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Citizenship Without Borders: Understanding empathy and domestic direct service as powerful approaches to making global connections that matter

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**Citizenship Without Borders: Understanding empathy and domestic direct service
as powerful approaches to making global connections that matter**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
International Studies

By
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Under the mentorship of Dr. Darin H. Van Tassell

ABSTRACT

By unraveling a case study on Georgia Southern University's Alternative Break program, this research examines the relationship between empathy and globalization. Alternative Breaks are week-long trips, during University holidays, which facilitate and encourage direct service, immersion in a specific social issue, and guided reflection sessions. Four active Alternative Break participants and advisors were interviewed to outline accurately and depict their experience with culture-based Alternative Break trips. Their stories demonstrate an alternative to traveling abroad in order to achieve a sense of global citizenship. The research suggests that through empathy and direct service, one can become a global citizen without ever leaving their hometown. Through empathy, the mind and heart can travel anywhere.

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For my dad.

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Introduction

Joshua Haney is a part of the West and Central-African cultures, yet he has never left the United States. He is a global citizen, but he has not traveled outside of his home country.

How is this possible? What about all of the places he has not been? The people he has not met? How can he be a global citizen if he has not yet explored the world? Achieving membership to a political boundary is often a birthright, but global citizenship does not come as easily. Josh must work for this title of “global citizen,” right? He has.

There are, of course, infinite ways to achieve any goal, and becoming a global citizen is no exception. This research focuses on one avenue in particular, Georgia Southern University’s Alternative Break (AB) Program, and its implications of both empathy and direct service as crucial pieces of many meaningful connections. It delves into the inner workings of a typical AB trip. It explains how the AB program strives to transform socially static members of society into dynamic advocates for social justice. It shows how volunteering your time and allowing yourself to leave your comfort zone can prove beneficial in more ways than one. It expounds on the idea of achieving global citizenship from your own backyard.

Three Alternative Break participants who have not left the continental United States, the Georgia Southern Coordinator of Alternative Breaks, and I have engaged in trips that focused on understanding cultures, deconstructing racial inequities, and learning how to respect unknown histories.

These are our stories.

A Guide to Naturalization: Describing the Alternative Break Model

To better grasp the relationship between empathy, direct service, and globalization, it is necessary to understand the Alternative Break program and its curriculum. Michael Magevney and Laura Mann, two students at Vanderbilt University, started Break Away in June 1991, and in 2000 Break Away incorporated as an independent 501(c)(3).¹ Since 2011, Georgia Southern University of Statesboro, Georgia has been a part of a network of almost 200 chapter schools, more than 500 nonprofit partners, and thousands of alternative break alumni worldwide.² Being a part of this national program allows Georgia Southern University access to endless resources for education, recruitment, and trip destinations.

The Break Away curriculum includes the Eight Components for a Quality Alternative Break Program: Strong Direct Service, Alcohol and Other Drug-Free, Diversity, Orientation, Education, Training, Reflection, and Reorientation.³ “Strong Direct Service” refers to the level of student engagement. Programs usually encourage hands-on tasks, like building a wheelchair ramp or planting trees, that strive to address unmet social needs. “Alcohol and Other Drug-Free” allows for a safe and focused trip that will represent the respective universities well. “Diversity” can refer to the intended diversity between trip participants, social issues, and locations.⁴ The program at Georgia Southern University seeks to further the diversity of experiences by expanding to new

¹ “History of Alternative Breaks & Break Away.” *Break Away*. Web. 17 Feb. 2015.

² “Movement Lexicon.” *Break Away*. Web. 1 Aug. 2013.

³ A complete outline of the Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break Program can be found in the appendix. The “Eight Components” and “Reorientation” are also included in the Movement Lexicon.

⁴ “Participant” is included in the Movement Lexicon.

states, countries, social issues, and sites, yet also strives to maintain relationships by replanning trips that were especially magnificent. It facilitates the opportunity for students to learn about people and places to whom and which they were once unfamiliar.

“Orientation,” “Education,” and “Training” are all prepared and accomplished pre-departure. Each encourages a more detailed understanding of the community partner (trip destination), the social issue, and specific skills needed to be effective on site.⁵ “Reflection” occurs during the trip and allows thought processes to advance through the



Kaitlyn Kaesebier

This map shows the locations of the AB trips for the 2014-2015 academic year at Georgia Southern University.

“What? So What? Now What?” model.⁶ “Reorientation” promotes the idea of bringing what one has learned back to their own community by educating those around them and continuing to volunteer with an agency that serves a similar social issue as the trip.

An additional facet of an Alternative Break program is the Active Citizen Continuum.⁷ It serves as a guide to monitor the progress of the trip participants. The first stage is “Member.” This stage describes trip participants that have not volunteered before the trip. The second is “Volunteer.” It includes students who have volunteered only from

⁵ “Community Partner” is included in the Movement Lexicon.

⁶ Examples of reflection questions that follow this model can be found in the appendix.

