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A Human Resource Approach to Improving an Alternative Break Experience

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A Human Resource Approach to Improving an Alternative Break Experience

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ABSTRACT

Alternative breaks are intensive service experiences that allow students to address social issues while impacting the communities they serve. This thesis examines Georgia Southern University's Alternative Break Program in depth, specifically the participant selection process. Seven alternative break coordinators of programs across the United States were interviewed in order to evaluate the various participant selection processes used and to determine the main characteristics that these programs seek in participants and site leaders. Through this analysis, it was determined that programs look for site leaders who are flexible, passionate, and responsible. The research also revealed that coordinators look for participants who are eager to learn and who are committed to the service. It was determined that the participant selection process varies with each program and depends on the size of the program, the financial support the program receives, and the leadership of the program. The analysis concludes with recommendation of new protocols for Georgia Southern University's Alternative Break Program drawn from best practices at other institutions.

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Defining Alternative Breaks

Each year, hundreds of universities send out multiple experiential trips to various communities around the world, hoping to leave an impact on the people and places they serve. Countless definitions of alternative breaks (AB) exist, but two definitions seem to cultivate the true meaning of AB trips. One organization defines it as, "A community-driven service experience that employs structured, critically reflective, practice to better understand common human dignity, self, culture, positionality, social and environmental issues, and social responsibility in global context".[1] To add onto that definition, American University sees AB trips as:

> "Trips that are intended to challenge participants to reflect critically upon their role in the global community through service, activism, academic inquiry, and leadership. They provide opportunities to explore social, economic, political, and cultural issues through unique immersion experiences that facilitate critical thinking and the exchange of ideas as well as testing academic concepts in the field with follow-up in the classroom and community."[2]

Although the concept of AB trips is growing rapidly and numerous new programs are created each year, there is a lack of research on the topic. The research that does exist

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[1] Hartman, E., & Kiely, R. (2014). Pushing boundaries: Introduction to the global service-learning special section. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *21*(1), 55-64.
[2] (2009). Alternative Break Trip - American University. Retrieved April 5, 2016, from https://www.american.edu/ocl/volunteer/upload/Alt-Break-Manual.pdf.

mainly focuses on assessing the impact of AB trips[3] or on trying to determine why

reorientation is such a challenge for alternative break participants.[4]

Purpose of Analysis

This is an exploratory study that examines the effectiveness of the processes that

seven unique university programs use to select the participants that go on AB trips. The

secondary purpose of this project is to determine the main characteristics that these

programs seek in both participants and site leaders. The objective is to maximize the

development of students and the impact of AB programs by determining the specific

characteristics that allow site leaders and participants to be successful and effective in

their roles. The analysis concludes with recommendations for strengthening Georgia

Southern's AB Program.

Georgia Southern's Program

Georgia Southern University is a midsize institution (21,100 students) in the

University System of Georgia. The Georgia Southern Alternative Break program has seen

extensive growth since it was first developed in 2006. Like many programs across the

country, it was born out of a desire to assist with the relief efforts after Hurricane Katrina.

During March of 2006, the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement sent forty-

two people to New Orleans on the first AB trip. Due to the first trip being a great success,

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[3] Porter, M. C. (2011). Assessment matters: Assessing alternative breaks: Moving beyond sleeping on floors and pass- the- candle reflection. *About Campus*, *16*(5), 21-24.
[4] Ivory, B. T. (1997). The Re-entry Crisis of Students Returning to Campus following a Volunteer Alternative Break Experience: A Developmental Opportunity. *College Student Affairs Journal*, *16*(2), 104-12.

the program garnered support, and the program has grown tremendously in the past ten years. GSU's program defines alternative break trips as "intensive service experiences that provide students an opportunity to make a true difference in the lives of others by giving of themselves while sacrificing their breaks from school."

