

How to Better Prepare for the Eagle Review Board

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June, 2018

Piedmont-Appalachian College of Commissioner Science

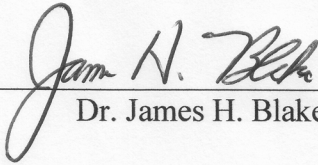
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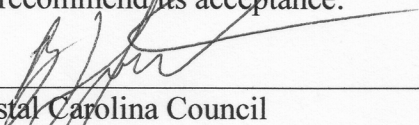
To the Doctoral Candidate Review Board:

I am submitting herewith a Dissertation written by Robert Griffin, entitled "How to Better Prepare for the Eagle Review Board". I have examined the final copy of this report for format and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Commissioner Science.

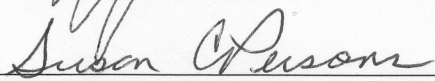


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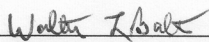
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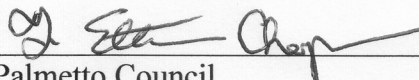
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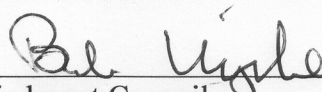
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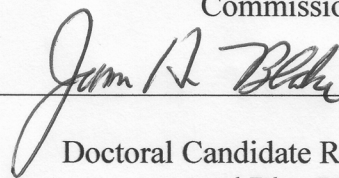


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere appreciation is extended to the folks kind enough to answer questions for the interview process used in this study.

I wish to thank the Doctoral Candidate Review Board for their time and useful insights. A very special thanks to my Dissertation Advisors, Dr. James Blake and Dr. Elizabeth Stoner for their encouragement and assistance in pursuing this endeavor.

To my wife, Gloria and my daughter, Carole Leigh, I sincerely appreciate your understanding and support of my absence from home the many nights and weekends of my Scouting career.

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ABSTRACT

“Every Scout deserves a trained leader” has been the mantra of Scouting for many years and is very true and I have always believed it to be true. However, when I began serving on Eagle Review Boards, I learned that there was one area of training that we were missing out on and that is the road to Eagle. Every Scout leader that I interviewed stated that the problem with Eagle Review Boards was training – Eagle Review Board members were often not trained in how to conduct a Board. In addition, Scoutmasters and other adult leaders in the troops were not trained on how to prepare Scouts for the Eagle Review Board and the requirements of the process. In some cases, Scoutmasters act like they are the gatekeepers for the advancement system when they are supposed to be coaches, guides and mentors. Some Scoutmasters develop the idea that their personal standard of achievement is all important. Therefore, Scoutmasters should be included in the training. Scouts were not prepared properly for the requirements and the board in particular and last but not least, the parents were not trained on how to help their son with his Eagle requirements without doing it themselves. The purpose of this paper is to help the Commissioners to see that there is training in their units and districts so that the Eagle Review Boards are completed with fewer failures and that the candidates are truly qualified to become Eagle Scouts.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I was a Cub Scout, a Boy Scout and an Explorer Scout. Rank advancement was not a concern for my troop when I was a Scout. We went camping, hiking and fishing and that was what I was interested in doing, so rank was not a concern. Being an Air Explorer was really fun, we “camped” at Donaldson Air Force Base and slept in the barracks, ate in the mess hall and got to ride in C-124 aircraft during the weekend. It’s no wonder that when I finished high school I joined the U.S. Air Force for four more years of those camping experiences.

When I became a parent, I wanted my son to be a Scout and he wanted to be a Scout so I became involved in Scouting as the Chartered Organization Representative for the Centerville Elementary School P.T.A. Cub Scout Pack. One evening while helping with a project at my church, I spoke with the Scoutmaster of Troop 105, Chad Merrill, chartered by Trinity United Methodist Church and told him that I had a son in Cub Scouts and I would like to assist with the troop. That next week, Pat Watson, the District Executive for Anderson District came to my office. When he left my office, I was the Scoutmaster for that troop. He left a box with me that included a cassette tape player, tapes and a book called “Cornerstone Training”. As the Scoutmaster, I learned much more about the rank advancement program. In fact, when I became the Scoutmaster, I had 10 Scouts – seven were Eagles. My first trip to Camp Old Indian as a Scoutmaster I had three Scouts. We had the shortest line for formations and at the first formation they asked me “where was the rest of my troop”.