⁷ A more complete description of the Active Citizen Continuum can be found in the appendix. The “Active Citizen Continuum” is also included in the Movement Lexicon.

extrinsic motivations like club requirements or class assignments. Their intentions are good, but they lack the education on specific social issues. The following is “Conscientious Citizen.” The Conscientious Citizen volunteers on their own will and asks questions that refer to the deeper root of the social issue, like “why?” and “how?” The final stage of the Active Citizen Continuum is, of course, “Active Citizen.” People who self-identify in the Active Citizen category are those who make everyday decisions based on what they care about most, be that animal rights, gender equality, or immigration policies. Active Citizens change at least a minor part of their life to cater to the social inequality of their choosing. Every trip participant can come in at any stage and hopefully end the week in an advanced category.

Biometrics and Interviews

The following profiles highlight the experience of five members of the Georgia Southern University’s Alternative Break Program. Three trip participants and the Coordinator of Alternative Break Program were interviewed. My story is included as well. The testimonies of these five people serve as proof that domestic travel and service are as meaningful and pertinent to global citizenship as extensive world travel. The narrations and explanations of our trip experiences show how the United States is full of cultures that are begging to be discovered and explored. They also perpetuate the idea that understanding all your home has to offer is extremely important to global citizenship (and not to mention far more affordable and realistic compared to travel abroad). These

stories prove that through empathy and direct, meaningful service, the mind and heart can travel anywhere.

Racheal Lamb⁸

Racheal Lamb traveled to Lakeland, Florida to serve the migrant community. Through GSU's Alternative Break Program she was able to work with the East Coast Migrant Head Start Project. This is a program that was established in 1974 in order to provide schooling to the children of migrant farm workers. The project strives to provide holistic and high-quality education in a culturally-sensitive environment while advocating for the success of the children and their families.⁹

Hearts & Souls, Oranges & Watermelons. Racheal worked with four different Migrant Head Start programs. Their planned and expected service was to go into different classrooms and help the teachers and other employees with the kids. To start the week, the group of Georgia Southern students was split up into smaller pods for more efficacy. Some groups headed to classrooms to work with the older kids. There they went over academic topics like reading and writing. Other groups worked with the infants and toddlers and played and assisted in any way possible. Some of the participants helped around the center making sure all of the tables, toys, and chairs were sanitized.

⁸ The following story is based on my interview with Racheal Lamb. The full transcription can be found in the appendix. The initial questions for all interviews can also be found in the appendix.

⁹ "About East Coast Migrant Head Start." *East Coast Migrant Head Start Project*. Web. 12 Mar. 2015.

The group was delighted to find out upon arrival that they would also be able to visit a few of the orange and watermelon fields and meet some of the migrant workers. From this opportunity, they saw the factories and how tirelessly the migrants have to work each day to support their family. Racheal said that this part of the AB trip had the greatest impact on her. It made her start to realize and understand what she takes for granted and what the value of hard work is to others. The migrant workers wake up at 4:00 each morning and work all day picking fruit and carry huge bags with them just to make \$15 by the end of their shift. The trip participants later learned that most of the migrant workers would send most or all of their money back to their home countries in order to support their families.



Racheal Lamb
Racheal bonded with many of the kids at the Migrant Head Start.

Another aspect of migrant life that this cultural AB trip shed light on was the stark reality of deportation. Some of the parents of the children at the Migrant Head Start were here in the United States without documentation. They were constantly worrying about the fields getting raided and possibly getting sent back home. The AB participants also discovered that unfortunately, with the way deportation works, the children who were born here would have to stay while their parents were sent back to their home country. Racheal stated that this realization both frightened and humbled her and the other students from GSU.

Making the Connection. To Racheal, global citizenship is when someone takes what they learn from different cultures, practices, and differences and really works toward emerging into the world's community. When she was on her cultural AB trip, the participants did direct, meaningful service, participated fully in the daily group reflections, and by the end of the trip each of them had a better understanding of what happens in their home country. Racheal believes that a volunteer needs to truly know the background of why they are doing what they are doing. On this trip she was able to see how these kids and migrant families are affected while here in the United States. Because of this trip, there are now more Georgia Southern students who understand what some migrants have to endure to travel here, what they have to do to stay, and the situations the children sometimes go through.

Joshua Haney¹⁰

Joshua Haney spent the first week of his Winter Break on Sapelo Island, which is just a short drive and ferry ride away from Statesboro, Georgia. There resides a magnificent African-American culture which has, more or less, chosen their current life of isolation. Their ancestors were brought to the United States through the slave trade, and now the people proudly refer to themselves as the Gullah-Geechee nation.¹¹ The inhabitants of this island are of Central and Western African descent and have roots in

¹⁰ The following story is based on my interview with Joshua Haney. The full transcription can be found in the appendix.

¹¹ "Our History & Culture." *Gullah Geechee Corridor*. Web. 16 Jan. 2015.

Muslim teachings. Josh spoke fondly of the Gullah-Geechee people and said they were really knowledgeable and able to talk about where they came from with ease.

