

## Generating Leaders in an Age of Diversity: Fifty Years of U. S. Rhodes Scholars

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### Abstract

This paper provides an overview of findings from a study of United States Rhodes Scholars elected between 1947 and 1992. The purpose of the research was to trace changing pathways to public leadership over the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Taken together, survey, interview, and field work analyses indicate a major change that American society has been tracking since World War II. This shift is essentially the by-product of two competing historical forces: the tide of expanding equality of opportunity and the spread of meritocratic institutions. Pathways to power and prominence among outstanding youth may be explained by these interacting forces. Family background does not explain differences in Rhodes Scholars' ultimate wealth, prominence, or influence. Nor, despite meritocratic claims, do differences in tested ability account for variation in their adult outcomes. Rather, elite higher education socializes top students for public leadership within an increasingly stratified mass higher education system. These data also portray the less fluent process by which students from second-tier tertiary institutions enter circles of future elites. More generally, our data show that the remarkable overall record of achievement by former Rhodes Scholars has been facilitated by cultural and social capital acquired in prestigious baccalaureate institutions, at Oxford, and within the Rhodes Scholars peer group.

### Introduction

This paper summarizes research on generations of American Rhodes Scholars. The study includes a survey of 1019 Rhodes Scholars from five post-World War II cohorts ranging from 1947 to 1992, intensive interviews of 59 selected individual Scholars, a comparison group study of Phi Beta Kappa academic honorees, and field work at five leading institutions that have produced a disproportionately large number of Scholarship winners. Survey data collection was carried out by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago and funded by the Lyle M. Spencer Foundation. Additional data collection was supported by the Andrew W. Mellon and the William and Flora Hewlett foundations. In addition to these funders, we gratefully acknowledge the Oxford Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies for hosting co-principal investigator, Karen Arnold, in the final stages of the research. The second principal investigator, Ted I. K. Youn, was a full partner in the research described here.

### The Rhodes Scholar Study

#### The Rhodes Scholarship

The Rhodes Scholarship, the oldest international fellowship program, was established in 1903 and now brings outstanding students from nineteen countries and five continents to study at the University of Oxford. Thirty-two U. S. Rhodes Scholars are chosen annually by regional selection committees. Students normally compete during or soon after their final year of undergraduate study, participating in a competition involving written

applications and two interviews with groups of former Rhodes Scholars and other eminent individuals<sup>1</sup>. The criteria for awarding the two to three year fellowship for Oxford study and associated travel are: intellectual and scholastic excellence, exemplary character, potential for leadership in public service, and physical vigor (Rhodes Scholarship Trust, 1995; Rotberg, 1988). Despite the prominence of the fellowship and the eminence of many recipients, there have been only a few studies<sup>2</sup> of the Rhodes Scholarship and no empirical research on the role of higher education in identifying and cultivating these outstanding individuals.

Since the first contingent of Rhodes Scholars arrived at Oxford in 1904, the Rhodes Scholarship has become one of the preeminent honors in the United States. Social positions and the record of accomplishments of Rhodes Scholars in contemporary American institutions are impressive, including one U. S. president and several presidential candidates, cabinet members, supreme court justices, senators, leading university presidents, industrial leaders, and influential journalists, scientists, and award winning authors. Such prominence characterizes an elite who occupy commanding positions in important spheres of social life (Dahrendorf, 1959; Lipset, 1966) and who share a variety of interests arising from similarities of training, experience, public duties, and way of life (Cohen, 1981). Clearly, the approximately 1700 living American Rhode Scholars are a strong presence among American political and intellectual elites.

### Research Issues

Our central research questions ask: Who becomes a public leader and under what conditions? How do formative institutions and experiences shape individuals who occupy pivotal positions with far reaching consequences for American society as a whole? More generally, what shapes the allocation of power and privilege in the United States? What role does American higher education play? Contemporary industrial nations have come to designate higher education as a primary equalizing force in expanding life chances for many. At the same time, higher educational institutions promote meritocratic competition and reward talented young people with access to influential occupational positions. Little is known about the role American higher education actually plays in supplying society with elites or how this role might have changed over time. Similarly, we know little about the pathways by which leaders move from college achievement to career prominence. The expansion of higher education and the spread of democratic institutions have led to widening participation by women and ethnic minorities among postsecondary students and opened pathways to national leadership (Alba & Moore, 1982; Jamieson, 1995; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1998). Has the appearance of diversity changed the nature of these leadership groups? Does upper class cultural capital still matter in elite membership, as some radical critics state (Karabel, 2005; Useem & Karabel, 1986; Useem, 1994; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1998)? Does a handful of highly prestigious universities in American higher education continue to produce the majority of our nation's leaders today?

What role does American meritocracy play in stratification? The spread of meritocratic institutions, equality movement notwithstanding, has profoundly shaped the preparation for power and privilege in America. Nicholas Lemann has argued that the ideology of

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<sup>1</sup> The 2-tiered interview process changed in 2005, after our data collection had been completed.

<sup>2</sup> See Frank Aydelotte, American Rhodes Scholarships (1946), T.J. Schaeper and Kathleen Schaeper, Cowboys into Gentlemen: Rhodes Scholars, Oxford, and the Creation of an American Elite (1998), and J. David Alexander, "American Scholarships," in Anthony Kenny, ed., The History of the Rhodes Trust, 1902-1999 (2001)

meritocracy, in which attainment rests on individual ability and effort, has wrongly led to education becoming “the personnel office, the central opportunity provider of the United States” (1997, p. 33). Social stratification based on higher education credentials restricts the range of merit to be rewarded, occurs too early to use performance as a central criterion of advancement, and muddles credentialing with social origins through conferring educational advantage to holders of upper middle-class cultural capital (Lemann, 1999). “To construct society so that as many permanent decision as possible are made by the time people are 22 is to come perilously into range of being an aristocratic system” (Lemann, 1997, p. 34).

The pathways of Rhodes Scholars illustrate the ways social transformation affects the life chances of educated Americans and provide insights about the changing nature of leadership within the context of the larger society. Rhodes Scholars are particularly appropriate for a study of American leaders and higher education because of the college-centered selection process, Scholars' identification as potential national leaders, and the educational nature of the award itself (i. e. , attendance at the University of Oxford). In contrast to most elite research investigating cross-sectional, retrospective accounts of leaders in leaders in particular occupations or social groups (Fraser & Gerstle, 2005; Halberstam 1969; Kadushin, 1974; Kirkpatrick, 1976; Lerner, Nagai & Rothman 1996; Useem & Karabel, 1986), our study takes a prospective and historical perspective. As higher education has become more accessible and its students more diverse, has higher education become the definitive arbiter of future power and privilege? In what ways do colleges and universities set talented students from all backgrounds onto pathways to adult leadership? How have these conditions changed over the past fifty years?

Understanding how potential leaders are identified and shaped under changing social conditions holds strong implications for developing talent through higher education, for advancing women and ethnic minorities, and for generating effective public leaders. Beyond its usefulness for policy, the study's multiple historical cohort analysis contributes to empirical and theoretical advances in social stratification and the sociology of elites.

### Research Methods

The study relied on four major sources of data: a survey of 5 age cohorts of Rhodes Scholarship winners elected between 1947 and 1992; interviews with 59 individual Rhodes Scholars; field work at five institutions that have produced a larger numbers of Rhodes winners in the past fifty years; and a survey replication with a comparison group of 148 Phi Beta Kappa members elected.<sup>3</sup>

#### Survey Rhodes Scholars

The 40-50 minute survey was a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers and administered orally over the telephone by trained interviewers from the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago in 2001-2002. The survey gathered information about family background, parental education and occupation, childhood cultural capital, undergraduate experience, Oxford experience, occupation and income, political and social attitudes, civic participation, family and religious affiliation, and scope of influence.

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<sup>3</sup> Survey recipients' names, contact information, and an introductory letter to the survey were generously provided by the offices of the Secretary of the American Rhodes Trust and the Secretary of the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

Of the 1019 Rhodes Scholars in the study population, usable responses were received from 874 Scholars, for a response rate of 85%.

