt in the process.” For Hannah, Wright “started as a client and has turned into one of my best friends, biggest advocates and best supporters.”

In her senior year, Hannah enrolled in a pilot seminar with Dr. Conradsen designed to explore goals after graduation. As Hannah evaluated what she had learned about herself through her many interests and experiences at Berry – her strengths and weaknesses and the work that enlivened her the most – she realized how much she loved the learning as a way to improve herself and others. She is now enrolled with a graduate teaching assistantship in the Master of Science program in health and exercise science at Wake Forest University, one of just eight students selected.

THE BERRY COMPACT

Hannah’s story illustrates how the formative process of discovery and learning is strongest when it is a shared responsibility. And context is vital. That is why Berry emphasizes a residential experience with a culture of mentoring. It is why we provide structured opportunities and encouragement while asking students to participate fully in the life of the college and the practical work of making Berry better. Learn a lesson

well; keep it always.

Every employee at Berry is an educator, some in the classroom, some on courts or playing fields, and still others at work sites and in offices. In all cases, the lessons a first-semester student needs to learn are different from those of the second year or for juniors and seniors. A first-semester student worker has a lot to learn about the basics, for example, before he or she can move on to a mid-level position, and the expectations for student supervisors are greater again. The academic challenges given to a senior in his or her major are miles beyond those of a student just testing the waters.

By the point of graduation, we want Berry students to have a sense of direction, conviction about what matters and confidence regarding the next step. Like Hannah, they must take ownership of their learning and their personal and professional development.

One of Berry’s primary efforts this year is to think deliberately as a community about how we guide students during their eight semesters here and the structures that support this trajectory. We appreciate all, including the many alumni, who participated in our process of exploration this last year. Your insights underpin our efforts. We hope that you too will join in this formative partnership with our students.

“I left Berry as a new person, more myself than I have ever been. I came with a lot of hope, but low expectations of myself. I left with good options, more than I was even praying for. I am now at an admired graduate program, and I feel so prepared. I came with dreams of making a difference in my community. I had no idea if I could, or how I could. I left Berry with experience, confidence, faith, understanding, joy and love. I found opportunity at every door. I found grace in every failure and mistake. I found home and a family.”