Georgia Southern's program sends out approximately twenty-five trips a year, offering trips in the Winter, Spring, and Summer. Most of the trips are sent to areas within the southeastern United States, but three trips are sent internationally to the Bahamas, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic each year. In order to get students involved earlier in their college experience, two former students created a program called Incoming Freshman Alternative Breaks. This program is designed specifically for incoming freshmen and includes a strong focus on leadership development and paths to success at Georgia Southern

The AB program now includes a salaried professional that serves as the Coordinator of Alternative Breaks and Community Partnerships. Our Coordinator supervises the Alternative Break Board and focuses on building relationships with Community Partners from the local to global level. She is also responsible for managing finances, strategic planning, developing Alumni initiatives, and selecting the Resident Scholars. Resident Scholars are faculty or staff members that accompany students on trips. The Alternative Break Board consists of a graduate assistant, two Co-Chairs, two Site Coordinators, an Education Chair, and a three person Development Team.

Over the last ten years, the Georgia Southern University Alternative Break Program has sponsored 131 trips with more than 1500 participants. Students have contributed 62,265 service hours, which is valued at over $1.4 million.

Evaluation of Georgia Southern University's Program

The Office of Leadership and Community Engagement partnered with the Office of

Strategic Research and Analysis to design an Alternative Break Trip Evaluation. The

evaluation took place from May 2014 to May 2015 and "measures the respondents'

satisfaction of the Alternative Break trips in which they participated." The following

table summarizes the findings from 169 survey respondents:

Of the 169 survey respondents:

	Winter %	Spring %	May %
Pre-trip:			
Male/Female	35/65	67/33	8/92
Felt very highly or highly educated about the trip	85	77	92
Very highly or highly understood the potential tasks for service associated with their trip	87	90	77
Post-trip:			
Male/Female	25/75	30/70	31/69
Understood the logistical details associated with their trip	85	100	87
Strongly agreed or agreed that the volunteer projects were meaningful	95	100	88
Reported that their experience has prompted them to take action in their community	100	100	100
Reported that their experience has prompted them to take action on their campus	100	100	94
Resident Scholar:			
Male/Female	13/88	0/100	50/50
Were very prepared or prepared for their role	100	100	100
Were very prepared or prepared to handle an emergency situation	100	100	100
Would recommend working with this site again	100	100	100
Site leader:			
Male/Female	33/67	38/63	38/63
Were very prepared or prepared for their role	100	100	100
Were very prepared or prepared to lead their group through the education process of the trip	100	88	88
Were very prepared or prepared to lead their group through on-trip reflections	100	88	100
Would recommend working with this site again	100	100	100

After looking at the results of the evaluations, it is apparent that the majority of

participants, site leaders, and resident scholars are satisfied with the present state of

Georgia Southern University's Alternative Break Program. Student Affairs is always

committed to continuous improvement, and even though the result indicated that the AB

Program was quite effective, it was felt that improvements could be made in various processes used to select and prepare participants.

Georgia Southern University's Current Participant Selection Process

1. Participants fill out an online application and submit it to the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement. The application consists of basic information, such as major, year, expected graduation date, and age. The application also asks participants to list any previous AB experiences they have had. Additionally, participants answer the following three questions:

   a. As a participant and group member, how do you see yourself contributing to and benefiting from the Alternative Break Experience? (300 word limit)

   b. Please describe the social issue that you are most interested in and why. (300 word limit)

   c. Is there anything else you would like to tell us that you have not had a chance to express?

The Office of Leadership and Community Engagement website prepares a short paragraph detailing the social justification and expected service projects for each trip. Applicants review this information, then rank their preferences at the end of the application. All applicants have the opportunity to rank each trip with a value of 1 (top choice) through 4 (bottom choice. They can also choose to rank a trip with a "0" meaning they are not interested in that trip at all. It is important to note that the trip locations are not revealed to applicants at this time.

2. All participants attend an event called "Group Processing." The Alternative Break Board and site leaders host two evenings of Group Processing sessions. During the thirty minute session, participants sit in groups of three to five students. The full group watches a short video focused on a current event, ideally related to a social issue for one of the trips. Each group is then given ten to fifteen minutes to discuss specific questions about each video. Each participant is evaluated on the following categories: teamwork, communication skills, open-mindedness, and enthusiasm. The participant is given a score out of twenty-five points.