After my son got out of Scouting, I was away from the program for a number of years until my grandson got involved and I became a Unit Commissioner in order to stay involved with Scouting and my grandson. A few years after becoming a Unit Commissioner, I was asked to be on an Eagle Review Board.

Since Arthur Eldred became the first Eagle Scout in 1912, the Eagle Scout rank has represented a milestone of accomplishment – perhaps without equal – that is recognized across the country and even the world. Men who have earned the Eagle Scout rank count it among their most treasured possessions. Eagle Scout is not just an award; it is a state of being. Those who earned it as boys continue to earn it every day as men. That is why an Eagle Scout **IS** an Eagle Scout – not was.

After participating on a few Eagle Review Boards, I was disappointed with how the candidates were prepared for the board of review, with how the application was prepared and with how the Eagle project was completed and presented. I was also concerned that the members of the board, including myself were not up to date on the requirements of the Eagle Rank.

I started talking with other Scout leaders to see if I could determine a way to make the Eagle Review Boards better. Hal Helms is the chairman of the Southboulder District Eagle Review Board. Hal said that the most difficult issues with the Eagle Review Boards arise when there appears to be poorly or inadequately trained leaders. The very best candidates are a reflection of the Scoutmaster and also a reflection of a quality program that was in place from day one of that Scout's career. A good solid troop committee really goes a long way in making

that night a huge success. If a Scout is given a pass on earlier requirements when more effort should have been applied, he will approach his Eagle advancement the same way.

John Cederman, former chairman of the Southboulder District Eagle Review Board and current leader of Crew 725, said that “most Scouts don’t make it without a plan to get there”. John also said that “a good plan should be put into works by the time the Scout turns 16”.

Paul Winston, Blue Ridge Council Advancement Committee Chairman said that the committee has very few issues with the actual boards of review. The Eagle project is vetted by the District Committee so most of the problems with the paperwork are taken care of before the board is convened. The Eagle packet is required to be submitted at least one week prior to the Eagle Board of Review and is reviewed for errors, i.e. dates, omissions, illegibility, etc.

Tim Poole, Committee Chairman for Troop 9, Greenville, SC said that he visits troops to meet with their Life Scouts, their parents and the troop adult leadership. He takes an hour and a half to go over the application line by line and the required documentation to go along with the application. Tim stated that since he started this process, Eagle applications and candidate performance had improved greatly.

My first thoughts were to try and figure a way to improve the boards, but I soon realized that the improvement needed to begin with the Scout and the troop leadership. In addition, the board members and the parents of the candidates all have a stake in improving the outcome. I realized that training was the key to improvement and that the best person to provide that training or to see that it was provided was the Unit Commissioner.

In this paper, I hope to point out some of the ways that training can improve the Boy Scout Advancement program leading to the Eagle Review Board process. This training is not a once and done thing – it should be an ongoing process in all troops and districts.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Eagle Scout Requirements publication is a two-page document that gives the official requirements for Eagle Scout and explains that “if a Scout believes he has completed all the requirements for Eagle but is denied a unit signature or a Scoutmaster conference, he may request a board of review under disputed circumstances in accordance with “Guide to Advancement”, topic 8.0.3.2 (1,2). If the board of review does not approve the Scout’s advancement, the decision may be appealed in accordance with “Guide to Advancement” topic 8.0.4.0. Although rarely granted, if a Scout foresees that, due to no fault or choice of his own, he will be unable to complete Eagle Scout rank requirements before age 18, he may apply for a limited time extension in accordance with topic 9.0.4.0. Most Scouts and their leaders are unaware of this information.