Let's all go to Gullah, Gullah Island. This Alternative Break trip was an entirely new experience for Josh. The destination was both beautiful and untouched by modern day markets and industries, had a rich historical background, and housed a loving community. All of the aspects of the island and the fact that it is only two hours from Georgia Southern University was surprising to the group.

The main focus of this particular Alternative Break trip was to allow for a more thorough understanding of what this particular culture has been through and what they stand to offer today. The group also had a goal to help preserve this culture by learning and then reteaching their friends and classmates upon return. Through pre-trip service working with a local horse rescue, the group began to consider the impacts of serving communities different than their own. They paid close attention to the different personalities of the horses, their strict diets, and their environment. They learned how to appreciate something that they did not understand only a short time before. The pre-trip education honed in on the specifics of the Gullah-Geechee culture. The group focused on the history and the future of the people on Sapelo Island by reading pieces of literature and watching documentaries. These preparations allowed for the participants to conjure meaningful questions and insights about the culture before their arrival on the island.¹²

¹² “Pre-Trip Meeting” is included in the Movement Lexicon.

The direct, hands-on service included helping to preserve the island's culture and aesthetic look. This involved clearing out an area of the island's shell ring, which is a unique landmark left behind by the indigenous people. The AB participants also spent time clearing out brush and weeds, helping to dispose of debris, and digging a trench for a drainage pipe installation. Anything that the community needed done, the group did their best to help.

The service this group was a part of not only focused on service through action but also service through learning. GSU's Alternative Break program understands the role



Joshua Haney
Josh and his group pose for a picture on the island.

of education in the processes of working toward social justice and globalization. The first day the group toured the island learning about the landmarks and the origins of the Gullah-Geechee people. Josh shared that he and his group found that this beautiful and culturally rich destination has a lot to offer, yet not many people know of this historically-important island off the coast of Georgia.

Making the Connection. To Josh, global citizenship is when all countries and people, regardless of their cultures, come together as one unit to learn about each other and foster a deeper understanding and respect. During our interview, he made sure to reiterate the fact that there are many groups and cultures right here in the United States. He believes that attempting to understand all of the unique groups here can grant you an

access to other parts of the world. You do not have to travel the world in order to know the world, he said. His time on Sapelo Island gave him a closer connection to an African culture and way of life that he may not have ever experienced if it was not for his time spent on an Alternative Break. He said that even though many of the families on the island are modernized and Westernized, you are still allowed the opportunity to learn and experience their unique culture.

Jesse House¹³

Jesse House and the other Alternative Breakers ventured to Maryville, Tennessee to immerse themselves in the Native American culture.¹⁴ His Alternative Break was centralized on the Indian Reservation. The focus of this AB trip was to learn how to preserve both history and the land. The group had an even split of service that was labor-intensive and service that was emotionally intensive.

Once Upon A Time... On the first day of the trip, the group drove up to a log cabin in the middle of the woods. There they were greeted by two of the nicest people that you could ever hope to meet. Their names were Ed and Arleen Decker, and they ran the initiative called Once Upon A Time. This program was set up to focus on the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, the environment, and hardships in rural Appalachia.¹⁵ Once

¹³ The following story is based on my interview with Jesse House. The full transcription can be found in the appendix.

¹⁴ "Alternative Breaker" is included in the Movement Lexicon.

¹⁵ Decker, Arleen. "About Once Upon A Time." *Once Upon A Time Breakaway*. Web. 27 Dec. 2013.

Upon A Time partners with several local agencies and communities, including the Snowbird Cherokee community in Robbinsville, North Carolina, Cherokee National Forest, a local senior center, the Sequoyah Museum, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Georgia Southern's week in Maryville involved two days in the Snowbird Cherokee community, one day in the Cherokee National Forest, and one day volunteering at an after school program in a Cherokee public school system.

At the senior center, the group was able to spend time with some of the more traditional and more fully-blooded Cherokees. The Georgia Southern students and the senior citizens did crafts, sang songs, had snacks, and swapped stories. After lunch, the students moved to a new site to help with the after school program. There Jesse met a little girl who stole his heart. She did not talk much, but when she finally did, he learned how tragic her home life was for her. Poverty and alcoholism plague the Cherokee nation, and Jesse saw the effects of that come out in the way that little girl spoke and carried herself. She did not want to leave his side when her parents were there to pick her up, but she had to go. The service was not as exhaustive as the following days proved to be, but it helped the group understand why they were serving this community in the first place: because everyone deserves to be respected and heard.

The remainder of the week was spent outdoors. The breakers spent one day at the Cherokee National Forest picking up litter, which included unusual things like chairs, shoes, and the occasional machete. The following day the group helped clear out an invasive plant species that was slowly killing some of the native trees on the reserve. While the group tugged and pulled at the vines, they continued to learn about the

importance of land, water, and sky to the Cherokees. They began to understand that this place is more than just where the Cherokees live. It is who they are. The last day of service was spent on a family farm that had been devastated by a harsh storm. The students all took turns chopping wood from a huge tree that fell severely close to the family's house, rebuilding the horse barn, and tending to the animals. The group appreciated the opportunity to, in a way, come to the family's rescue.