3. The second part of Group Processing contains a team activity that is meant to showcase participants' leadership and teamwork skills. One example of a team activity is having the group stand on a bedsheet while trying to flip the sheet over without using their hands. Site leaders or board members evaluate participants on the following categories during this activity: teamwork, communication skills, and enthusiasm. Each participant is given a score out of fifteen points. Finally, the evaluations for each participant are totaled and the participant is given a total score out of forty points.

4. Site leaders are given access to participants' written applications. The names of participants are removed from the spreadsheet so site leaders are unaware of who they are scoring. Three to four site leaders read each participant's application and score their application out of forty points. The site leaders score each participant

based on the following categories: ability to apply AB experience at GSU, the time spent on the application, desire to attend the trip, the expression of what qualities he/she can bring to the trip, and the overall impression of the application. The average score is taken for each participant.

5. Points from the written application and Group Processing are totaled and placed on a separate spreadsheet. The Coordinator of the program then starts placing participants on trips by starting with the highest score. The highest scores are typically placed on the trips that they ranked first. The Coordinator uses this process until all trips are full. If there is a tie, the comments written from site leaders during Group Processing are used. After all participants have been placed, the Coordinator then looks at all of the trips to see if any adjustments need to be made. The Coordinator attempts to ensure that no couples, roommates, or best friends are placed on the same trip. It is important to note that any participant with a score below twenty are usually placed on a waitlist.

The entire selection process takes an estimated twenty-five hours in total to complete. This estimate includes Group Processing, reading through all applications, and the actual placement of participants on trips.

Defining the Problem

After discussing the Alternative Break Program's participant selection process in depth, it was determined that the process is not without flaws. The process was broken down into

different parts and found that the entire process takes an estimated twenty-five hours to complete. This is an extensive amount of time compared to the processes that other universities use. In addition to lack of efficiency, the process is inconsistent. Site leader rankings have a great impact on the selection of participants, yet the scoring is inconsistent from leader to leader. For example, the same application was ranked with twenty-eight points while another site leader ranked the application to be worth thirty-nine points (out of a total of forty points). Furthermore, the process is not completely fair. The bias of site leaders and the Coordinator also affect which participants are selected. Knowing site leaders or the Coordinator can act as both an advantage or disadvantage to participants. A friendship with a site leader can result in separation of the participant and friends, roommates, or couples. However, site leaders tend to rank participants higher if they know them since they already have a positive reputation within the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement. An extensive literature review revealed that these issues of alternative break trip management and participant selection have not received much attention in the scholarly press. In fact, little research has been published on Alternative Break Trips as a whole.

Research Design

Seven separate interviews were conducted, each with a different coordinator of an alternative break program at selected Universities. Each interview lasted thirty to forty-five minutes and participants were provided a copy of the questions one week before their interview in order to familiarize themselves with the questions. The audio of the interviews was recorded; there was no video recording of the interviews.

Subjects

The subjects were the coordinators of seven different university alternative break programs. Each alternative break contains a different structure. Five out of the seven subjects are salaried staff who coordinate their university's alternative break program. The remaining subjects are students who direct their alternative program, meaning their program is completely student led. All of the identifying factors have been removed. Therefore, each subject was assigned a unique label, such as A1, to protect confidentiality.

Recruitment

Selection of subjects was based on the strength and size of the programs. In order to get a varied sample, subjects from different kinds of programs were chosen. Short descriptions of each program are provided below.

A1: Mid-Atlantic

This program is present in a school that has an undergraduate enrollment of 6,300 students. The program has a salaried coordinator and consists of a six member executive board. The board contains two education coordinators, two site coordinators, and two development coordinators. The program sends out a total of twenty-five trips during Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer breaks.

A2: Southeast

This institution has an approximate undergraduate enrollment of 15,746 students. The AB program has a salaried coordinator and consists of a seven member executive board. The board contains a chair, an international coordinator, an outreach coordinator, an events chair, a logistics coordinator, and two public relations coordinators. This program sends thirty-five trips out during Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer breaks.

A3: Midwest

This institution has an approximate undergraduate enrollment of 18,427 students. The program has a salaried coordinator and consists of a five member board. The board contains a fundraising coordinator, three trip coordinators, and an AB director. This program sends out six trips during the Spring and Winter. It is important to note that each trip consists of forty-five students compared to the average trip of ten to twelve students at other institutions.