The Eagle Scout Rank on www.boyscouttrail.com is a document that goes over the Eagle Scout requirements and adds a paragraph concerning that “if a Scout has a permanent physical or mental disability, he may become an Eagle Scout by qualifying for as many required merit badges as his ability permits and qualifying for alternate merit badges for the remainder” (3). An application for Alternate Eagle Scout Award Merit Badges form must also be used.

“Eagle Rank, About the Journey, Not the Eagle Project” by Pualani Graham, is good information for leaders to understand (4). “The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young men to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law”. The Aims of Scouting states “Every Scouting

activity moves boys toward three basic aims: character development, citizenship training and mental and physical fitness.”

“Preparing for your Board of Review” at www.eaglescout.org is an excellent document for the Eagle candidate to read before the board. Questions are answered about how the board works and the best ways to prepare. One of the most important areas covered in the paper is how should the Scout be dressed. “Full class A uniform with neckerchief and sash. The Scout should make sure the uniform is clean, pressed (of course the new uniforms cannot be pressed – free of wrinkles) and complete and that his shoes are clean. The Scout should wear his merit badge sash, but the Order of the Arrow sash is not required” (5).

“Encouraging Scouts who don’t pass Boards of Review” at www.scoutingmagazine.org is good information in case a Scout does not pass the Board of Review. “The Board of Review should be more like a pep rally for continuing in Scouting. Failure can be extremely humiliating to a Scout, and if not handled well, the Scout will quit. Hold a private meeting with the Scout and his parents and explain why you think the Scout is not ready. Keep it positive!” (6).

CHAPTER III

INTERVIEWS

I decided that one of the best ways to get information on how to improve Eagle Review Boards was to talk with well-respected Scout leaders (listed below) in the Blue Ridge Council to see what they had to say. I asked each of the interviewees to share with me their thoughts on how to improve Eagle Review Boards.

Hal Helms, Chairman – Eagle Review Board, Southbounder District, Mauldin, SC. Date interviewed January 4, 2016.

John Cederman, Former Chairman, Eagle Review Board, Southbounder District and current Venture Leader, Crew 725, Mauldin, SC. Date interviewed September 4, 2015.

Paul Winston, Blue Ridge Council Advancement Committee, Greenville, SC. Date interviewed January 11, 2016.

Tim Poole, Committee Chairman, Troop 9 and Chairman, Eagle Review Board, Reedy Falls District, Greenville, SC. Date interviewed November 12, 2015.

Traci Bridwell, Registrar, Blue Ridge Council, BSA, Greenville, SC. Date interviewed February 21, 2016.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The Road to Eagle

Most of the folks I interviewed said that training was the key to better Eagle Boards of Review. One said the training should start when the Scout is 16 – another said that the training should begin at Life Scout. My research shows that “The Road to Eagle” begins the day the Scout joins the unit. The Scout earns the Scout rank by learning, understanding and demonstrating his knowledge of the Scout Oath, Scout Law, Scout Motto and Scout Slogan. Advancement is used in the road to Eagle as the Scout advances from Scout to Eagle. Advancement is the process which youth members of the Boy Scouts of America progress from rank to rank. Advancement is based on experiential learning – learning comes from doing Scouting activities that are fun and learning just happens.

According to the BSA “Guide to Advancement” there are four steps in advancement:

1. The Scout learns by doing and is asked to teach others which develops leadership.
2. The Scout is tested by another Scout, a leader or a merit badge counselor.
3. The Scout is reviewed by a board of review for all rank advancement with the exception of the Scout rank which does not require a board of review. These boards are made up of leaders of the unit the Scout is a part of until the Eagle Review Board which is made up of volunteers from the district. When these review boards are conducted properly they better prepare the Scout for the Eagle Review Board.