Courtney Tielking

Jesse and his group pose with the Once Upon a Time sign.

The group of participants spent countless hours paying close attention to all that the Cherokees have to offer. Through service, the stories of Ed and Arleen, and educational sessions from local Native Americans, each member in the group left with a new sense of self and appreciation for the underrepresented.

Making the Connection. To Jesse, global citizenship is going beyond and learning about cultures all around the world. It is allowing yourself to grow globally even without world travel. Throughout this experience Jesse learned how important it is to defy stereotypes that overwhelm your home country. When you really try to overcome them, you learn how little it actually means but also how much damage it does. His most memorable moment was with the little girl in the after school program. He learned so much from her in just a short amount of time. Because of this AB trip, Jesse, and the rest

of the group, is now aware of what the Cherokee culture goes through, how important the culture is to the rest of the United States, and just how much attention it needs and deserves.

Courtney Tielking

I traveled with the Alternative Break Program to Nashville, Tennessee to work with Refugees and Immigrants. We volunteered with Catholic Charities of Tennessee for a week. This agency has a plethora of missions, but we were focused on helping those who were unfamiliar or struggling with the way-of-life in the United States.

Nashville: An Unexpected Refuge. Why Nashville? That was a question that almost everyone I spoke to before our trip asked me. Why are there refugees in Nashville? For some reason it seemed strange to others as well as to myself. Is it because the image we have in our minds about refugees does not match up with the culture of Nashville? Is it because we do not truly understand the process of refuge?

I was given the privilege of being the site leader for this trip, which means my co-leader and I were responsible for pre-trip education, logistics, and leading reflection.¹⁶ We made it our priority to clear-up any confusions that we all seemed to have. We also found it important to prepare our participants mentally and emotionally for what they might experience with the refugees in Nashville. We encouraged them to keep up with the crisis in Syria and to try their best to comprehend what the stories of these refugees

¹⁶ “Site Leader” is included in the Movement Lexicon.

could tell us about the current state of our world. We wanted them to want to care for these people who were crying out for help. We wanted them to be their advocates.

When we finally made it to Nashville, Tennessee, we were excited for what the week had in store. We were set up to work alongside refugees in a factory that was a partner to Catholic Charities. We also were surprised with the chance to sit and participate in a resettlement class. On our first day in the factory, we encountered more cultures, ethnicities, and origins than I think any of us could have imagined. Many of them could not speak English yet, but their boss shared their stories with us. They all had pasts of being the victims of either abuse, religious persecution, or war crimes. The list



Courtney Tielking
I was so excited to work with the resettlement class in Nashville, Tennessee.

went on and on, and it was hard for our group to even begin to imagine the calamities that these people had been through. But they worked through the pain in this little factory with smiles on their faces, and that is something that I will always keep with me.

Later in the week we attended a resettlement class. The students were refugees who had been in the United States for a few days or less. They were still clothed traditionally and spoke only two or three words of English. They were from places like Burma, Iraq, and Cuba. The class was full of humbling moments. The refugees were learning things like how to call 9-1-1, how to pay bills, and how to get to work on time.

The classroom, though, was full of more timid, smiling faces, faces of people who were ready and willing to take on this new life full of freedoms and opportunities. Later in reflection we discussed how we take this knowledge for granted everyday and how scared we would be to stand in their shoes.

Kaitlyn Kaesebier¹⁷

Katy Kaesebier is the Coordinator of Alternative Breaks & Community Partnerships at Georgia Southern University. She coordinates the Alternative Break Board and maintains relationships with community partners from the local to global level through engaging students in over 20 AB trips each year. In our interview, she spoke to the “why” and “how” of Georgia Southern’s AB program.

When choosing each round of students who will be involved with GSU’s Alternative Break Program, whether that be returning veterans or newcomers, Katy looks for these particular things while reading applications and conducting interviews: people who are willing to learn, people who know how to support a social issue that they do not understand, and people who have a drive to experience new things. The executive board, trip leader, and participant hopefuls all have to undergo some variation of these evaluation questions before being chosen to participate.

