

# Travel. Serve. Change Lives.

The Alternative Breaks program at the University of Wisconsin has been providing students with service-learning opportunities for over twenty years and with Spring Break just around the corner, it's showing no signs of slowing down, said Program Advisor Jay Ekleberry.



By Tahleel Mohieldin

The Alternative Breaks program allows students to spend their breaks traveling locally, nationally, and even international volunteering their time to a variety of service agencies. According to Ekleberry, since its inception, the program has had nearly 4,000 participants and well over twice as many applicants.

“What makes the Alt. Breaks Program work I think is that it’s students planning for students,” said Ekleberry. Unlike other similar programs, UW’s Alternative Breaks program participants consist entirely of students. There are no faculty chaperones or staff that go along on the trips.

The program operates on a cooperative leadership model where responsibilities are shared equally among trip participants. During orientation participants get to know one another, map out their own routes and make plans to check out the local culture.



UW students in Virginia, during the Spring 2012 Alt. Break Program. Photo credit: UW Alt. Breaks Blog

Trip participants have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the ins and outs of an issue and a local culture for one week. While a lot of the break is spent volunteering, students are still having a lot of fun on the trips, said Ekleberry.

The program is unique because not only do Students get to experience the joys of a tradition spring break, they also participate in educational programming, issue exploration, and are provided with leadership opportunities, he added.

It is easy to get caught up in the routine of everyday life, and ones personal goals and aspirations but the Alternative Breaks program allows participants to engage broadened perspective, said Ekleberry.

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“The next time they see the tornado struck somewhere and they’ve been in Joplin helping people rebuild their house, they’ve got a completely different perspective on it than previously when they probably just blown off that news report,” said Ekleberry.

“Coming out of an alternative break you world can’t help but be broadened and your perspective broadened,” he added.

Ekleberry has been the Program Advisor for the Alt. Breaks program for three years. He has worked for the Wisconsin Union for nearly thirty years, beginning in October of 1984.

The next upcoming programs are scheduled to depart on March 23 with road trip destination points ranging from Detroit, Michigan to Pensacola, Florida.

For more information on the Alternative Breaks program and how to apply for a trip visit the Wisconsin Union website at <http://www.union.wisc.edu/> and search “Alternative Breaks.”