4. The Scout is recognized at the next troop meeting and then again at a unit Court of Honor.

Eagle Rank Requirements and Comments:

The process starts with the Eagle Scout Rank Application #512-728 (1). This is a downloadable PDF which can be found at www.scouting.org/advancement that can be completed online or printed and filled out by hand. Filling out the form online makes it much easier to read as compared to a handwritten form. The application should be carefully reviewed and proofread. Errors can delay the process.

Once completed and the signatures obtained, the application is submitted to the Council Service Center. In the Blue Ridge Council, the application is submitted to Traci Bridwell, the Registrar. She reviews the application for accuracy comparing dates in the council system with the application and then forwards the application to the District Advancement Committee Chairman to arrange for the Board of Review. Several copies should be made of the application and saved on multiple computers in case of a computer crash. The Scout's statement of ambitions and life purpose is very important for the board to review to get a good picture of the Scout.

The requirements to earn the Eagle Scout rank, as outlined in the Eagle Scout Rank Application (1), are:

1. **Be active in your troop for at least six months as a Life Scout.**

Be sure to verify dates so that the application does show a full six months.

2. As a Life Scout, demonstrate Scout Spirit by living the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

Be able to tell how you have done your duty to God, how you have lived the Scout Oath and Scout Law in your everyday life, how the Scout's understanding of the Scout Oath and Scout Law will guide your life in the future. List on your Eagle Rank Application the names of individuals who know you personally and would be willing to provide a recommendation on your behalf. The application specifically lists Parents/Guardians, Religious, Educational, Employer and two other references. The district advancement committee members are responsible for obtaining recommendations from the references. Recommendations can be obtained by letter, form or phone call. The Eagle candidate can help by asking for the letters of recommendation from the people he has listed on his application form. Beyond that he doesn't have to make sure the letters come in. In fact, the 2015 Guide to Advancement states that if no letters come in by a reasonable time, that the Eagle board of review must go on without them.

3. Earn a total of 21 merit badges.

Merit badges 1 through 13 are specifically required and are listed on the application. Merit badges #7, #8 and #10 have more than one option listed, the other one or two can be lined out and if completed can be listed in boxes 14 through 21. List the month, day and year the merit badge was earned and the unit number in which it was earned. Again, dates are very important here – I have seen applications that show a

merit badge earned before the candidate joined Scouting. There are 120 merit badges which gives the Scout the opportunity to investigate 120 different areas of knowledge and skills. The merit badge can introduce the Scout to a new hobby or even lead them to a future career.

4. While a Life Scout, serve actively in your unit for a period of six months in one or more of the positions of responsibility.

The acceptable positions are listed on the application. List only those positions served after the Life board of review date. The application has room for two positions, but only one is required.

5. While a Life Scout, plan, develop, and give leadership to others in a service project helpful to any religious institution, any school, or your community.

The Scout must use the Eagle Scout Service Project Workbook, NO 512-927 in meeting this requirement.

- a. The first item required is the project proposal. The project must benefit an organization other than Boy Scouting. The beneficiary must be a non-profit organization such as a religious institution, a school or the community.

Although a nursing home may seem to be a good beneficiary, many are for-profit institutions so they do not qualify. The proposal must show that it provides the opportunity to develop leadership skills and “To help other people at all times”.

- b. The project may not be a fundraiser, it may not be an effort that primarily collects money, even for a worthy charity. Fundraising is permitted only for securing materials for the project and it may need to be approved by the council. The parents should not fund the project – it is a goal that the Scout will raise the funds himself.
- c. A project proposal must be approved by the organization benefiting from the effort, the unit leader and unit committee, and the council or district before the Scout can start. I have seen Eagle applications where the signatures for approval of the project are dated after the project was completed. There is not a required minimum number of hours for the project only the number required to complete the project. However, the project can't be just labor – it must be a project which is planned and supervised by the Scout helping him to develop his leadership skills by leading others. “Others” means at least two people. Helpers may be Scouts or not. As with the Scout, there can be no requirement as to the time worked on the project or the number of others required. Scouts should remember that helping other Scouts with their Eagle Project will mean that they will have more help when it comes time for them to need help with their Eagle Project.