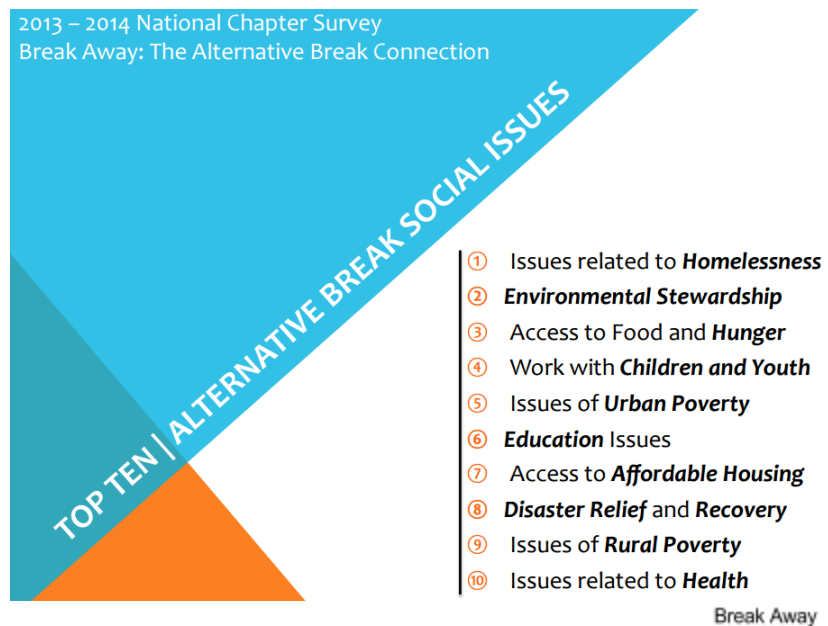
While selecting participants, site leaders, and executive board members, Katy said she tries her best to create diversity among the program. This includes making sure there

¹⁷ The following story is based on my interview with Kaitlyn Kaesebier. The full transcription can be found in the appendix.

is an almost even number of guys and girls (girls volunteer at a much higher rate than guys), an equal balance of ethnicity, a wide variety of interests, and a good representation of majors and concentration. These ideals are put in place to hopefully generate a learning environment everyday on a trip and everyday after. Katy enjoys matching people in groups that will push them to grow. She also said the program at GSU focuses on including many different social issues because she knows different things appeal to different people. Having a wide variety of trips, as in destinations and social issue focuses, gives people a reason to come back and participate in more trips.

According to Break Away, not one of the top ten Alternative Break social issues for the 2013-2014

school year was focused on cultural understanding, preservation, or respect. 145 out of 161 Break Away charter schools participated in the



survey that provided these results. Katy said the bulk of cultural trips at Appalachian State University, American University, and Vanderbilt University are done outside of the United States. Georgia Southern is encouraging cultural awareness right

here. The AB program at GSU focuses on cultural trips domestically, because everything really is tied together, and Katy thinks it is important for the students to understand that.

For students who may not be able to afford to travel or study internationally, Alternative Breaks provide the opportunity to experience and engage with another culture. Katy said that there are many benefits that could come from a partnership between AB and the Center for International Studies programs here at GSU, including the International Studies program being able to encourage students going on an AB trip in order to connect at a deeper level with a given culture and community. AB trips could offer students returning from studying or traveling abroad the chance to deepen their passion for travel while exploring similar communities close to home.

Why It Matters

With these stories as evidence, we can see that Alternative Breaks (and other trips and activities that encourage direct, domestic service) should be encouraged and held in higher regard by universities. Trips like these could be someone's only chance to further their sense of global citizenship, in which case serve as a viable addition to programs such as International Studies and Foreign Languages.

Global citizenship has a very similar definition to International Studies, which is the study of the broad array of human relationships that involve cross-border interactions.

¹⁸ Global citizenship is just taking that one step forward and acting on it, being an integral

¹⁸ Chernotsky, Harry Ira, and Heidi H. Hobbs. "Getting Your Global Bearings Navigating the World." *Crossing Borders: International Studies for the 21st Century*. 2nd ed. 2012. Print.

part of that human relationship that transcends a border. As an International Studies major at Georgia Southern University, I have learned many times that borders include much more than state borders. In addition to the political borders we call states, there are cultural borders (nations), economic borders (markets), social borders (class), geographic borders (mountains, rivers), and technological borders (access). The AB Program at Georgia Southern repetitively focuses on hunger and poverty (social borders), cultural preservation (cultural borders), and equity in education (technological borders). If the goals, mindsets, and needs of both programs are continuing to overlap to this extent, why is there not a stronger relationship? AB needs higher student involvement; International Studies needs to produce the best global citizens it can.

With this study as a backdrop, I am suggesting a partnership that will grow not only the respective programs in their own right, but also the university as a whole. Georgia Southern students make and will continue to make strides toward social justice, global citizenship, and an overall a better place for us to all live.

You do not have to leave the country to be a part of the world. Your country is a part of it.

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Appendix

"Movement Lexicon." *Break Away*. Web. 1 Aug. 2013.

Alternative Breaks

An alternative break is a trip where a group of college students engage in direct service, typically for a week. Each trip has a focus on a particular social issue with exploration and immersion in that issue beginning long before the trip itself. Students educate themselves and each other, then do hands-on work with relevant organizations. These experiences challenge them to think critically and compassionately—and to understand that there's no such thing as "not my problem." Upon return, participants are empowered to make more informed decisions and to take meaningful action that support community efforts.

Alternative Breaker

An alternative breaker is, simply put, a college student who participates in one of these immersive service-learning trips.

Active Citizenship

Through alternative breaks, we hope to assist individuals in seeing themselves as contributors to their communities. Alternative breaks are the "what" of Break Away, but active citizenship is our shared "why." Active citizens are individuals who prioritize the community in their values and life choices. They don't have to take action on every social issue, but rather, see the world through that lens. They take action on issues that matter to them and their communities.

