



# NEVILLE BONNER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

## Applicant Information Document

### Indigenous Status

Written evidence confirming that you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. For example, a letter from an Indigenous community leader/organisation or from the Indigenous Unit of your university confirming your status as an Indigenous Australian.

### Other Scholarships

The Scholar may hold concurrently with the Neville Bonner Memorial Scholarship any other scholarship or award but must give details about the nature and value of the other scholarship(s), either held or being applied for, in the Application Form and must seek specific permission from the Selection Committee for the concurrent holding of the scholarship or award.

### Academic Record

You will be required to attach an original, certified academic transcript of your undergraduate degree and any other academic qualification/s you have completed. (Also include the explanation or key to the marking code/grades used).

When your Semester 2 results are available, you must forward them to the Scholarship Administrator as soon as possible, so they can be considered with your application.

You may also include a two-page Curriculum Vitae if you wish. Please do not include any additional information (other than that requested) as the Selection Committee will not be able to consider it.

### Selection Criteria

The Selection Committee will take into account the previously attained academic achievements of the student, the suitability of the applicant for an Honours year of study as assessed by the referees, the relevance of the proposed Honours research project to the Scholarship objectives, the student's aspirations including expressed interest in service to the Indigenous community, and other criteria as included from time to time by the Selection Committee. The award of the Scholarship is conditional on the Scholar gaining entry into the Honours program.

### Personal Statement

A personal statement (up to two pages) which may include a description of your chosen Honours topic, your service to the Indigenous community and your future aspirations to support your application.



## Academic Referees

You will need two academic referees who can comment on your suitability for the Scholarship and your ability to undertake study at Honours level.

## Personal Referee

A reference from someone who is not related to you but who has known you for at least three years may also be submitted to support your application. Ask your personal referee to write a letter (no more than two pages in length). They may comment, for example, on your extra-curricular activities, other interests and community involvement.

## Honours Course Details/Enrolment

If you are not currently enrolled at the University at which you wish to undertake the Honours program, you need to apply for admission separately and concurrently.

Written confirmation (from your university) of your acceptance and enrolment in the Honours program is required before the Scholarship can be awarded.

The Scholar shall enrol on a full-time basis (or part-time with permission from the Selection Committee) at an Australian university in the Honours year of a program of study leading to the award of a Degree of Bachelor with Honours in Political Science (or related subjects) as identified on the Application Form and as approved by the Selection Committee.

## Commencement

Payment of the Scholarship stipend shall commence when the Scholar commences the Honours program. It is expected that, under normal circumstances, commencement shall be in the first semester of the academic year immediately following selection. Should the Scholar be granted permission from their university to commence the Honours program in the second semester of an academic year, permission must also be requested and given by the Selection Committee for the Scholarship to commence in the second semester.



### Useful links:

[Contact our office if you have further questions!](#)

[Neville Bonner Memorial Scholarship Webpage](#)

[Referee Report Form](#)

# Neville Bonner

A few special Australians have burrowed into our hearts over the course of the twentieth century. Foremost amongst them is Neville Bonner. Neville Bonner's life is a study not only of courage, conscience and compassion in the face of extraordinary adversity, but also of personal and national reconciliation.

Neville Bonner was born on a blanket under a palm tree on Ukerebagh Island, in the mouth of the Tweed River, south of the Queensland border. His mother, Julia Rebecca Bell, descendant of the Jagara tribe of the Brisbane River Queensland, married an Englishman Henry Bonner. Despite the marriage, Neville's certificate was marked 'illegitimate'.

As a boy Neville cut scrub and cleared land for little money. When finally found a place at South Lismore School, his mother made clothes for him from rags. But the parents of non-Indigenous children boycotted the school in protest of his aboriginality. He was moved, finally receiving six months schooling in a dairy. Neville's grandparents, Ida and Roger Bell assumed responsibility for raising him and his brother after the death of their mother.

In Queensland at the age of 14 he spent one year at Beaudesert State School in which time he was taught three grades, being able to read and write when he left. "I owe a lot to my grandmother", Neville would say towards the end of his life. "She always said that courtesy and respect cost nothing but paid great dividends. And she told us that if you didn't have an academic education, but were able to speak well, it would get you through life." She died just before Neville finished school but left an indelible mark on the young boy. Neville "humped his swag" to join ring-barking and scrub-felling camps.

Here and on the cattle stations he learned that aboriginal labourers were fed less than others. He tried unsuccessfully to enlist in 1940 but aboriginal men were at first rejected for

war service on the basis of their "unsuitability for the European climate".