6. While a Life Scout, participate in a unit leader conference.

Once the Eagle Scout Rank Application is completed and all signatures received, it is turned into the local council to be approved as accurate. Council then sends the

application to the district advancement chairman to schedule the Eagle Board of Review. If done properly, this and all previous conferences will help prepare the candidate for the Eagle Scout board of review.

7. Successfully complete an Eagle Scout board of review.

The board of review for an Eagle candidate is composed of at least three but not more than six members. Members do not have to be registered in Scouting, but they need to have an understanding of the importance and purpose of the Eagle board of review. I would highly recommend that only trained Scouting adults should be members of the board. Unit leaders, assistant unit leaders, relatives or guardians may not serve as members of a Scout's board of review. The board members should meet 15 to 30 minutes before interviewing the candidate. This gives the board time to review the application, reference letters and service project paperwork. When the paperwork has been reviewed by the board and the board is ready, the Scoutmaster is asked to introduce the candidate to the board and the board introduces themselves to the candidate. The Scoutmaster can be invited to remain as an observer and may be called upon to clarify a point in question but must not participate.

After the introduction, I always ask the Scout to open the board of review just like he was opening his troop meeting which usually consisted of reciting the Scout Oath and Scout Law. This gives the candidate an opportunity to relax because this is something that the Scout has

done many times before. This also gives the board time to look the candidate over, to evaluate the candidate's uniform and merit badge sash.

A board of review is not a test - it should be a review of the boy's Scouting career. "Over-testing of the Scout was the cause of 99 percent of the failures to complete a rank" (6). Therefore, the board will ask questions which usually cover future plans, camping history, merit badges and the project. The Scout should be encouraged to talk – questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no should be avoided. I usually ask what are his plans for college or a career and how was that affected by Scouting? What was his favorite camping experience and why? Which merit badge was the hardest to earn and why? A discussion of the Scout Oath and Scout Law is in keeping with the purpose of the review. Asking questions about the project gives the Scout time to explain why the project was chosen, how it was carried out, who did most of the work and who benefited from the project. The board should be able to determine:

- a. Did the candidate demonstrate leadership?
- b. Did the candidate indeed direct the project himself, rather than do all the work himself or allow someone else to direct the project?
- c. Was the project of value to the institution, school or community group?
- d. Who from the benefiting group may be contacted to verify the value of the project?
- e. Did the project follow the plan, or were modifications necessary to complete it – what did the candidate learn from making the modifications?

There is not a set length of time for an Eagle board of review, but most can be completed in about 30 minutes.

After the review, the candidate and his unit leader leave the room while the board members discuss the candidate and render their decision. Because of the importance of the review, the decision of the board must be unanimous. When the board has completed deliberations, the Scout is asked to return and is given the decision of the board. Usually the Scoutmaster and the Scout's parents come into the room with the Scout.

If the candidate is found acceptable, the application is signed and turned into the Council Service Center. The date of the board of review is the date of rank for the Eagle and plans can begin for the Eagle Court of Honor.

If the Scout is found to be unacceptable, he is told the reasons for his failure and if it is thought that he can benefit from an opportunity to properly complete the requirements before his 18th birthday, the board may adjourn and reconvene at a later date. If the candidate agrees to this, then if possible, the same members should reassemble. If the candidate does not agree, then the board must make its decision at that point.

In any case, a follow-up letter must be promptly sent to the Scout who is turned down. It must include actions advised that may lead to advancement. The Scout has the right to appeal the board's decision. All appeals are directed to the next highest level. In other words, troop to district, district to council on up to the National Boy Scout Committee and a favorable decision at either level is final. Units have no right of appeal of a decision.

After successfully completing the Eagle board of review and being validated as an Eagle Scout by the National Service Center, the Court of Honor can be planned, however, it should not be held until approval is received from the National Service Center.