Study cohorts were chosen from key benchmark periods that indicate the expansion of equality of access to higher education, including: the post-War G. I. Bill era in which educational opportunity for returning veterans became enlarged; the post-Sputnik era in which massive federal assistance in education became available; the civil rights era in which African-Americans became viable Rhodes candidates (Slater, 1993/94); the affirmative action era in which women were first allowed to apply (Vandenberg, 1991); and the post-affirmative action era. Each period represents shifts in ideology and opportunities that are hypothesized to affect the composition, attitudes, and trajectories of elites. Five study cohorts are included in the study: Cohort I: Post World-War II (Scholars selected in 1947 through 1952); Cohort II: Cold War Period (Scholars of 1956 through 1962); Cohort III: Civil Rights and Vietnam Era (Scholars of 1966 through 1972); Cohort IV: Affirmative Action and Women's Movement Period (Scholars of 1976 through 1982); and Cohort V: Reagan/Bush Era (Scholars of 1986 through 1992). The full population for the survey consisted of all 1019 living Rhodes Scholars from these cohorts.<sup>4</sup>

### Collection of College Entrance Examination Scores

In the absence of any ability measures collected by the Rhodes Trust, we acquired Scholastic Aptitude Test scores for the majority of Rhodes Scholars in our survey sample and American College Test scores for a subset who had taken only that test. SAT and ACT are widely used standardized college entrance examinations in the U. S. The SAT, in particular, was conceptualized as a test of intellectual ability rather than scholastic achievement. The SAT/ACT scores enabled us to see whether observed differences in Rhodes Scholars' outcomes were systematically associated with verbal and quantitative ability measures. We had relatively complete data only for the latter 3 cohorts (1966-1992), as earlier Rhodes Scholar groups either predated the test or did not routinely sit for the examination.

### Interviews

We conducted a set of in-depth interviews (n= 59) with individual Rhodes Scholars in order to document a rich picture of the Rhodes process and to elicit interpretive narratives of success and leadership. We chose 59 Rhodes Scholars to interview who spanned the 5 study cohorts and who represented the variety of Scholars in gender, race, profession, and achievement.. Interviews were conducted by the principal investigators in metropolitan areas where Rhodes Scholars cluster: New York City, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, DC. We also interviewed in university communities, including Princeton, New Haven, West-Point, and Champaign-Urbana. In addition to interviews with Rhodes Scholars from the study cohorts, we spoke with numerous other informants. We met several times with the American Secretary of the Rhodes Trust, Elliot Gerson, and also interviewed an officer of the Rhodes alumni organization (the American Association of Rhodes Scholars). In England, we met with several Rhodes Trustees and heads of Oxford colleges. We spoke with Rhodes House Warden Sir Colin Lucas, the chief officer of the Rhodes Trust, as well as with former Wardens John Rowlett and Sir Anthony Kenny.

Interview data complemented survey findings to provide a rich, contextualized picture of how Rhodes Scholars understand their social roles within the constellation of actors and institutions that shape opportunities. Some Rhodes Scholars had protested the structured

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<sup>4</sup> War-related conditions precluded the admission of Rhodes Scholars during World War II and in 1946. The classes of 1947 and 1948 were increased from 32 to 48 U.S. Scholars each.

format of the 2001 telephone survey, saying they wanted to tell their own stories. We therefore designed a semi-structured interview protocol asking Rhodes Scholars to reflect on how they got the Rhodes Scholarship, their salient experiences at Oxford, their conceptions of success and their definitions of leadership. We also asked what they considered to be the lasting effects of having been a Rhodes Scholar and whether the Rhodes Scholarship was a good model for preparing leaders. As former Scholars typically serve on selection committees, the interviews also covered perceived selection criteria and changes in criteria over time.

Interviews with Rhodes Scholars in our study cohorts lasted between an hour and 2 hours; they were audio-taped and transcribed by a professional transcription service. We kept extensive notes on our conversations with current Rhodes Scholars and Rhodes Trust officials in Oxford but did not tape record and transcribe these interviews. Following professional transcription, a team of 4 doctoral students coded the interview transcripts using a qualitative data analysis program. Analysis followed the constant-comparative method in which themes are derived from clusters of codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## 2). Institutional field work

We visited five top Rhodes-producing universities in order to document the institutional practices that support recruitment and successful competition among talented students. The ways in which undergraduate institutions identify Rhodes Scholar nominees and prepare them for competition illustrates each organization's unique practices for generating its academic elite and developing its identity through its graduates' success. We chose Harvard, Yale, and Princeton to learn more about how they maintain their dominance of the production of Rhodes Scholarship winners. The 4th all-time Rhodes producer, the U. S. Military Academy, was included because of its unique fellowship structures. We also visited Kansas State University, which is one of the 2 top state universities in Rhodes Scholars production over the past 20 years. This regional land-grant institution offered a look at how a public university accomplishes the identification and sponsorship of talented students into the Rhodes Scholarship.

At each institution, we conducted interviews with the faculty member(s) or administrator(s) overseeing the Rhodes Scholars selection process. We also interviewed some current applicants on the campus, a member of the official nominating committee that writes the required letter to the Rhodes Scholarship Trust, a senior dean involved in the process, and selected faculty and faculty Rhodes Scholars involved in recruitment and selection. Interview respondents discussed organizational practices for recruiting and preparing candidates

Interview questions included: 1) the nature and locus of the organizational practices for supporting Rhodes Scholarship winners; 2) organizational structures for recruitment (i. e. , personnel and resources; marketing; identification and recruitment strategies; 3) applicant coaching and other support. The students answered additional questions about the university's role in their exposure to the Rhodes Scholarship, their decision to apply, and the nature of institutional information, assistance, and advice. We also collected institutional documents related to the Rhodes Scholars nomination and selection process.

## Comparison Group Analysis

A comparison group study comprised the final data collection. Our initial objective was to compare achievement trajectories of unsuccessful Rhodes Scholarship district finalists with those who received the award. British Rhodes Trust officials declined to approve the plan. Our alternative was to construct a comparison group from those who were elected to the Phi

Beta Kappa Society, the oldest and best known scholastic honours organization in the United States (Phi Beta Kappa, 2002). While Rhodes and Kappans are each recognized for undergraduate scholastic excellence, the awards differ in selectivity and in the character requirements. Rhodes Scholarship applicants are expected to apply and are subject to intensive screening, and selection rituals, whereas colleges select Kappans without any application or interview process. Comparing Rhodes Scholars and Phi Beta Kappa recipients enabled us to examine the ways in which these differences in recognizing merit might shape career pathways and public involvement.

The original telephone survey instrument for Rhodes Scholars was replicated in 2003 by the National Opinion Research Center with a sample of 148 Phi Beta Kappa recipients. The response rate was 61%. Phi Beta Kappa members were chosen from a stratified random sample representing the same academic institutions and cohorts as the Rhodes Scholar sample. We were then able to compare the two groups using the same analyses previously done on Rhodes Scholars alone.

### Major Findings

#### Survey Findings

Major findings came from statistical analyses of telephone surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center with 874 Rhodes Scholars from five age cohorts. Our sample (86% male; 91% white) reflects the absence of women Rhodes Scholars before 1977 and African-Americans until the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Most Rhodes Scholars (88%) earned a graduate degree after their time in England or at Oxford. In addition to educational and professional accomplishments, the overall group reported being satisfied with their lives (86%). Most were married or living with a partner (81%); only 18% of the Rhodes Scholars had ever been divorced. In terms of political party affiliation, Rhodes Scholars were predominantly Democrats (62%) or Independent (20%). They characterized themselves as liberal (43%) or moderate (33%) in their political and social attitudes, endorsing survey items having to do with pluralism, tolerance, and an active government role in solving national problems. Only 15% listed themselves as Republicans and 8% as conservatives.

Ninety percent of all Rhodes Scholars received a degree at the University of Oxford. Before the late 1980s, the majority read second Bachelor's degrees, with 15%-18% earning D. Phil. degrees. Of Bachelor's students, the largest single group read philosophy, politics, and economics (PPE, 42%), with another 10% each reading English, history, and jurisprudence. Beginning in the latest cohort (1986-1992), degree enrollment changed dramatically. Although only a few more Rhodes Scholars from this cohort pursued D. Phil. Degrees (18%), 42% enrolled in Master's degree programs. By 2003, only 5% of U. S. Rhodes Scholars were reading second Bachelor's degrees, while 60% were enrolled in Master's programs. Of B. A. recipients in our survey who reported their results, 19% earned first class honours degrees.