Active Citizen Continuum

The **Continuum** gives a language to the transition from apathy to action. *Members* are individuals who aren't concerned with their role in social issues; *Volunteers* are well-intentioned, but not necessarily well-educated about social issues; *Conscientious Citizens* are concerned with the root causes of social issues; and *Active Citizens* are individuals for whom the community has become a priority in their values and life choices.

Eight Components

Can you name them all? The **Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break** are the foundation for any alternative break programs. Alternative breaks distinguish themselves from other volunteer programs by adhering to strong direct service, an alcohol and drug-free policy, a commitment to diversity and social justice, orientation, education, training, reflection, and reorientation.

The Movement

The Movement consists of the 20,000+ alternative breakers, staff advisors, and learning partners who commit to active citizenship and to moving the needle on social issues each year at 200+ schools. It also consists of the 1,500+ Community Partners and Intermediary Organizations who host alternative breakers each year. And with nearly 25 years of alternative breaks and active citizenship, this Movement has made a lasting impact on the individuals who've participated and the communities they've served.

Community Partners

A **Community Partner's** primary function is working with the populations they serve. They use volunteers to build capacity and assist in that work. An alternative break trip typically works with 1-2 Community Partners and participants learn about the organization's mission, vision, history, and community context as a part of their week of service. As a result of these experiences, participants often leave their trip as dedicated and enthusiastic advocates of these Community Partners.

Intermediary Organizations

An **Intermediary Organization's** (IO) primary function is working with volunteers, rather than working on a specific social issue in a specific community. They recruit volunteers as part of programming, charge set fees to provide a quality volunteer experience, and often have headquarters located outside the areas of direct service. IOs remain the conduit between an alternative break program and the local Community Partner to provide service, cultural experiences, and logistical support.

Staff Advisors

A professional staff member typically provides guidance and oversight for an alternative break program, although their level of "hands-on" responsibilities varies from program to

program. Newer alternative break programs are typically more reliant on a staff member, while more developed programs include stronger student leadership, which allows a staff member to focus on bigger picture considerations – such as strategic planning, support from administration, and student leader mentorship.

Executive Board

A group of student leaders who oversee an entire alternative break program. While each one of our Chapter Schools has a leadership structure that fits their unique campus culture, there are common practices, including one – two program chairs/directors, and often positions that coordinate fundraising, PR, reorientation, Site Leader training, trip logistics, among other positions.

Site Leaders

Site Leaders are the cohort of student leaders who facilitate individual alternative break trips. Two students typically co-facilitate a trip, handling the trip logistics and ensuring the participant experience is a transformative one through the inclusion of the Eight Components (issue education, community partner orientation, training, reflection, and reorientation, to name a few).

Participants

Participants are students who don't have a leadership role on a trip. Their primary responsibility is to fully engage in the social issue, strong direct service, and reflection, and to use the experience as a catalyst toward active citizenship. On average, there are 10-12 participants on a trip.

Learning Partners

Faculty and staff members who accompany an alternative break trip are often referred to as Learning Partners. This title acknowledges their unique role as non-peer learners on the trip, while making it clear to the team of participants that the student Site Leaders are still tasked with facilitating the experience. Approximately two-thirds of alternative break trips include a Learning Partner. Some Learning Partners have additional responsibilities as a staff member while also serving as a full participant on the trip.

Pre-Trip Meetings

Prior to departure, participants spent time learning about the social issue context, building the group dynamic, gaining relevant skills, and are oriented to the mission and vision of the community partner or organization(s) with which they will be working.

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.

"Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break Program." *Break Away*. Web. 12 June 2013.



EIGHT COMPONENTS OF A QUALITY ALTERNATIVE BREAK PROGRAM

STRONG DIRECT SERVICE

Programs should 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 during the break.

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG-FREE

Issues of legality, liability, personal safety and group cohesion are of concern when alcohol and other drugs are consumed on an alternative break. Programs should 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

Strong alternative break programs include participants representing the range of students present in the campus community. Coordinators should recruit for, design, implement and evaluate their program with this end in mind.

ORIENTATION

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

EDUCATION

Programs should include issue specific educational sessions that participants attend prior to and perhaps during their alternative break. These sessions should provide participants with the historical, political, social and cultural context of the social problems they will be working with during the break. Effective education provides facts and opinions from all perspectives on the issue, including ways that the participants' personal life choices are connected to them.

TRAINING

Participants should be provided with adequate training in skills necessary to carry out tasks and projects during the trip. Ideally this training should 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 should be encouraged to reflect upon the experience they are having, synthesizing the direct service, education, and community interaction components. Time should be set aside for this activity to take place both individually and as a group.

REORIENTATION

Upon return to campus, programs should have reorientation activities for all participants where they can share their break experiences and translate these experiences into a lifelong commitment to active citizenship. Through these activities, participants can continue their volunteer efforts in their local area, learn about possible internships, engage politically in their community, obtain resources for continued education on social issues, and make life choices that benefit the entire community.

Typical Reflection Outline

What?