The Scout will be entitled to receive an Eagle Palm for each additional five merit badges completed before the Eagle board of review. After becoming an Eagle Scout, he may earn additional Palms by earning five additional merit badges beyond those required for Eagle or the last Palm earned. Eagle Palms are worn on the Eagle Scout rank patch, or on the ribbon of the Eagle Scout Medal. The Eagle Scout may wear only the proper combination of Palms for the number of merit badges earned beyond the rank of Eagle. The Bronze Palm represents five merit badges earned, the Gold Palm represents 10 and the Silver Palm represents 15. Then he can start over again with another Bronze Palm and so on. For example, I recently sat on the board for an Eagle Scout candidate who at age 16 had earned 39 merit badges. He, therefore, will be entitled to the Bronze Palm, Gold Palm and the Silver Palm and with one more merit badge would be entitled to start over with another Bronze Palm.

There are many benefits of being an Eagle Scout. One is the National Eagle Scout Association (NESA) scholarships available only to Eagle Scouts. The scholarships are available for four-year universities and new for this year, vocational trade schools and other approved programs. They are not payable to any of the U.S. military academies. In 2016-2017, NESA awarded \$690,000.00 to 154 recipients. In 2017-2018, NESA plans to award at least 150 scholarships with amounts ranging from \$2,000.00 to \$50,000.00.

Another benefit, The National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) invites all Eagle Scouts under the age of 19 and interested in the American Revolution to participate in the Arthur M. & Berdena King Eagle Scout Award. The Eagle Scout must complete an application form, a four-generation ancestor chart and a 500-word patriotic themed

essay. The National First Place Winner receives \$10,000.00; the Runner-up receives \$6,000.00 and the 2nd Runner-up receives \$4,000.00. Prizes and recognition may also be awarded at the SAR chapter and society level.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Since I started this project I have sat on many more Eagle Review Boards and have picked the brains of many Scout leaders and read many articles on the Eagle process. There is a lot of information out there and in this report, I hope to have provided Commissioners and other Scout leaders a tool that will help them prepare Scouts, parents of Scouts, Scout leaders and Eagle Review Board members for the Eagle Review Board. After all, every Scout deserves a trained leader.

Training needs to start when the Scout joins the troop so that he can learn the importance of record keeping and build on his experiences. Review boards for the lower ranks are very important by giving the Scout confidence for the Eagle Review Board.

The training for the Eagle Scout should start with the application itself. Application form #512-728 is available online and is the only form which will be accepted. The form can be filled out electronically or it can be printed and filled out by hand, but special attention needs to be given to the neatness of the form. It would be a good idea to print the form and fill it out by hand for practice, but the final application should be filled out online. The Scout should make sure that there are extra copies and backups of all the information – computers do crash from time to time.

The Eagle rank is, of course, the highest rank a Scout can attain. It is, therefore, the duty of the Eagle Review Board to make sure that any candidate who comes before the board is

treated fairly and approved if he has completed the requirements and that no candidate who has failed to qualify receives the award until he has met **all** of the requirements.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

My experience as a member of several Eagle Review Board convinced me that there needed to be more and better training for the Eagle Review Boards. The training needed to be provided to the Scoutmasters, adult Scout leaders, parents or guardians of the Scouts and the Scouts themselves. It, like most training, needs to be done on a regular basis and start with leadership of the troop. The parents/guardians need to be kept in the loop so that they can encourage their Scout to keep on the road to Eagle and be aware of what requirements are needed to complete that project.

There are a lot of misconceptions about the requirements for the project. Therefore, training should include the project. The project may be simple or complex. The project may require no money or thousands of dollars. The project may take days or months to complete with a few people or an army of helpers. It may simply make a difference or have a tremendous impact. There are few universal standards of the project and they are all listed in the Eagle Scout Service Project Workbook. If it is not in the workbook – it is not a part of the requirement.

The Commissioner is the ideal person to help determine training needs and insure that the training is completed because of his relationship with the troop as a mentor to the troop leadership.

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