Respondents overwhelmingly reported that the Rhodes Scholarship affected the overall course of their lives (93%). Two-thirds felt their eventual success was influenced by having the Rhodes Scholarship. They also attributed to Oxford increased interest in world affairs. From interviews, we know that many Rhodes Scholars saw no direct professional benefit from the fellowship but attributed significant personal growth and lifelong friendships to their time at Oxford.

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<sup>5</sup> An African-American Rhodes Scholar, Alain Locke, was elected to the Scholarship in 1907. By all accounts, his election was controversial and his time at Oxford marred by discrimination among U.S. Rhodes Scholars and others (Alexander, 2001; Shaepfer & Shaepfer, 1998). African-Americans became viable U.S. Rhodes candidates beginning with the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s.

The adult accomplishments of the Rhodes Scholars anchored the study. We analyzed adult “success” using 4 different outcome measures: income, prominence, public leadership, and civic engagement. The first 3 outcomes reflect standard attainment factors of wealth, reputation, and power. Civic engagement—like public leadership—related to the scholarship goal of contributions to the common good. By any of these measures, Rhodes Scholars were enormously successful. The most common professions among our 874 respondents were: university faculty (31%), executives and administrators (27%), and attorneys/judges (16%). As a group, Rhodes Scholars were highly paid, well represented in Who’s Who and in top public leadership positions, and deeply engaged in civic activities.

Age cohort, prestigious undergraduate education, and social connections emerged as significant predictors of all 4 measures of adult accomplishment<sup>6</sup>. Intensive undergraduate academics, Oxford socialization, and legal training were significant predictive factors for some, but not all outcomes. Multivariate findings support key contentions of social resource theory (Lin, 2001). As social capital models propose, Rhodes Scholars appeared to acquire social resources through membership in institutions located at the top of social prestige hierarchies. Their considerable social capital resulted from accessing resources embedded in connections with others. Interview findings indicated the expressive motivation of enjoying the company of people with similar status, world view, and life style. Survey findings pointed to the instrumental motivation of reaching valued outcomes through social relations on appointed boards and through direct access to powerful individuals.

Pathways to wealth, prominence, and power began with childhood social location (gender, race, class, family cultural capital, and historical cohort). Family origins predisposed future Rhodes Scholars to attend higher education institutions located at different levels of prestige. Though not as often as their upper class peers, some less-privileged youth enrolled in universities located at the top of the prestige hierarchy. Baccalaureate prestige was a crucial factor in adult attainment. Regardless of childhood background, Rhodes Scholars who graduated from top universities carried a lasting achievement advantage apparently resulting from the Ivy League legacies of polished manner (elite “habitus”), prestigious educational credentials (embodied cultural capital), and influential social connections (social capital). All study members entered the professional world with the asset of the Rhodes Scholar credential and a new set of social resources acquired at Oxford and through access to Rhodes Scholar networks. Rhodes Scholars with the highest income, reputation, public leadership, and civic engagement were those men and women who mobilized their social resources to make use of extensive, highly-placed connections. In addition to personal friendships and workplace contacts, social capital flowed from board memberships and acquaintance with influential public leaders.

Rhodes Scholars’ family origins almost never affected outcomes directly, but some family background factors had a strong effect on highly selective college enrollment. Specifically, father’s education and childhood cultural capital influenced entrance into highly selective colleges. Similarly, high school prestige and verbal (but not mathematics) ability led Rhodes Scholars into top universities. Father’s occupation did not affect the Rhodes Scholars’ undergraduate admission. Educational advantages provided by privileged family origins and high verbal ability were important, as prestigious baccalaureate origins had lasting positive effects on adult success. Although women earned lower incomes than men and were less likely to reach top leadership positions, gender differences disappeared once social connections were taken into effect. In particular, service on boards equalized outcomes for

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<sup>6</sup> Relationships between independent variables and outcome measures come from ordinary least squares and logistical regression analyses of self-reported survey responses. All reported relationships are statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

men and women Rhodes Scholars. Interestingly, Rhodes Scholars of color were equivalent to their white Rhodes peers on every index of adult accomplishment.

The general picture of Phi Beta Kappans was strikingly different. In contrast to Rhodes Scholar findings, our analyses of pathways to prominence, wealth, and volunteerism of Phi Beta Kappans yielded no statistically significant models. Specifically, age cohort, family social background, cultural capital, baccalaureate prestige, undergraduate experience, and Oxford experience were not predictive of wealth and prominence. The only significant effect shown in any multivariate model was a significant negative relationship between attendance at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton and participation in civic and volunteer activities. (Rhodes Scholar data showed the same pattern. ) One possible explanation is that Harvard, Yale, and Princeton students were encouraged or motivated to participate in different kinds of civic engagements than students from other institutions.

Particularly surprising was the finding that law or medical degrees were not statistically significant predictors of income among Phi Beta Kappans. A study of the Phi Beta Kappa Society by Richard Current (1990) suggests that historically the society has always been open to students from highly educated, presumably economically well-off families as well as those from families with modest means. According to Current, Phi Beta Kappa members are disproportionately professors and scholars for whom accumulating wealth is not a central goal.

Family origins and entry to higher education: One of our most striking descriptive findings was the discovery that a third of all Rhodes Scholars between 1947 and 1992 earned undergraduate degrees from just 3 universities: Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Harvard alone has produced 1 in 5 Rhodes Scholars over the past 60 years. Published lists of all Rhodes Scholars confirmed this finding across the complete roster of Rhodes Scholars elected between 1947 and 1992. We were also able to confirm that the dominance of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton in the production of Rhodes Scholars increased from the first half-century of the scholarship, in which the combined Big-3 accounted for 1 in 5 Rhodes Scholars (Aydelotte, 1946).

Rhodes Scholars came from varied family backgrounds, but their fathers were far better educated than their college-educated age peers in the general public. We conducted regression analyses of Rhodes Scholars' social origins and ability on Big-3 (Harvard/Princeton/Yale) baccalaureates and on Cartter prestige rankings of all Rhodes Scholars' undergraduate universities (Cartter, 1976). Prestigious high school attendance, strong family cultural capital, well-educated parents, and high SAT-verbal scores all predicted entrance into the Big-3 and other highly selective undergraduate colleges and universities.

Income: Almost a third of the Rhodes Scholars reported family household incomes between \$200,000 and \$300,000 U. S. dollars. Another quarter earned more than \$300,000. Five percent each earned less than \$40,000 and more than a million dollars in the year preceding our data collection. Men earned more than women. Our regression model showed Rhodes Scholars' incomes were significantly positively associated with: age cohort; having a father who completed less than a high school education; earning a Bachelor's degree at Harvard, Princeton, or Yale; holding a medical or law degree; serving on boards; and maintaining a wide scope of influential acquaintances in political and media circles. Gender was not significant in the full model.

In descriptive terms, the distribution of household income of Phi Beta Kappa Scholarship recipients is more normally distributed. Compared to a third of Rhodes Scholars, only 16 per cent of Kappans in the survey earned between \$200,000 and \$300,000. More Kappans



than Rhodes Scholars earned incomes at either end of the distribution: 9% of Kappans reported incomes above \$1, 000, 000 and 15% earned less than \$40, 000. Our PBK multivariate model of income shows no significant relation to the following independent variables: demographics, family and social backgrounds, college prestige, graduate and professional education and social capital. This analysis was the first of several confirming that top academic achievers were a very different group than Rhodes Scholars.

Although the lack of fit of our highly significant Rhodes Scholar income model to the Phi Beta Kappa sample was unexpected, most of the Rhodes Scholars findings were unsurprising. One would expect, for instance, that Rhodes Scholars in their prime would earn more than the mostly-retired World War II cohort and the 1986-1992 group career builders. Law and medicine tend to be lucrative professions. Even among Rhodes Scholars, it makes sense that attorneys and physicians would generally out-earn peers in such professions as academia, journalism, and the arts. Board memberships and influential networks of ties can serve as instrumental means to enhancing income and as recognition of one's wealth. The importance of board membership to women's income suggests that exclusion from networks of influence might explain much of the pervasive gender disparity in income. What of the positive effect on income of low parental education? Following Bourdieu (1977), we posit that economic, social and cultural capital are distinct types of resources. Rhodes Scholars from working class backgrounds might prioritize economic capital as both compensation for their past and expression of their parents' aspirations for material ease. Rhodes Scholars from more privileged families, this line of reasoning goes, might care less about economic outcomes because of a focus on cultural values. Regardless of family background, Rhodes Scholars developed important social ties that significantly enhanced their wealth.