What happened?

What did you observe today on site?

What kinds of things did you do?

Why does this organization exist in this community?

So What?

How is your experience different from what you expected?

What did you learn about the people/community?

What are some of the pressing needs/issues in the community?

How does this agency address those needs?

Has the experience affected the way you view the world?

Now What?

What seems to be the root causes of the issue addressed?

What work in your community is currently happening to address the issue?

How can you apply this learning?

What about this week can you take back to your home town?

What would you like to learn more about, related to this project or issue?



THE ACTIVE CITIZEN CONTINUUM

MEMBER



VOLUNTEER



CONSCIENTIOUS
CITIZEN



NOT CONCERNED WITH HIS/HER ROLE IN SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

WELL-INTENTIONED BUT NOT WELL-EDUCATED ABOUT SOCIAL ISSUES.

CONCERNED WITH DISCOVERING ROOT CAUSES; ASKS WHY?

COMMUNITY BECOMES A PRIORITY IN VALUES AND LIFE CHOICES.

PRE-BREAK TRANSFORMATION

PREPARE STUDENTS FOR ON-SITE EXPERIENCE AND PROVIDE BASIC EDUCATION ABOUT SITE-SPECIFIC SOCIAL ISSUES.

- EDUCATION, ORIENTATION AND TRAINING
- PRE - BREAK SERVICE
- PREFLECTION: GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS
- ICEBREAKERS AND GROUP BUILDING

ON-BREAK TRANSFORMATION

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO LOOK CRITICALLY AT THE ROOT CAUSES OF SOCIAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGE PARTICIPANTS TO EVALUATE THE ROLE THAT THEY CAN PLAY IN THE COMMUNITY.

- STRONG DIRECT SERVICE
- ONGOING EDUCATION
- COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
- DAILY REFLECTION TIED TO SERVICE

POST-BREAK TRANSFORMATION

HELP PARTICIPANTS FIND AVENUES FOR CONTINUED COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT PARTICIPANTS' EFFORTS TO TAKE THE NEXT ACTION STEPS.

- REORIENTATION
- CONTINUED EDUCATION
- REFLECTION ABOUT REENTRY PROCESS
- POST - BREAK SERVICE
- CHALLENGES TO MAKE LIFE CHOICES THAT BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY

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Interview Question Outline

Tell me about the service on your Gullah Alternative Break Trip.

What interactions did you have with the community/culture?

Where did you stay?

What kinds of food did you eat?

Did you have any interactions with the culture that stick out in your mind?

What does Global Citizenship mean to you?

Do you think you received a similar cultural experience to if you would have traveled abroad?

Do you think there is a relationship between direct service and international understanding?

Racheal Lamb's Interview

They worked with four different migrant head start programs. The service was to go into the different classrooms and help the teachers and workers with the kids. They were all split up into classrooms so some worked with the older kids and read to them and went over lesson plans. Some worked with the infants and had play dates. Some helped around the center making sure all of the tables, toys, and chairs were sanitized. They also got to go to some of the orange fields and meet some of the workers. They got to see the factories and how much they have to work and bring in each day to support their family.

The group stayed at a local church that worked with multiple other groups who were partnered with Alternative Breaks. Most went and volunteered at the different Migrants Head Start Programs so they were familiar with the service GSU was going to be doing.

When they joined the kids at the migrant head starts they ate on their buffet, family-style lunch. They would have one of every food group to make sure the children got all of their daily nutrition. It was more of a traditional type of food. Group ate a rice and bean styled dish one day and the next ate macaroni and cheese with sides of vegetables. It was mixed up each day to give the children variety in what they ate.

The biggest thing that stuck out to Racheal was when we visited the watermelon fields and the orange fields. They got to meet some of the workers and hear a little bit about what they do. They saw how much they had to get done in one days time just to bring home a certain amount of money. It made Rach think of how much we can take for granted. These workers wake up at 4:00 each morning and work all day picking oranges and carry huge bags with them just to make \$15.00 by the end of their shift. Most of them sent the money back home to their families, so they didn't even get to spend what they worked so hard to earn on themselves. Another part that really stuck out was the fact some of the parents were illegal. Some had to worry about the fields getting raided and possibly getting deported. The children who were born here would have to stay while their parents were being sent back to their home country. It scared Rach and really opened her eyes.

Global Citizenship means someone who takes what they learn from different cultures, practices, and differences and really works towards emerging the world community.

Honestly, no. Racheal thinks it would have been a different experience completely. Here she got to see how these kids and migrant families are affected while here in America. What they have to do to get over here, what they have to do to stay, and how the children learn when they go to school. Since they are migrants she was able see that more here in America than she could have abroad.

Rach does think there is a relationship. When she was on an AB trip, the participants did direct service and by the end of the trip each had a better and full understanding of what happens in their home countries. They got to see why they do what they do. If it were a

different situation and we were doing direct service with a different program, sure it would still give them an understanding because in order to work and really get that direct service in, you need to know the background of why you're doing what you're doing.