A4: Pacific West

This institution has an approximate undergraduate enrollment of 8,615 students. This program is completely student run and consists of a three member board. The board contains a director, a housing/community impact coordinator, and a housing/reorientation coordinator. This program sends out four trips over Spring Break.

A5: Southeast

This institution has an approximate undergraduate enrollment of 8,000 students. The program has a salaried coordinator and consists of a five member board. The program send out eight trips during the Fall, Spring, and Summer.

A6: Central

This institution has an approximate undergraduate enrollment of 26,427 students. The program has a salaried coordinator and also consists of three student coordinators who receive compensation for their work. This program sends out fifteen total trips, which occur during the Spring, Summer, and during a weekend within the semester.

A7: Northeast

This institution has an approximate undergraduate enrollment of 18,017 students. This program is completely student run and consists of two program managers and five chairs. This AB program sends out thirty-four trips, occurring during the Spring and Winter.

The coordinators of the alternative break programs were e-mailed, asking for their participation in an interview. The e-mail addresses for the coordinators are found on each university's public website. A copy of the recruitment e-mail is found on the following page.

Recruitment E-mail

Dear (Subject),

My name is Mikaela Shupp and I am a student at Georgia Southern University. I am writing to ask if you would agree to be interviewed over Skype for a research project entitled, "A Human Resources Approach to Improving an Alternative Break Experience". The primary purpose of this research is to explore the various processes colleges and universities use to select the participants that go on alternative break trips. It is our goal to examine the effectiveness of the various processes used.

I hope you will be willing to help us with our study. If you agree to participate, I will interview you for about thirty minutes via Skype. During the interview, I will ask about the top characteristics of successful participants and site leaders of their trips. I will also inquire about how the programs match their site leaders to a trip. Finally, I will ask you to describe your participant selection process, including advantages and disadvantages of the process you are using.

The calls will be audio recorded, but all identifiers will be removed in transcription. I have attached a copy of our informed consent document for you to review and sign. If you are interested in participating in this study, please return the signed document via email or fax it to 912.478.1316 with a cover sheet addressed to Katy Kaesebier.

If you would like to participate in the study, I will call or e-mail you shortly to ask if I may schedule a time to interview you. In the meantime, if you have any questions, feel free to call or email me.

Sincerely,

Mikaela Shupp

Breakdown of findings

Site Leaders

Evidence from secondary sources

Currently, there are only ten articles available on AB, none of which directly focus on characteristics of an AB site leader nor the participant selection process.[5] However, through analysis of other topics, many sources touched on characteristics that help make a site leader effective. One study mentioned that site leaders served as motivation for future student involvement. The same study showed that effective site leaders have the ability to mentor, guide reflection, and motivate participants.[6] An additional study noted that leaders should make meaningful reflection an integral component during the trips.[7]

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[5] (2016). Alternative Break Research Summary - Break Away. Retrieved April 5, 2016, from http://alternativebreaks.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Alternative-Break-Research-Summary.pdf.

[6] Wendel, A. Tools vs. Textbooks: Comparing the Impact of Alternative Break Trips and Classroom-Based Learning.

[7] Bowen, G. A. (2011). Fostering college students' civic commitment through alternative breaks. *Journal for Civic Commitment*, *16*, 1-13.

Characteristics

Each coordinator was asked to list the top five characteristics that they look for in

a person when selecting site leaders. The characteristics mentioned are displayed

below in relation to how many institutions listed the trait.

Desired Characteristic	Number of Programs
Flexibility	4
Passion	5
Responsibility	3
Leadership	3
Dedicated	2
Willing to learn	2
Creativity	1
Positivity	1

Requirements

Each coordinator was asked to list the requirements a student must have to serve

as a site leader. The various requirements that programs expect are shown below:

Requirements	Number of Programs
Previous Volunteer or AB Experience	5
Specific GPA Requirement	3
List of References (A6)	1
Van Certified (A1)	1
Led a domestic trip to lead an international (A2)	1

Process

Each coordinator was asked to describe their site leader selection process as well as how they match co-leaders together.

    i. Similarities across programs

        1. All seven programs either have a written or online application that prospective site leaders complete.

        2. 6/7 programs conduct individual interviews, while the remaining program conducts group interviews.