Career Prominence. We measured professional prominence through appearance in Who's Who. Nearly a third of our respondents were represented with biographies in this standard source (29. 6%). This figure underestimates the prominence of Rhodes Scholars because the 1980s and 1990s Rhodes Scholars have not yet reached their professional peak. Among the first 3 cohorts, a remarkable 45% appear in Who's Who.

To investigate the correlates of professional prominence, we conducted a logistical regression analysis predicting the log odds of appearing in Who's Who. The model showed significant positive effects of membership in older cohort; father's partial college education; Harvard, Yale or Princeton baccalaureate; undergraduate degree from other highly selective colleges; academically intensive undergraduate experiences; serving on boards; and maintaining a wide scope of influential acquaintances in political and media circles.

As in findings with income, professional prominence and age related in unsurprising patterns. Rhodes Scholars elected in the 1980s and 1990s were much less likely than older respondents to appear in Who's Who because they were still building their careers. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton exerted an influence on prominence above and beyond other highly selective schools. Graduates of the least selective colleges in the study were significantly less likely than their Rhodes Scholar peers to appear in Who's Who. These findings were consistent with the social capital model of status attainment, in which the most valuable social resources are found at the top levels of the prestige hierarchy. They might also point to poorer self-concept or weaker skills acquired in less competitive sectors of higher education. Whatever the undergraduate institution, eventual career prominence was positively influenced by academically intensive undergraduate experiences involving heavy writing loads, student-centered class discussions, individualized instruction, and participation in small seminars. As with income, social connections (boards and influential contacts) contributed to adult prominence. Finally, the finding that children of fathers with

some postsecondary education but no degree—about 60 Rhodes Scholars--were more likely to appear in Who's Who was puzzling. As in the relationship of working class fathers to high Rhodes Scholar income, perhaps some sort of compensatory process was at work here. Finally, Rhodes Scholars reached prominence across professions. Of the 4 outcome measures, only Who's Who showed no relationship with earning a law degree. For Phi Beta Kappans, the measures of cultural capital, family background and the selectivity undergraduate show no significant relation to the achievement of prominence.

Public Leadership Cecil Rhodes called for Rhodes Scholars who would “esteem public service as their highest aim.” This central focus, along with the public importance of socially-oriented careers, led us to create a measure of public leadership. We coded all respondents on a 3-point public leadership scale based on career information from surveys, Who's Who, and other published and internet sources. Top ranking went to the quarter of Rhodes Scholars who currently or formerly served as elected or appointed government officials; federal judges, university presidents; chief executive officers of Fortune 500 firms and major non-profit organizations; ambassadors, military generals and admirals; full partners at the top 100 U. S. law firms; celebrated artists, authors, and journalists; editors of prominent newspapers and magazines; chief scientists in major research centers and hospitals; and endowed professors at Ivy League institutions. Middle-ranked Rhodes Scholars were a third of respondents, including local elected officials; full professors and deans at top-tier universities; high-level (non-CEO) executives at top firms; CEOs of non-Fortune 500 companies; and notable arts and literary figures. Forty-one percent of Rhodes Scholars ranked in the bottom tier of the high-achieving assembly. This group included academics, attorneys, scientists, writers, business people and other professionals who were nearly all successful professionals but who did not hold top-level positions of public leadership.

A regression model demonstrating the likelihood of achieving public leadership showed the following significant variables: cohort; Harvard, Yale or Princeton baccalaureate; top Carter-ranked undergraduate degree; Oxford influence on public affairs and international interests; law degree; board membership; and influential social connections. As with income, men were more likely to hold public leadership positions than women in a direct comparison; however, the gender difference disappeared when social connections were added to the multivariate model.

Public leadership showed the now-familiar effects of prestigious undergraduate education, law degree, and social connections. Cohort behaved slightly differently in this analysis, with Vietnam era Rhodes Scholars joining the most recent cohorts in displaying a negative effect on public leadership. Although the relative youth of the 1980s and 1990s Rhodes Scholars explains their lower leadership attainments, the showing of the 1968-1972 cohort is surprising. The Vietnam era cohort also earned the fewest degrees at Oxford. As interviews corroborated, the turbulence of this era affected many Rhodes Scholars profoundly. The small group of non-professionals is concentrated among this cohort. A second notable difference from previous analyses is the emergence of an Oxford factor in predicting a Rhodes Scholar group outcome. Derived from a factor analysis, the variable includes Oxford's effects on strengthening international interests, intercultural awareness, and commitment to public service. In sum, Rhodes Scholars reached public leadership positions through the social connections and values formation provided by top baccalaureate institutions and the leadership socialization of Oxford. In addition to the productive social capital of board membership and network membership, the pathway to public leadership also frequently involved legal training.

Among Phi Beta Kappans, no one in our sample has held prominent public leadership positions. We therefore were unable to construct a comparable multivariate analysis. Phi

Beta Kappa members work at high level professions like law, academia, medicine and business. However, Rhodes Scholars achieved much more highly as a group than their same-age, same-college peers who were recognized for academic attainment alone. This is particularly true in the realm of public leadership.

Civic Engagement. We borrowed from Bowen and Bok's The Shape of the River (1998) a set of items measuring level of volunteerism in local and national educational, civic, athletic, cultural, and service activities. Rhodes Scholars were deeply engaged in voluntary civic activities, particularly at organizational and leadership levels. Their civic participation differed considerably from our comparison group of Phi Beta Kappa members in extent, scope, type, and level. As compared with Phi Beta Kappans, Rhodes Scholars tended to participate more heavily in civic activities and to engage in organizations with a more national and international (as opposed to local) scope. The Rhodes group were more likely to volunteer in political, cultural, and higher education activities, whereas the Phi Beta Kappa group volunteered more often in religious organizations, schools, and social services. Compared with PBK members, Rhodes Scholars volunteered more often at policy and governance levels. The two groups were similarly involved in professional organizations.

Ordinary Least Squares regression on the summed volunteerism of Rhodes Scholars resulted in the following significant predictor variables: cohort; childhood cultural capital; father with less than high school education; Oxford influence on public affairs and international interests; undergraduate academic intensity; Harvard, Yale, or Princeton baccalaureate; law degree; board membership; influential social connections. All effects were positive with the exception of the negative influence of 1990's cohort membership (the only significant cohort effect) and—surprisingly—the negative influence on volunteerism of having earned an undergraduate degree from Harvard, Yale, or Princeton.

Appearing for the first time as a direct effect, childhood cultural capital influenced civic engagement. Interview data confirmed that many Rhodes Scholars grew up in families that stressed the importance of public service and making a positive difference in the world. Having a poorly educated father might contribute to eventual civic engagement as the outcome of an early sense of inequality and a desire to advance social justice. As in leadership analyses, law training probably reflected Rhodes Scholars' interests in public affairs. Similarly, Oxford's strengthening of internationalism and social commitments clearly relates to values of public engagement. It was less clear why an academically intensive undergraduate experience would lead to increased volunteerism. Perhaps such an education leads to socially-relevant critical thinking and breadth of perspective. Social capital effects of board membership and social connections were familiar positive influences on volunteerism, reinforcing the relational aspects of high level achievement and social contributions. The youngest cohort will probably increase their volunteer activities as they establish themselves professionally. Most puzzling in this analysis is the finding that Harvard, Yale, and Princeton students were less civically engaged once other variables in the analysis were held constant. This is the only outcome in which a Big-3 diploma led to a less desirable adult outcome, although it is also possible that graduates of these top institutions are engaged in different kinds of civic activities.

For Phi Beta Kappans, civic participations was also negatively associated with holding a Harvard, Yale, or Princeton degree. Overall, Phi Beta Kappa members were less engaged civically, and their participation was more local and less policy-oriented than Rhodes Scholars'. As with public leadership, it appears that the Rhodes Scholars differ systematically from Phi Beta Kappans on the scope and level of their civic engagement.

