Our Story

For more than 30 years, the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute (RBSI) has inspired nearly 600 undergraduate students from underrepresented backgrounds to consider pursuing academic careers in political science by exposing them to graduate-level coursework in research methodology and racial and ethnic politics.

Established in 1986 and originally called the APSA Summer Institute for Blacks in Political Science, the RBSI was a jointly sponsored program run by Southern University and Louisiana State University. Between 1988-1989, the program was renamed for Ralph J. Bunche, the first African American to earn a PhD in political science.

The program has moved over the years, first to a five-university consortium which included Spelman College, Clark-Atlanta University, Emory University, Georgia State University and Morehouse College in 1990; then to the University of Virginia in 1995; and has resided at Duke University since 2000.

Rising college seniors from across the country participate in an intensive 5 1/2 week program intended to simulate the graduate school experience through hands-on experience with an introduction to political science inquiry and scholarship, and research methodology. Since 2000, RBSI has hosted up to 20 undergraduate students at Duke each summer and provided training in research methods and critical thinking. A strong ethics component is added with readings, cases, debates and lectures on issues within an academic setting.

The Institute also provides a GRE prep course and transferable credit courses in quantitative analysis and race and American politics. Representatives from a number of leading PhD-granting institutions from across the country (many of whom are program alumni) participate in a recruitment fair at RBSI to discuss their doctoral programs. Students prepare original, empirical final research papers. Each year, students who excel at the Institute and on the final project are invited to present research posters at the APSA Annual Meeting.

RBSI and APSA are proud of the RBSI scholars and the impact they have and will continue to have on the future of the discipline and our society.
“The real objective must always be the good life for all the people.”

DR. RALPH J. BUNCHE

Bunche served as the founding chair of the Department of Political Science at Howard University, teaching generations of students to think strategically and intentionally about the world in which they lived and the possibilities and implications for the future. He was invited to join the Office of Strategic Services, a precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency, at the start of World War II in Europe. From there, his public service career took him to the State Department and eventually to the United Nations where he championed human and civil rights for everyone. He believed in “the essential goodness of all people, and that no problem in human relations is insoluble.” In 1947, Bunche, as a UN emissary, became involved in negotiating the Arab-Israeli conflict. For achieving the 1949 Armistice Agreements, Dr. Bunche was awarded the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize.

From 1953 to 1954, Bunche served as the president of APSA and was active in helping to determine the future of the discipline as one that values freedom of inquiry, rigor, scholarly exploration, teaching and learning, international relations, associational collaboration and interdisciplinarity.

There are numerous research centers, libraries, schools, roads, and parks named for Ralph Johnson Bunche across the country and around the world. The APSA Ralph Bunche Summer Institute is a living legacy of Bunche’s belief in the importance of education and scholarly excellence as an imperative for all — especially for students of political science.
For thirty years, the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute has provided academic training, research experience, professional inspiration, access to a supportive network, and financial support for students from diverse backgrounds to pursue advanced degrees and careers in political science. RBSI alumni have made major contributions to the discipline, public policy debates, the legal field, higher education administration and beyond. Your contribution to RBSI and the Ralph Bunche Fund will have far-reaching impact beyond the political science discipline.

Nearly $250,000 is currently required to cover the costs associated with RBSI each year. The costs include full summer session tuition, health insurance, transportation, on-campus room and board, books and instructional materials for 20 students annually. Students also receive a food allowance and a weekly stipend.

APSA and Duke University have been fortunate to have received generous support from the National Science Foundation (NSF) over the years to augment contributions made by both APSA and Duke University – but this funding is not guaranteed. Funding restrictions placed upon NSF in 2013 caused RBSI at Duke University to be cancelled for one year. This is not a scenario we wish to repeat.

APSA’s priority is to fully fund the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute not only for this year or next year but for generations of students who will contribute a diverse collection of innovative ideas and approaches to the political science professoriate, as well as other academic and professional fields.

APSA contributed $1.25 million to start this effort, and with thanks to the generosity of grateful RBSI alumni, members of the political science community, and other sources of support, we are within 20 percent of our $2.5 million fundraising goal as of August 2019.

APSA invites you to join us in securing the future of the RBSI program by investing in the next generations of students and scholars. Many of you have benefited from the generosity of others in achieving your goals – now it’s your opportunity to help support the future generations of political science scholars, researchers, and professionals. Your financial gift is the enduring gift of education for those who follow in your footsteps. You can make gifts of cash, stocks, and bequests, and pledge your gifts over as many as five years.

To donate, visit apsanet.org/pledge or contact development@apsanet.org.
“Participating in the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute (RBSI) is the reason why I am a political scientist. This was my first exposure to the professoriate. My involvement with the RBSI experience provided an opportunity for me to truly understand the importance of knowledge creation. Without this program, it is doubtful that I would have entered a graduate program in political science. I am thankful for APSA’s dedication to cultivating a pipeline for minority scholars.”

NADIA BROWN, PHD
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,
PURDUE UNIVERSITY
RBSI CLASS OF 2003

“Like most political science majors, I had high dreams of law school, and a plan of study to get me there. That all changed the summer (2007) I attended the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute (RBSI) at Duke; that experience is responsible for setting me on a professional-academic course that has been so rich in opportunity, friendship, and adventure.”

NYRON N. CRAWFORD, PHD
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
RBSI CLASS OF 2007

“RBSI opened up a world of possibilities that I did not know was in reach. By participating in the Bunche program, I not only learned that I had ‘the chops’ for completing a doctoral program, but I also learned that my modest financial background need not impede going to graduate school right after college.”

TEHAMA LOPEZ BUNYASI, PHD
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
RBSI CLASS OF 2000