        3. The majority of the programs match co-leaders based on personalities and interest in a particular social issue.

        4. Almost all of the programs select their site leaders six to eight months in advance of the trips.

ii. Differences across programs

1. Many of the programs match co-leaders after conducting interviews. However, A4 and A7 hire the site leaders, but then wait a period of time before pairing the site leaders. A4 gets to know the leaders for three weeks before pairing them and A7 hosts a retreat and matches co-leaders after the retreat.

2. The techniques used to pair site leaders varied. For example, A2 uses True Colors, a popular personality test, to help pair leaders. A4 uses the Working Styles Assessment, a type of personality test, to help pair leaders. A4 also uses leaders' placement on the Active Citizen Continuum to match co-leaders. A6 examines the student's' level of development as a leader to pair leaders.

Preparation

Each coordinator was asked to describe how they prepare site leaders for unexpected challenges that arise before and during an AB trip. The responses are displayed below:

Training	Number of Programs
Roleplays/ Emergency Response Scenarios	7
Class (Semester Long)	2

Site Leader Retreat	2
Conflict Management Workshop	2
Willing to learn	2
CPR/First-Aid (A5)	1

Participants

Evidence from secondary sources

Carrie DuPre, a lecturer at Clemson University, realized the importance of
participants creating relationships with one another. She conveyed that this would
allow students to feel comfortable enough to be themselves so they could open up
to new learning experiences.[8] Similar to the previous point, a study pointed out
that students must "get out of their bubble" during trips to interact with
individuals with different life circumstances. They have to be willing to cross
boundaries between the familiar and unfamiliar.[9] One study recognized the need
for more research on this area. The author wrote, "As programs continue to grow,
there is much more to understand with regard to the students who participate, the

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[8] DuPre, C. (2010). Campus commons: Alternative break service trips. *About Campus*, *15*(3), 25-28.

[9] Jones, S. R., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., Ireland, S. M., Niehaus, E., & Skendall, K. C. (2012). The meaning students make as participants in short-term immersion programs. *Journal of College Student Development*, *53*(2), 201-220.

potential impact on institutions who host such programs, and the communities in which programs are located."[10]

Characteristics

Each coordinator was asked to list the top three characteristics that they look for in a person when selecting participants. The characteristics mentioned are displayed below in relation to how many institutions listed the trait.

Desired Characteristic	Number of Programs
Eager to learn	5
Commitment	3
Commitment	2
Positivity	1
Open-minded	1
Flexible	1

[10] Jones, S. R., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., Ireland, S. M., Niehaus, E., & Skendall, K. C. (2012). The meaning students make as participants in short-term immersion programs. *Journal of College Student Development*, *53*(2), 201-220.

Requirements

Each coordinators was asked to list the requirements that a student must have in order to serve as a participant on a trip. The responses are displayed below:

Requirement	Number of Programs
Mandatory Pre-Trip Meetings	4
Specific GPA Requirement	2
Interview	2

Challenges

Coordinators were asked to describe the biggest challenges participants face during the AB trips

    iii.   Similarities across programs

        1. 4/7 programs mentioned that the simple living lifestyle is an obstacle that many students talk about. It is difficult for the students to adjust to sleeping on floors, eating on a poverty budget, minimizing use of electronics, and sharing common spaces.

        2. 3/7 programs discussed that many participants are challenged by the types of service. Some participants are not used to manual labor, while others struggle to understand the importance of indirect service.

iv. **Differences across programs**

1. A1 mentioned that is difficult for students to face the social issues since many have not been exposed to a particular social issue at this depth.

2. A5 stated that the lack of education or orientation from community partners is an obstacle that students have had to overcome.

Participant Selection Process

Since the participant selection process is one of the main purposes of this research, it is necessary to summarize the selection process steps of each program. Coordinators were also asked to rate how effective they think their process is on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the most effective.