### The Role of Ability in Achievement Pathways: SAT Analyses

How does cognitive ability explain career prominence, public leadership, and wealth? Investigating the correlates of adult achievement calls for some measure of intellectual ability. In the absence of any test scores collected in the Rhodes Scholarship selection process, we obtained either SAT or ACT scores for 594 (67%) of the Rhodes Scholar and Phi Beta Kappa survey respondents. Given the extensive missing data in the first 2 cohorts, we restricted our SAT analyses to the final 3 cohorts. Rhodes Scholars earned high average SAT (or converted ACT) scores across the 25-year time period available for analysis. No statistically significant differences distinguished scores across the 3 cohorts. The average SAT Verbal score for the 485 test takers (1966-1992) was 663 (SD=74). Mean SAT Math score was 674 (SD=84). These impressive scores mask outliers: scores ranged from a low of 390 (SAT-V) and 380 (SAT-M) to 21 perfect scores of 800.

Tested verbal ability was a statistically significant predictor of undergraduate enrollment in prestigious universities. Top university credentials carried forward as a key contributor to adult attainment; therefore, SAT verbal scores played an important role in achievement pathways. Although we included SAT/ACT as a proxy for ability, it is possible that SAT-verbal is an additional indication of embodied cultural capital in the form of elite habitus. (Bourdieu, 1977). The role of verbal ability in converting academic talent into career prominence supports Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital analysis. Basil Bernstein (1973, p. 289) argued that "status groups may be distinguished by their forms of language use" that is developed within the family. Both Bourdieu and Bernstein argued that language performance is the key to educational achievement. Cultural capital that is characteristic of dominant groups in society such as verbal facility and preference for so-called "high culture" result in ways of perceiving and presenting oneself that tend to be rewarded in formal education. Certainly the Rhodes Scholarship essay and interview selection process favors students who demonstrate superior written and oral expression.

We asked Phi Beta Kappa respondents to report their SAT scores. For the 22 Kappans who did report them, SAT scores were higher and more normally distributed among Phi Beta Kappa members as compared with Rhodes Scholars. For Phi Beta Kappans, the average SAT-Verbal score was 690 (SD=20) and 732 for SAT-Quantitative (SD=18). Although the sample size was insufficient to conduct multivariate analyses with SAT, we suspect that the measure of SAT scores might be a good predictor for entrance into selective institutions, as it was for the Rhodes Scholars. Given the poor fit of Rhodes Scholars statistical models of achievement to Phi Beta Kappans, it is likely that SAT scores do not play a role in Kappans' career prominence. The selection criteria for Phi Beta Kappa members, the poor fit of multivariate models that explain Rhodes Scholars' achievement, and the finding of higher Kappan SAT scores all suggest important differences among these 2 groups of top college students.

### Interview Findings

Response rate. As with the survey portion of the study, we were very pleased with the positive response of Rhodes Scholars to our requests for interviews. Only 2 Rhodes Scholars turned us down: an artist in the midst of making a film and a scientist who "never interrupts my research time with such things." Their interviews were notably reflective and candid. The major interview categories were: family background, undergraduate experience, Rhodes selection, Oxford experience, and Rhodes Scholarship effects.

Pre-college background. Our quantitative analyses indicated that pre-college cultural capital—as distinct from fathers' occupations—had a significant influence on the entrance into prestigious higher education as well as a direct effect on adult civic engagement.

Interviews showed the effects of childhood enrichment even among Rhodes Scholars from working class families. Some of these future Rhodes Scholars were identified by teachers as academically gifted and plucked out of their neighborhood schools for private schooling. Others had a parent or parental figure who was politically active or a voracious reader. Sometimes enrichment was accidental, as in the case of a rural Rhodes Scholar whose small town was transformed by the arrival of a government laboratory that brought highly educated, cosmopolitan families and classmates into his life. As children, Rhodes Scholars tell of family members or school mentors who invited their opinions and took their aspirations seriously. Among Rhodes Scholars from more affluent families, many grew up in the homes of highly educated and accomplished parents. These students had first hand experience with intellectual life, civic engagement, international travel, and stimulating educational and leisure activities. Several knew Rhodes Scholars personally. By high school, virtually all of the future Rhodes Scholars were academically successful and the majority had also been competitive athletes. Finally, many Rhodes Scholars said their families stressed the importance of making positive contributions to the wider society, an early socialization experience that probably accounts for the significant relationship between childhood cultural capital and adult volunteerism.

Undergraduate experience. As survey findings illustrated, Rhodes Scholars shared academically intensive, interpersonally rich undergraduate experiences. Virtually all of the Rhodes Scholars worked closely with at least one professor whom they counted as a mentor. One of the most striking findings of the study was the dominance of elite higher education—especially Harvard, Princeton, and Yale baccalaureates—in the production of American Rhodes Scholars. Interviews gave us a rich picture of elite undergraduate education. Two major themes emerged from the Harvard-Yale-Princeton group. First, students at these institutions initiated or strengthened an identity as someone who could be successful at the very highest levels. For this reason, several interview respondents from average secondary schools found the leap into the Ivy League the definitive step in their identity as achievers. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton undergraduates had access to exceptional opportunities that expanded their horizons, increased their confidence, and raised their aspirations. For example, a 1950s Yale anthropology major followed the advice of a professor to learn Indonesian in order to take part in ground-breaking fieldwork in the region. A 1960s Harvard student received the only undergraduate summer internship in the U. S. Civil Rights office. “That experience at that age... I don’t know what most sophomores in college have as summer jobs, but not like that. Early on, it gave me a sense that this kind of thing could be done, although not necessarily how to do it. It was close contact with some pretty heroic stuff.” Many students pointed to the stimulating peer group and involvement with faculty, like the student who said Yale had “the right climate. An informal, over time engagement process over several years. Just having people around.” Academic superstars at less elite institutions had at least as much recognition and mentoring from faculty. However, non-Ivy League students were never sure exactly how they might compare with the very best youth across the country. Several never fully stretched themselves as undergraduates.

Second, the experience of a top undergraduate school matched the challenges of the Rhodes Scholarship selection process and Oxford. From a 1940s Ivy League Rhodes who went directly into a doctoral degree program in Oxford: “My undergraduate training was so good that I was very fortunate. I think that the Princeton history department in European history was probably the best in the world - was certainly the best in the United States at that time. And I was really into it and working hard and digesting it, so I had the equivalent of a much better than just a normal undergraduate education.” A 1980s female Rhodes was disappointed in the level of Oxford academics in comparison with her undergraduate university: “I was really supercharged intellectually at Yale. At Yale the level of expectation of performance was that you would produce at the level of a graduate student always.” In

addition to superb academic preparation, elite universities turn out students who are skilled at understanding how to present themselves. As a Harvard graduate told us, successful self-presentation, paradoxically, is really a matter of genuineness arising from self-knowledge. This genuineness is not just a personality trait of Rhodes Scholars, she insisted. It is cultivated and prepared at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, she said, through “the process of getting in touch with our own ideals and directions” and through deep tacit knowledge about how elites think and express themselves.

Becoming a Rhodes Scholar. Longtime Warden of Rhodes House, Sir Edgar Williams, famously said that the ideal Rhodes Scholar is “well-rounded, with a bulge.” Our Rhodes Scholar interviewees discussed the Scholarship selection process from the dual vantage points of candidate and selection panel member. A strong picture of the successful Rhodes candidate emerged across baccalaureate institutions. Rhodes Scholars were successful, respondents said, because they were articulate, engaged, and able to make strong connections with others. In interviews, success came from being honest, genuine, intellectually lively and playful, and willing to admit ignorance. To get the Rhodes Scholarship, they said, one must be accomplished and passionate about an area of interest. At the same time, successful candidates must be able to converse interestingly about a variety of issues and to discuss specialized knowledge in relevant, accessible ways. Applicants must be able to articulate who they are and connect intellectual to social purposes.

Rhodes Scholars relished the wide-ranging, swift, and challenging selection interviews. They shared numerous examples of humorous and assertive responses to interview questions. The majority of our interview respondents insisted that they did not count on receiving the Rhodes. In fact, a majority said that not expecting to win helped them to be relaxed and genuine during the interviews. A few Rhodes Scholars drew attention to the necessary social graces required for the mandatory social receptions that precede state and district-level individual interviews. Several pointed to the Ivy League advantages of insider knowledge and mock interviews for the delicate balance of optimal aggressiveness, seriousness, and irreverence that marks winners.

