

# Jonathan Baldwin Turner Agricultural Merit Scholarship: Seven years of success

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## ABSTRACT

The Jonathan Baldwin Turner (JBT) Scholarship Program was established at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1979 to recognize outstanding scholarship. Seven classes have netted 402 JBT scholars, and only 4% have left the university for reasons other than graduation. Eighty-five percent of the first four classes from 1979 to 1982 (192 JBT students) have graduated from the University of Illinois-UC, and 10% are still students. Typically 250 eligible students apply annually; 50 to 75 JBT scholarships are awarded to members of the freshman class. High school juniors apply who are interested in agriculture and are in the upper 10% of their class and/or have a composite ACT score of at least 26. A JBT interview team consists of faculty, students, alumni, and agribusiness persons, who interview each qualified applicant. Final selection is based on a composite score of high school rank, ACT score and five items from the personal interview. Scholarship funds are provided by private donations. Initially the stipend was \$1,000 over the first 2 yr. In 1984 the stipend was increased to \$2500 and awarded over a 4-yr period. To receive funding beyond the freshman year, the student must maintain a grade point average of 4.4 (A = 5.0). This JBT Scholarship Program has been very successful in recruiting and retaining outstanding scholars.

*Additional Index Words:* Donors, Funding, Personal interview, Graduation percentage, Undergraduate, Stipend, Selection criteria.

THE JONATHAN BALDWIN TURNER (JBT) Agricultural Merit Scholarship Program was established at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the fall of 1979 with a pilot group of 24 freshmen selected from 52 nominees. This JBT Scholarship Program was the brainchild of Dean John R. Campbell and was created to recognize outstanding high school students based on their scholarship and leadership record. Thus, these outstanding scholars with diverse backgrounds are attracted to the University of Illinois College of Agriculture.

To be eligible for the JBT program, high school juniors must have a sincere interest in agriculture, be in the upper 10% of their class, and/or have a composite ACT

score of at least 26 or equivalent. Typically, 200 to 250 eligible students apply annually and are interviewed for a JBT Scholarship by a team consisting of an agricultural faculty member(s), agricultural student(s), extension, alumni, and agribusiness persons. Final selection is based on a composite score, which includes high school rank, ACT score, and five items from the personal interview. The interview items include: leadership, commitment to an agricultural career, motivation, communication skills/articulation, and personal characteristics (maturity, sincerity, poise, etc.).

The merit scholarships are funded by private donations with the number of donors having grown from seven in 1979 to more than 60 in 1986. Donors include college of agriculture faculty, alumnae, agribusinesses, banking institutions, commercial industries, professional associations, and private individuals. Initially the JBT Scholarship consisted of \$1000 distributed as \$500 for the freshman year and \$500 for the sophomore year. In 1984 the stipend was increased to \$2500 and distributed \$1000 for the freshman year and \$500 for each of the next 3 yr. To retain the scholarship the student must maintain a cumulative grade point average of 4.4 (A = 5.0) for 30 credit hours of class work each academic year. Scholars who fail to meet the requirements may be reinstated if their performance returns to the required level in a subsequent year.

We have had 200 to 250 qualified scholarship applicants each year after the initial 1979 pilot year with a high of 72 JBT Scholarships awarded in 1 yr. It is not anticipated that more than 75 students will ever be selected in any given year. Most of the applicants who were not declared JBT scholars have been offered a \$300 to \$500 stipend (Freshmen Recognition Scholarship) if they attend the college of agriculture. This encourages non-JBT scholarship students to attend the college of agriculture and rewards them for outstanding high school scholarship. It also increases the number of incoming freshmen with high scholarship.

During the past 7 yr (1979-1985), as shown in Table 1, 402 JBT Scholarships (25 in agronomy) have been awarded. Only 16 (4%) of the 402 JBT students have left the University of Illinois for reasons other than graduation. For the 192 JBT students of the 1979 to 1982 classes, 85% (163) (Table 2) have graduated from the University of Illinois-UC. Ten percent (20) are still at the university (primarily from the freshman class of 1982) and 5% (9) left the university before graduation. The average graduation percentage for the University of Illinois-UC is 68% after 5 yr (I.W. Langston, 1986, personal communica-

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**Table 1. Status of 402 JBT students from classes beginning in 1979 to 1985.**

Student status	Beginning class year		Total	%
	1979-1982 (4 classes)	1983-1985 (3 classes)		
Graduated or current student	183	203	386	96
Left before graduation	9	7	16	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>402†</b>	

† Includes 25 agronomy majors.

tion). The four college of agriculture classes of 1979 to 1982 (2121 students) average graduation percentage was 65% after 5 yr. The graduation percentage of the JBT scholars is approximately 20% greater than the average graduation percentage for the college of agriculture or university. The data also show that 78% (Table 2) of the JBT students (1979-1982 classes) graduated in agriculture compared to 42% for the corresponding four college of agriculture classes.

**Table 2. Graduation status of 192 JBT students from 1979 to 1982.**

Student status	Beginning class year				Total	
	1979	1980	1981	1982	no.	%
Graduated						
Agriculture†	19	42	45	43	149	77.6
Other UI	3	2	3	6	14	7.3
Current student	0	3	1	16	20	10.4
Left before graduation	2	2	3	2	9	4.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>192</b>	

† Includes agricultural engineering-engineering and veterinary medicine.

As expected, the grade points of the JBT graduates have been high, with 71% having GPAs of 4.0 or greater. Fifty-seven percent had GPAs of greater than 4.2, whereas 40% earned the 4.4 average needed to retain the scholarship part of the JBT recognition.

This JBT Scholarship Program has been a joint effort that has the support of many constituent groups in and outside the college. It has very successfully recruited and retained bright young people in agriculture.