By the time the policy had changed, Neville had sustained an injury to his wrist riding a buckjumper and was then rejected on medical grounds. He worked the cattle stations of Western Queensland, rising to head stockman at the Mt Emu Plains Station, where in 1943 he met his first wife, Mona whom he married at Palm Island where she had been born. The near death of their first son led them to leave the isolated stations and relocate to Palm Island. In doing so, Neville surrendered his own freedom in a sense. His life was now subject to a Superintendent, a concept to which he was unaccustomed.

It was during his 16 years on Palm Island that Neville's political and leadership skills emerged. He learnt bridge carpentry, formed health and recreation committees and rose to the position of Assistant Settlement Overseer responsible for a workforce of 250 men. Asked how he coped with moving to what was essentially a penal settlement, he replied "I was very rebellious, but I soon learned that you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar."

In 1960 the Bonner family returned to mainland Queensland, settling in the Ipswich area where Neville worked first on a dairy farm and later in a meatworks. It was here that he then joined the Coloured Welfare Council which merged with the ironically named, "One People of Australia League". Over the next few years Neville's personal life changed.

Some years after their separation, Mona died. Three years later in 1972, he married Heather, his honorary personal secretary, an event he would later describe as "one of the greatest blessings God has ever given me in bringing us together". Having served three years as Vice-Chairman of the Eastern Suburbs Branch of the Liberal Party in Oxley and a year on the Party's executive, Neville Bonner made history in 1970. He became the first Indigenous Australian to contest a Senate election,

albeit unsuccessfully as the seat was taken by Vince Gair. But then in 1971, when the late Dame Annabelle Rankin was appointed High Commissioner to New Zealand, Neville nominated for selection to fill the casual Senate vacancy. He became Senator Bonner.

He commenced his first speech at 8.26 pm on 8 September, 1971: "It is with very deep and mixed emotions that I participate in the debates of this parliament for the first time. I feel overawed by the obvious education of honourable Senators within this august chamber... but this does not mean that as a Senator from Queensland I am unable to cope. I have graduated through the university of hard knocks. My teacher was experience. However, I shall play the role which my State of Queensland, my race, my background, my political beliefs, my knowledge of men and circumstances dictate. This I shall do, through the grace of God, to the benefit of all Australians." His career discredited the early views of sceptics. He attacked State and federal governments over the management of Arukun-Mornington Island. He rebelled against government policy in relation to East Timor and again in relation to the 1977 Referendum.

Neville was an advocate in the Liberal Party for Aboriginal land rights but also criticised some non-Indigenous people for "encouraging" the impatience of young militant Aboriginals.

Whilst serving as a Senator he suffered the painful, but all too familiar indignation of being refused service in some Queensland hotels. But whether it were such incidents or losing the coveted winnable position on his party's ticket for the 1983 election, he was never consumed by bitterness. Instead, his was a life of grace, humility and gentility acknowledged in part by his appointment in 1979 as the Australian of the Year.

Neville continued to serve in public life after leaving federal parliament. He was a member of the board of the

Australian Broadcasting Corporation for 8 years, was patron to a number of organisations including World Vision and the Ipswich Women's Shelter, and wrote a number of publications including "Black Power in Australia" and "Equal World – Equal Share". From 1992 to 1996 he was a member of the Griffith University Council and Chairman of the University's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee. In 1993, the University awarded Neville an honorary doctorate. Between 1990 and 1997 he was Senior Visitor for Queensland prisons and in 1997 was elected chairman of the Indigenous Advisory Council.

Asked by his biographer, Angela Burger in 1979 whether he was a "Senator for blacks or whites", he replied: "My responsibilities are first to God Almighty, secondly to my nation, thirdly to my State, and entwined through it all, my love for my race."

Asked in 1992 to nominate his greatest achievement while in Canberra, he said: "I think the fact that I was there. That an Aborigine was there. They talked about Aborigines rather than boongs and blacks. So, you know, there were a lot of things that made quite an impact and a difference in the attitudes and thinking of people."

In 1998, Neville contracted lung cancer which finally took its toll, depriving Australia of a much loved and well respected son.

In May 2000, a tribute dinner was held for Neville in Old Parliament House in Canberra. Many of his old friends and colleagues from all walks of life spoke of Neville's life and work. The Prime Minister, John Howard announced the establishment of a scholarship in his memory to assist Indigenous people studying in higher education who had a particular interest in politics.

As a people we are enriched for having had this man, his quiet humility, courage, conviction, conscience and compassion. In a century that produced so many Australians of great talent, Neville Bonner's legacy is to remind us that above other virtues stands the importance of character.