Our interview respondents mused over how to balance the Rhodes selections as a reward for achievement, an opportunity for those most likely to take advantage of Oxford, or an investment in the most likely future leaders. Informants agreed that athletic accomplishment has diminished in importance over the past quarter century. Despite otherwise impressive fidelity to the selection criteria of Cecil Rhodes’ Will, selectors differed on the relative importance of academics, character, and public-mindedness in choosing Scholars. Activists tended to fault the Rhodes selection process for choosing candidates interested in traditional careers. Many older Rhodes Scholars expressed concern about a new emphasis on academic excellence, which they saw occurring at the expense of well-roundedness, character, and uniqueness (Williams’ “bulge.”) Interestingly, the actual selection of the Rhodes Scholars in state and district committees appeared to be quite free of ideological conflicts. It seems selectors agree when they see the “spark” of the Rhodes Scholar across an application, recommendations and—especially—interviews.

The Rhodes Induction. Induction into elite circles began in earnest during the pre-departure orientation. For most of the fellowship’s history, Rhodes Scholars sailed to England as a group. More recently, they fly to Britain after a ‘sailing week’ of social and cultural events in New York or Washington, D. C. During this week, “they are told over and over again how wonderful they are,” a British Rhodes trustee told us disapprovingly. The cumulative message of British Embassy receptions, cabinet member briefings, meetings with Congressmen, and parties in private mansions is clear, said one of the Sailing Week organizers: “You are special. This is your milieu. You belong in these circles. You have

access to powerful people. You are capable of making a contribution to your society. You are expected to do so.”

Students reported mixed messages about what, precisely, they were to accomplish in Oxford. Several current Rhodes Scholars said the message from the sailing weekend was to “Go and have a good time, travel.” One longtime Oxford don said that “Selectors saw their experience as a time of freedom. Not so tied to an academic work but more having a good time.” Only the Warden of Rhodes House had a different take: “You’d better be serious [he said]. This isn’t a cookie jar to dip your hand into. The Warden expects us to toe the line, complete the degree well, don’t embarrass the Trust.”

While it may be unclear how to spend the Oxford years, the initiation period unambiguously hammered home the theme of worthy chosenness and began to form the Rhodes Scholars into a cohesive group. The lifelong process of measuring oneself within the group also commenced here. “If you bond with your class, there are peers whom you’re judging yourself against for the rest of your career,” said a 1980s Rhodes. A 1950s scholar described the posturing and showing off that began his mid-century boat trip to England. By the middle of the Atlantic, several Rhodes Scholars cornered one young man and demanded he stop wearing his Phi Beta Kappa key. It was pretentious to display it, and besides “We all have them, too.” Other Rhodes hung back until they got a feeling for where they fit. “For someone from a small town background and a small college, it was an intimidating experience because I think many Rhodes Scholars, whether they’ll admit it or not, assume that they’re the mistake who got through. Probably, part of the insecurity leads some people to work very hard to show that they weren’t a mistake, and the rest of us to kind of gulp and keep quiet, you know. And so there was definitely a kind of a taking stock of the other folks and kind of being awed by the other folks, too.”

The Oxford Experience. Rhodes Scholars varied greatly in how they engaged the University of Oxford and what they now make of their experience there. Oxford itself has changed profoundly over the years covered by the study. Regardless of these caveats, interview and survey data both indicate that the Oxford experience was a defining one for most Rhodes Scholars. The Oxford period capped a process in which Rhodes Scholars crystallized their identity as scholars and leaders and sorted out their relative status within competitive peer groups. In the context of the strong ethos of Oxford and the Rhodes obligation, international living broadened the Scholars. It was within the Oxford years that the most powerful socializing aspects of the Rhodes Scholarship occurred.

Across the decades, students felt insufficiently informed in choosing their preferred Oxford college and degree program. Most formed a satisfactory bond with their college, but degree choice became even more problematic with the proliferation of Master’s degrees beginning in the late 1980s. Before then, most students read a second B. A. in the famed tutorial system, with the remainder (around 15%) conducting specialized doctoral research in preparation for academic careers. Common across degrees was a demand for student self-direction that was quite novel for American college graduates. Many Rhodes Scholars delighted in the independence, verbal debate, and emphasis on synthesis and argumentation that characterized the tutorial system. Scholars’ baccalaureate origins affected their views of Oxford academics. Many Ivy League graduates found the academics lacking in rigor, military academy alumni reported difficulty adjusting to the unstructured pedagogy, and several graduates of non-elite American colleges struggled with Oxford-level writing and analysis. In all degree programs, relationships with tutors or research supervisors colored the entire academic experience. Peer relations were important wells of intellectual life. As a 1980s Rhodes Scholar said: “Where I got the most out of it was having incredibly vigorous debates about philosophy or political theories amongst ourselves. All having read the same

text. And in that regard, it was a phenomenal environment, because other students I thought were super smart.”

Interview findings explained why only one in five Rhodes Scholars strongly agreed on the survey that academics were their major focus at Oxford. Respondents did not need the second bachelor’s degree, they told us, and the Oxford years provided a refreshing hiatus from hard-driving achievement paths. The Rhodes Scholar label stood apart from what they actually accomplished in England. And Oxford college life offered many delights. Lord Robin Butler, head of University College summed up their choices. Like all Oxford students, he said, Rhodes Scholars are “left to make their lives here, including organizing their time. They must determine for themselves what books to read, which lectures to attend (if any), which sports and social activities in which to engage, and how much time to allow for each. Such a system requires self-discipline and helps students discover where their interests really lie.” That is, when it works. Many Oxford faculty and staff expressed dismay that many U. S. Rhodes Scholars give low priority to their studies. “Some regard this as ‘we’ve won a holiday as a prize for good citizenship,’ ” an eminent Oxford leader said. “In my frank opinion, they’re getting worse.”

Rhodes Scholars participated fully in college life, including organized athletics, social and political groups, and their college Common Room (student union). They pointed to rich interactions with American and international peers as one of the most important aspects of their Oxford experience. As one Oxford official said: “It is terribly important to be with the right mix of people—congenial but challenging, thinking in different ways. A good Common Room does that well. The mix of subjects and nationalities in a college is a good place to do that.” Rhodes Scholars also interacted with peers in their sports teams, residences, and dining halls. Although international friendships were the rule, only the post-World War II group and members of traditional British sports teams like crew and rugby found easy access to English social circles at Oxford. Among current Rhodes Scholars (2000-2005), we found overt awareness of professional networking and competition among American Rhodes Scholars. Rhodes Scholars from our 1947-1992 group did not speak in these terms, leading us to wonder whether this represents a real shift in the social relations of Rhodes Scholars. Group cohesion among American Rhodes Scholars could be heightened in the current era because of ubiquitous electronic communications, looser bonds to their Oxford college among graduate students, and the achievement strivings of the so-called “Millennial” students. Or, it could just be the rawness of youth that yielded so many accounts of young Rhodes Scholars “on the make.”

In addition to peer relations, Rhodes Scholars pointed to between-term travel as central to their Oxford experience. Intercultural immersion in England, along with travels around Europe and beyond, gave Rhodes Scholars an internationalist perspective and connections worldwide. As all study abroad tends to do, students also emerged from Oxford with a new lens on their own country.

Oxford itself seemed to be an important influence on Rhodes Scholars, as opposed to the generic experience of foreign study and travel. Important in the history of England, Oxford continues to dominate the production of British elites, including prime ministers and other public leaders. A 1970s Rhodes Scholar distinguished the focus of Oxford undergraduate education from the American “watered down versions of graduate education” designed to produce scholars. “I think the important distinction is that in the Oxford education that I knew, they believed they were training leaders.” Taking their place among future international elites helped Rhodes Scholars take themselves seriously as intellectuals and future leaders.



Rhodes Scholarship Effects. Oxford not only polished the scholarship winners and extended their social and cultural capital, it left Rhodes Scholars with the idea that they must somehow justify their election and the investment that had been made in them. Over and over, interview respondents brought up the “Rhodes Obligation,” a tacit pressure that both motivated and oppressed Rhodes Scholars as they defined their adult paths. Cecil Rhodes’ call for gifted youth to “fight the world’s fight” was a familiar quotation for Rhodes Scholars and one that resonated deeply within this group. Rhodes Scholars have taken on identities as talented people who can and should do something socially worthwhile with their professional lives. Along with internal achievement motivation, the accomplishments of fellow Rhodes Scholars reinforced the drive to succeed.