Joshua Haney's Interview

Gullah Geechee= African Descent and Muslim teachings

“You don't have to travel the world to understand culture. There are so many right here in the States, like the Gullah Geechee. Although many [of the families on the island] are modernized, you can still learn about and experience the cultures.”

There are many races and unique groups in the United States; understanding the groups here can grant you access to other cultures.

“The people were really knowledgeable and able to talk about where they came from.”

The service on the Alternative Break trip allowed for a more thorough understanding of what they have been through, why they would want to live on the island, and why they love the island.

Pre-trip service was at a horse rescue (learning to give to others who are unlike you)

Pre-trip education included history and intro to what they are as people and what their culture is and how it has changed.... helped to prepare questions before arrival on the island

Global Citizenship= all countries and people, regardless of culture, coming together as a group in order to learn and help each other in order to harness a better understanding and respect.

Buildings from shells

Slave houses slightly preserved

This alternative break trip was an entirely new experience to me. The destination was both beautiful and untouched by modern day markets and industries, has a rich historical background, and a loving community living on the island. All of this and it is only two hours from our college.

The service we were a part of was not just a service through action, but also a strong influence on a service through learning. The first day we spent touring the island, learning about the landmarks and the origins of the people on the island. Even farther back there is deep history going to the Native Americans who lived on the island. We spent the day learning as much history we could. We found that such a beautiful and culturally rich destination had a lot to offer, yet not many people know of the island in Georgia unlike the other coastal islands.

Our direct services included helping to preserve the islands culture and the islands look.

This involved clearing out an area of the islands shell ring. A unique landmark left behind by the indigenous people that even to this day we do not understand fully what they used it for. We also spent time clearing out brush and weeds from the local community, as well as helping to disposing of trash. Anything that the community needed done we did to the best to help, one of which involved digging a trench for a drainage pipe installation.

We met a couple different people as we toured and worked on the island. All of these people became learning opportunities for us. We learned about the many people who are descendants of the slaves who lived on the island, and why they loved being on the island so much. A few of the group took further steps and learning about a person's individual history seeing why they ended up where they are.

As we travelled through the island we also learned about some of the hardships that are coming onto the people. Certain taxes and issues with the government that are making it harder for the people on the island to realistically live there. The community is very spread out across the island as well. Travelling from one place to another was like going on a safari through a jungle. I pictured raptors coming out at any moment. We spent most of our time trying to learn about the peoples culture and making the island beautiful through service

We were hosted by a group called SALT. (Sapelo Ancestral Land Trust,) They provided a cabin for us to stay when not doing service. Not far from a dock or the beach, many of the group spent a lot of time outside bonding with each other through games or treks across the island to see the sunrise.

Our food was provided by the group SALT and was very southern inspired treats. Our liaison Stacey cooked all of our meals for us while also educating us more on her background with the island and its history. Being on an island all of this food had to be brought to the island by ferry if going to the store. Other than this the only other source is through growing or fishing for the many shell type seafood found around the island like oysters.

Jesse House's Interview

“AB immerses you”

On travel abroad “people usually go where they’ve been told to go, where the locals are trying to present themselves to tourists.”

On cruise port stops “they lose their culture so you can have a good time.”

At a daycare he met a full-blooded Native American, her homelife was not good, so she doesn’t talk much..... Tallest boy, smallest girl

“Someone less than half your size can make a huge impact.”

Drug and alcohol problems are huge among Native American communities.

Poverty is the only way they know how to live.

“Making a connections with someone you didn’t know you’d make a connection with”

Defying stereotypes makes you realize how little a stereotype actually means, yet how big of an impact it has on your point of view of a culture.

Global Citizenship is going beyond your immediate area and learning about cultures all around the world. Allowing yourself to grow globally, even without world travel, is global citizenship.

Author’s Note: I was a participant on this AB trip with Jesse. Therefore, in my interview with him, the questions were more focused on what he got out of the service rather than what the actual service was (since I was with him every step of the way.)

Kaitlyn Kaesebier's Interview

The bulk of cultural trips at Appalachian State University, American University, and Vanderbilt University are done outside of the United States. Georgia Southern is doing theirs right here.

Katy says that the program at GSU really focuses on hitting a lot of different issues because different things appeal to different people.

Having a wide variety of trips, as in destinations and social issue focuses, gives people a reason to come back and participate in more trips.

The AB program at GSU focuses on cultural trips domestically because everything really is tied together, and it is important for the students to understand that.

It is important to see how everything works together whether it is in Statesboro or Japan.

I asked what she looks for when choosing students to be a part of the Alternative Break executive board.

- People who are willing to learn

- People who know how to support something that they don't understand

- People who have the want and drive to learn new things

For students who may not be able to afford to travel or study internationally, Alternative Breaks provide the opportunity to experience, and engage with another culture. She believes that many benefits could come from a partnership between AB and international studies, including international studies being able to help students going on an AB trip connect at a deeper level with a given culture and community. AB trips could offer students returning from studying or traveling abroad the chance to deepen their passion for travel while exploring communities close to home.