

Protective Life Government Experience

Since 2005, the Protective Life Government Experience has been an integral part of the leadership development curriculum in the Blackburn Institute. An immersive travel program, it is designed to provide students with the background to understand some of the most urgent issues faced by Alabama and how they are being addressed by government officials. Participants have traveled to Montgomery in most years, where they interacted with political leaders, participated in panel discussions and placed national issues into a local context. By encouraging open dialogue, active citizenship and the intergenerational sharing of ideas, the Protective Life Government Experience upholds the vision and ideals of the Blackburn Institute, impacting today's students and developing tomorrow's leaders.

"As a young man of color from rural north Alabama, I often had quite a unique perspective when engaging in conversations with my colleagues and with community leaders during our students travel experiences. I fondly remember a conversation with a young woman of color working as a community advocate in the Blackbelt region. She told me that one of the best things that I could ever do for our State was to work to bring opportunity to the young people—many of whom have never seen past or travel beyond their county line. I reflect on this conversation as I now work in Washington D.C. administering and facilitating Youth Programs on behalf of the US Department of State through an international NGO. It is with pride that I travel back home to Alabama and present travel opportunities, often with full scholarships, to the future leaders of our state—and it all leads back to that conversation in Blackbelt."

- Aaron Brazelton (2014 Blackburn Fellow)
Admissions Officer & Youth Programs Recruiter,
World Learning, Inc.

"My Blackburn Institute experiences have not only helped me garner a greater worldview regarding the issues our society faces and the corresponding moral obligation that we have to address these, but also has helped me to incorporate public service into my career aspirations. In particular, the initiation experience in Montgomery and the field experience in Auburn/Opelika County helped me to connect how issues in Alabama's local regions can be addressed in the form of advocacy, activism, and intentional projects. The Montgomery experience was absolutely necessary for me, as it helped me to gain the lens I needed as I critically think about how to address issues in Alabama; the state's constitution, foundational basis, and main players are extremely important to take into consideration when trying to find solutions to issues in Alabama, and the Montgomery experience confers this understanding upon the Institute's students."

- Al-Karim Gilani (2013 Blackburn Fellow)
Research Associate, The University of Alabama
Education Policy Center



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“The Blackburn Institute opened my eyes to the various ways government and civic servants can positively impact lives and communities. Without the travel experiences, wealth of diverse speakers, and space to explore and network with civic professionals, I would not have pursued a career in public service.”

- Rita Martin (2012 Blackburn Fellow)
Special Agent, United States Secret Service

“The ideals and mission of The Blackburn Institute are exactly what have driven me to pursue a career of public service. Whether through working with elected officials or nonprofit organizations that work to increase the quality of life for all Alabamians, I can say that the Blackburn Institute opened my eyes to just how much difference one person can make for the state we call home.”

- Will Dodd (2012 Blackburn Fellow)
Executive Director, Heirloom Harvest



“I’ve had the good fortune of working in Washington, DC, and in San Francisco but, ultimately, the call instilled in me by the Institute, particularly Alabama 101 and the travel experiences, brought me home to Birmingham. Now, in my role as a journalist I’ve tried to put that call into action by drawing attention to some of the biggest issues facing the state and some of the people trying to solve them.”

- John Hammontree (2008 Blackburn Fellow)
Managing Producer, Alabama Media Group

“The Blackburn Institute offers a chance to pop the hood on the State of Alabama and examine all the rusted-out parts that need fixing. It’s a rush for the naturally curious whether you’re talking race or tax policy. Better still, Blackburn get-togethers leave you with the impression that your curiosity actually matters for the public good, like you can use it to make things change. I’ve believed that as a journalist and writer ever since.”

- Will Tucker (2011 Blackburn Fellow)
Staff Writer, Southern Poverty Law Center

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- [Vision, Mission, and Values](#)
- [Introductory Video \(5:54\)](#)
- [Full-Length Documentary Video \(27:18\)](#)

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