Rhodes Scholars defined success as making a positive difference in the world across a broad set of domains. A few Rhodes Scholars said the purpose of the scholarship was to prepare leaders in government and one academic argued the opposite. However, most allowed multiple arenas in which to “fight the world’s fight.” Each respondent discussed ways in which character and concern for the common good motivated their professional and civic work. The scope of their interests reached well beyond Rhodes Scholars’ employment organizations and even beyond their professions. Rhodes Scholars were deeply involved in cultural, civic, educational, and political organizations and activities. They defined life success in all these arenas, as well as in relationships and family roles. In interviews, they continued to show the abilities that won them the Rhodes Scholarship, including a broad interests and knowledge in national and world affairs and the ability to articulate the social value of their work.

Oxford academics, respondents said, left them with sharpened skills in written and oral argumentation. It gave them the ability to synthesize vast amounts of material and dig deeply into self-defined problems and issues.

One of the things that I think I did come away with from Oxford was the ability to step back and ask the fundamental question, the primary question. To say things like: ‘What is the common good? Is there a good? And it is discernable? Is it legitimate enough for us to pursue that? What is the frame of reference that we try to pursue that good?’ Like any public policy decisions for example. What is the democratic principal at work here? In this country, one of the things that worries me a lot is the willingness with which we will abandon that inquiry. I have to say that I do think that Oxford does get people to those kind of first principals. I do feel grateful for those thoughts and I try to fall back on those ideas when I am making decisions.

Beyond an internalized expectation of socially valuable achievement and the intellectual outcomes of an Oxford education, Rhodes Scholars cited several lasting consequences of receiving the scholarship. The majority of Rhodes Scholars attribute their international awareness and interests at least partially to the scholarship. Most strikingly, Rhodes Scholars named lifelong friendships as perhaps the primary effect of the scholarship. Their within-group professional ties vary but we heard many stories of Rhodes Scholars providing each other with assistance, advice, and contacts. In general, Scholars found the label helpful in getting access to opportunities. Being a Rhodes Scholar offered a short cut to top U. S. graduate programs, influential contacts, and high level jobs. These effects were particularly true for lawyers, business executives, and public servants and less so for scientists and academics.

Interview Summary. Overall, interview findings suggest a system of talent development in which merit is actualized through social capital acquired in prestigious higher education. Talent does matter. By the end of their undergraduate years, Rhodes Scholar men and

women stood out of the crowd as exceptional performers: vigorous, confident, accomplished, and persuasive. They sought out challenges, thrived on competition, and attracted mentors. Rhodes Scholars actively sought out opportunities to enter high status settings like the Rhodes Scholarship. Exceptionally promising young people needed sponsorship, however, to realize their worth and to move into circles where their gifts could be developed. Clustering within the most selective colleges and universities, savvy mentors and high-powered peer groups validated future Rhodes Scholars' ambition and identity as future elites. Talent spotters plucked out young performers, setting up connections to opportunities and influential contacts, and imparting unwritten information about where they might go and how they might get there. The chosen youth continued to perform in the new settings to which they had been invited. They attracted new talent scouts who sponsored them into additional, even more selective circles. They thickened their network of useful, stimulating, and validating connections. The result of successful competition at each stage was the entrance into a more select group with which to compare oneself. Positive achievement in increasingly rarified company led to greater self-confidence, a collective identity adopting the norms and values of the new circle, and increasingly useful networks of connections. At the most competitive levels—like the Rhodes Scholarship—belonging to a chosen elect meant a tacit invitation to envision big dreams and to expect that these dreams could realistically be attained. A moral component derived from this privilege: Rhodes Scholars were chosen, and socialized to use their talents for positive social contributions. Their accomplishments reflected both internal motivation and the pressure to maintain their status in the high-powered Rhodes Scholar reference group (de Botton, 2004). A repeating chain of talent development emerged: performance, talent spotting, opportunity, self-view, aspirations, accomplishment. The Rhodes Scholarship offered an exemplary structure for this model of talent development, but our findings also show that the process was accessible mostly to youth within very highly selective baccalaureate colleges and universities. Our findings support the thesis that talent is widely distributed but narrowly developed (Ilchman, Ilchman, & Tolar, 2004).

### Institutional Case Studies

“Welcome to the Fellowships game. Some of you have already played it a little. I hope you found it enjoyable.” The director of the Harvard University fellowships office continued the Rhodes Scholarship information session without giving a history of Cecil Rhodes and the scholarship. The packed room of undergraduates heard no motivational speech, no discussion of the Oxford tutorial system. The institutional competition—getting Harvard's endorsement—would be the toughest part of the competition, the students heard. Don't even bother getting faculty recommendations until Harvard endorses you to apply.

Nomination to the Rhodes competition is itself a form of ritual whereby each institution defines its outstanding students as “Rhodes material.” We visited five top Rhodes-producing universities in order to document the institutional practices that support recruitment and successful competition in the Rhodes Scholarship. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton (in that order) continue to lead the competition for Rhodes Scholars, as they have throughout the 100-year history of the fellowship. We visited these 3 universities, along with the United States Military Academy at West Point-- the 4<sup>th</sup> most successful Rhodes producer. Finally, we visited Kansas State University because of its top ranking among state university Rhodes winners of the past 25 years (along with the University of North Carolina).

Rhodes Scholar applications require a formal university nomination and endorsement. Beyond this official support, universities offer a variety of forms of assistance to potential Rhodes Scholars ranging from informal recruitment by faculty members to designated administrative positions overseeing international fellowship competitions. Some universities

explicitly target student success in the Rhodes Scholarship competition as an institutional goal. Some stage mock interviews, and even cocktail parties, to rehearse the state and district finalist competition. Formal university fellowship assistance has risen dramatically over the study period. Beginning in the 1980s, the majority of Rhodes Scholars had access to university information sessions about international fellowships, application coaching, connections to former Rhodes Scholars, and practice interviews. An exception to the rise in institutional assistance is the consistently low level of advising about Oxford colleges and degrees.

The implicit message of the Harvard information session was echoed in interviews with Rhodes Scholars who graduated from the Big-3. As the fellowship officer assumed, Harvard, Yale and Princeton students know what the Rhodes Scholarship is and why they want it. They have a realistic view of their standing among peers. They know, or will find out what they need to know, about Oxford. Many Big-3 students in the Rhodes competition have competed—and often won—other fellowships. All travel in circles where they meet former Rhodes Scholars as well as state and district level finalists. “There probably isn’t a student at Harvard who doesn’t know someone or work with someone who got an interview,” the fellowship director told us.

The most obvious advantages of the Ivy League and West Point certainly play an important role. Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and the US Military Academy enroll outstanding students from around the country. High ability and academic skills, keen ambition, competitive peer groups, notable accomplishment outside the classroom, and eligibility across the Rhodes Scholarship regional districts all position Big-3 students for success in international fellowships. As one dean told us about Harvard’s success: “The secret is our admission office,” claiming that a random 10% of the senior class might produce as many winners.

The Big-3 provide targeted assistance to students who have self-identified as Rhodes material. At Harvard and Yale, undergraduates live in a ‘house’ or ‘residential college’ with masters and tutors who know well their accomplishments in scholarship, activities, and athletics. Designated fellowship advisors within these living units help students with application essays and with strategies for recommendations and interviews. Along with other Rhodes Scholars and finalists to whom Big-3 students have access, fellowship advisors have deep knowledge about the factors that constitute successful applications. Faculty too have extensive experience in writing Rhodes Scholar recommendations. At Princeton, the fellowship director sends unsatisfactory recommendations back to the faculty writer for revision. At all Big-3 schools, students are coached about seeking recommendations and guiding recommenders.

At Harvard, House-based fellowship advisors vote on candidates for university endorsement, while the Dean of the College heads a committee of faculty and heads of house that makes the actual nomination decisions and crafts the university endorsement letter. Only 40-50% of Harvard Rhodes applicants are endorsed by the university and allowed to apply; students wait until that stage to collect faculty recommendations. At Yale, the President places a high-level assistant on the nominating committee, which endorses between half and two-thirds of its applicants. Princeton has a slightly different structure in which faculty play the key role in nominations.

