

Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break

Strong Direct Service

Programs provide an opportunity for participants to engage in direct or “hands on” projects and activities that address unmet social needs, as determined by the community. Community interaction during service projects and throughout the week is highly encouraged.

Alcohol and Drug-Free

Issues of community impact, legality, liability, personal safety, and group cohesion are of concern when alcohol and other drugs are consumed on an alternative break. Programs will provide education and training on alcohol and other drug related issues, in addition to developing and communicating a written policy on how these issues will be dealt with on an alternative break.

Diversity and Social Justice

Alternative break programs include participants representing the range of students present in the campus community. Coordinators recruit for, design, implement, and evaluate their program with this end in mind. Strong programs engage participants in dialogue that furthers understanding of how systems of power, privilege, and oppression relate to social issues present within communities. This deepened awareness enables students to do more responsible, sustainable, and impactful service work.

Orientation

Prior to departure, participants are oriented to the mission and vision of the community, community partner, or organization(s) with which they will be working.

Education

Effective education provides facts and opinions from all perspectives on the issue, including ways that participants’ personal life choices are connected to the social issue.

Training

Participants are provided with adequate training in skills necessary to carry out tasks and projects during the trip. Ideally this training will take place prior to departure, although in some instances it may occur once participants have reached their site. Examples of training include teaching basic construction, learning how to work with children, or gaining first aid skills.

Reflection

During the trip, participants are encouraged to reflect upon the experience they are having, synthesizing the direct service, education, and community interaction components. Time is set aside for this to take place both individually and as a group.

Reorientation

Upon return to campus, participants transfer the lessons learned on break by identifying local organizations for continued education or service, sharing their experience to raise awareness of social issues, and by organizing or joining other small groups to take action on local issues through direct service, advocacy, and/or philanthropy.