Along with residential fellowship advisors and other faculty, top Rhodes Scholarship institutions staff university-level fellowship offices. The fellowship director is in a position to share insider knowledge with applicants based on regular contacts with the Secretary of the American Rhodes Trust, members of selection committees, and students who interviewed for and who won the fellowship. Students have access to knowledge about the relative importance of athletics, for instance, in meeting the criterion of “physical vigor.”

They see sample interview questions gleaned from former applicants. They learn that Oxford's academic standards have been rising and that their application essay must address both their scholarly fit with Oxford and the likely outcome of the Rhodes Scholarship's investment in them. (As an Ivy League fellowship director advised one information session, essays must address: "Why am I special and why do I want to go to Oxford? What do these people get out of it if I go to Oxford?")

Finally, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale provide practice interviews with panels of former Rhodes Scholars. In addition to interviewer feedback, some of these interviews are videotaped for analysis. Interview practice with former Rhodes Scholars closely resembles the actual state and district competitions. A Yale student, for instance, told of confronting his practice interview panel when (as he later realized) "they were trying to knock you off stride." The laughter from the committee reinforced his confidence that a "slightly flip, response was a good thing, not a bad thing... If Yale had not had that little prep thing, I might have committed a faux-pas and not had the confidence to speak my own mind."

Harvard, Princeton, and Yale differ somewhat in their approach to the Rhodes Scholarship. Harvard tends to highlight well-roundedness, while Yale calls for students to demonstrate their passions and tie them to international and other policy implications. Princeton stresses academic excellence in applicants. The Big-3 share an ethos in which opportunities like the Rhodes Scholarship are "in the air"—familiar and realistically attainable for top undergraduates. Despite the confident, low-key rhetoric of the top institutions, each offers students laser-targeted assistance and deep insider knowledge about winning the Rhodes Scholarship.

The story is quite different at the U. S. Military Academy, where identification and preparation of potential Rhodes Scholars is highly organized and deliberate. Working closely with the Superintendent of the Academy and the West Point faculty, a scholarship committee screens third-year cadets who have excelled in the Academy's core curriculum of politics, economics, history, and international relations. The committee selects approximately 20 of these students whose profiles of achievement match the Rhodes Scholarship as well other international fellowships like the Marshall. Faculty mentors work with the chosen cadets to help them learn about themselves, formulate a personal vision, read widely, and follow current events. Identified juniors take a special seminar entitled "Critical Thought," in which they explore the Academy's mission of "duty, honor, and leadership." Approximately 8 students from this cohort are nominated to apply for the Rhodes Scholarship and connected to faculty and alumni Rhodes Scholars through private meetings and mock interviews.

Kansas State University offers a final model of Rhodes Scholarship grooming that is quite distinct from those of the Ivy League or the military academy. At KSU, success in the Rhodes Scholarship has become linked with the rising fortunes of the institution. To this day a regional university, Kansas State was an open-admission institution when its first 2 Rhodes Scholars were elected in the early 1980s. The unlikely initial success was due to a single mid-level administrator who built a fellowship constituency of faculty. This group identified talented students, informed them of the Rhodes (and other) fellowships, and guided them through the application process. One of the first Rhodes Scholars from KSU describes her application as "a group project," in which faculty and administrators spent long hours helping her with essay writing and interview preparation. Fellowship mentors even arranged for Rhodes applicants to attend small presidential and trustee functions in preparation for the selection committee receptions on the eve of individual interviews.

Kansas State's longtime president, John Wefald, moved quickly to capitalize on the election of 2 KSU Rhodes Scholars. He established a university fellowship office and named a full

time fellowship director. Publications and publicity materials about the university were revamped to feature fellowships. The Kansas State President never gives a speech without lauding Kansas State's success in the Rhodes, Marshall, Truman, and Goldwater fellowships. Faculty are inundated with information about prestigious awards and requests to identify potential candidates among their top students. The fellowship office begins working with promising students as early as freshmen year through advising, special courses, and deliberate mentoring. President Wefald points to fellowship success as the key to achieving selective admissions at Kansas State, claiming that academically talented students are attracted there because they know this opportunity is available to them. Faculty are proud of the university's success and deeply sensitized to their role in identifying and nurturing talent.

Kansas State is an example of more professionalized, institutionalized fellowship processes in non-elite universities. Oklahoma State University, for instance, recently had its first Rhodes Scholar as a result of a designated fellowship office overseeing a deliberate identification process and credit-bearing seminar for potential fellowship candidates (Brownstein, 2001). More and more institutions are following this model, as evident in the 1999 establishment of the National Association of Fellowship Advisors. Over 250 colleges and universities hold institutional membership in NAFA and all the major fellowship organizations are affiliated. The NAFA mission stresses the value to the individual of coming to know oneself better through the application process and sharply decries the pursuit of fellowship winners for institutional prestige. The tension between education and commodity will only increase with the entry of more non-elite universities into serious fellowship preparation programs. Many of the Rhodes Scholars we interviewed were sharply critical of this type of institutional machinery for producing scholarship winners. Some non-elite graduates, however, stressed the need for considerable assistance in overcoming the obstacles of limited fellowship awareness, confidence, and application savvy.

Finally, it should be noted that our survey results show fellowship preparation is on the rise. Even among early cohorts, however, high awareness of the Rhodes Scholarship and ready access to former Rhodes Scholars advantaged graduates of elite universities. The new landscape might produce over-coached candidates, as some Rhodes Scholars accuse, but it might also help to level the playing field across institutions. There is some indication of the latter: a 2001 Chronicle of Higher Education article noted that "since 1997, Ivy students have won only 21 percent of the scholarships. Harvard and Yale still dominate, to be sure, but their share of the overall pie has dwindled as institutions like Pennsylvania State University and Wheaton College in Massachusetts became first-time winners" (Brownstein, 2001).

### Conclusion

According to our study results, the Rhodes Scholarship is an exemplary means for producing public leaders. Cecil Rhodes' original selection criteria of intellect, leadership, vigor, and character are both valuably broad and remarkably durable. These identification criteria, along with intensive selection rituals, Oxford socialization, intergroup ties, and the prestige of the credential, together produce a cadre of high achievers devoted to public service, intellectualism, and internationalism. Equality movements in the United States over the past 60 years have opened the fellowship to women and people of color. Immigrants and working class Rhodes Scholars continue to be elected. Some differences the Rhodes Scholar experience are attributable both to generational and Oxford characteristics. However, there is remarkable consistency across eras in Rhodes Scholars' allegiance to

moral, intellectual, and character aspects of achievement and in their advocacy of activist, internationalist government.

The Rhodes Scholar criteria, application age, and selection process offer an ideal model for identifying young adults with exceptional potential for achievement in the public good. Also exemplary is the Rhodes means of talent development through public recognition, international study, peer status pressure, and connections to social resources. The Rhodes Scholarship is remarkably successful in providing cultural and social capital that Rhodes Scholars use for exceptional achievement in socially valuable professional and civic arenas. As one prominent Rhodes told us: “The Rhodes Scholarship both anoints people, in the sense that it gives them a tool that will help open doors for them, and it provides them with a sense of responsibility.” The Rhodes model of leadership, another Scholar told us, is “being a person of ideas and of action.”

It is disturbing that this exemplary process of talent development is concentrated in elite higher education. As the United States achieved mass higher education in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, stratification of university prestige became more and more important. Economic background diminished in importance, but family cultural capital maintained a primary role in channeling students into differing positions within the prestige hierarchy of higher education. Elite institutions enables students to acquire additional cultural capital, to convert cultural capital into social resources, and to use social capital for wealth, reputation, and power. The Rhodes Scholarship clearly demonstrates social pathways to power through cumulative cultural and social capital acquired in prestigious baccalaureate and graduate universities. As this study shows, mass higher education has expanded opportunities in the U. S. , but has by no means equalized opportunities for access to elites.

This study compels us to think of the important change that is taking place in America. The change is essentially the product of two competing forces: the tide of expanding equality of opportunity and the spread of meritocratic institutions. The interaction of these forces appears to give rise to a paradox in US democracy. The power of elites and pathways to social prominence are increasingly dependent on the recognition of cultural credentials guarded by gatekeeping institutions in higher education. Given the tenuous relationship between education and achievement, cultural credentials in the form of prestigious college degrees serve as certification of quality and success. We believe that these findings provoke some serious challenges to our inclination for the expansion of equality and social policy in general.

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