	Main Steps	**Rating (1-10)**
A1	1. Online application 2. Get number from online random number generator (lottery) 3. Place based on random number generator and ranked trips	8
A2	1. Apply online 2. Attend Lottery Night-Get a number when they walk in the door and they have a deposit in hand 3. Random number generator	9

	4. Select trip when number is called	
A3	1. Online application is open for three weeks 2. Blind applicant grading by leaders 3. Place based on grades and ranking	5
A4	1. Online Application (3 short answer and rating) 2. Required to participate in day of service 3. Participants interview for program as a whole (2:1) 4. Coordinators, directors, and leaders place on trip	7
A5	1. Application- basic questions (why do you want to do AB, why did you select your top choices) to gauge passion, and they get demographic info from ID 2. 15-20 min interview (most people get one, site leaders interview at random, get a score and leaders rank as Recommend, Recommend with Reservation, or Do Not Recommend) 3. Place based on time of application and grading 4. Site leaders look over roster and adjust rosters	5.5
A6	1. Participants submit an application 1. Participants participate in a required Service Day from 8:00-5:00	7

	2. Interview process (interview with top three trips and with the site leaders of those trips) 3. Gather and discuss ratings 4. Place on teams	
A7	1. Put trip descriptions online 2. Sign-up opens at 9am, participants go online and select a trip	8

In order to compare the processes, advantages and disadvantages of each protocol is discussed by grouping the programs by the similarities of their processes.

v. **Programs that use the lottery system (A1 & A2)**

1. **Advantages**

   a. Both coordinators stated that groups tend to have a diverse mix of students with the use of a lottery system.

   b. A2 pointed out that the lottery system offers a fair and equal opportunity for all students to be placed on trips.

   c. Both coordinators commented on how the group dynamic of each trip is great.

   d. A2 stated that it takes less than ten hours total to place students on the thirty-five trips they send out.

   e. A1 stated that it takes an estimated two hours to place students on each round of trips.

  2. Disadvantages

   a. A1 commented on the lower level of investment students make since they sign-up online. Students are more apt to drop out out trips.

   b. A2 stated that the lottery night sometimes makes student uncomfortable since they are anxiously waiting for their number to be called.

vi. Programs that require a service day (A4 & A6)

  1. Advantages

   a. Both programs stated that they see a higher level of commitment within students since they have invested more time to complete the service day.

   b. The service day allows leaders to observe the work ethic and attitude of prospective participants.

   c. A6 stated that their prospective participants are placed in groups that are very similar to their actual groups so they can observe the group dynamic prior to permanent placements.

  2. Disadvantages

   a. The service day is time consuming.

  b. A6 stated that their program only offers one day of service that occurs on a Saturday. If the participant cannot attend, they will not be placed on a trip. Therefore, this requirement alone reduces the number of applicants.

vii. **Programs that include an interview (A4, A5, & A6)**

 1. **Advantages**

  a. The interviews require more of a time commitment so students seem to be more invested in the trips.

  b. A5 stated that the interviews allow leaders to be more connected to students.

  c. A4 stated that it offers a more personalized experience.

 2. **Disadvantages**

  a. The interview process is hard to organize.

  b. All programs agreed that the interview process is time consuming. A5 stated that their program spends 80 hours in interviews alone.

  c. A5 said that when students drop out, it makes them question if the time spent interviewing each participant is worth it.

> viii. **Programs that allow students to sign-up online (A1, A3 & A7)**
>> 1. **Advantages**
>>> a. The online process is easy and is accessible to all students.
>>> b. A7 stated that the group dynamic turns out well and it gives all students an equal chance to get a trip.
>> 2. **Disadvantages**
>>> a. The online process does not hold students accountable since they have a lower level of commitment.
>>> b. A3 stated that the process can be time consuming since their program grades applications by hand.

Limitations

It is important to note specific limitations that impact the study. The small sample size may not be fully representative of the population of all the AB programs that exist in the United States. Although the subjects were selected from different regions, there are 143 additional AB programs in the United States alone. Each program varies in structure, size, and quality, making it difficult to obtain a full assessment of AB as a whole. Additionally, the institutional differences impact the program and research. Each AB program receives differing amount of financial resources and administrative support, which can directly impact the size and quality of the program, so in a sense, some of our comparisons are like comparing apples to oranges. The numerous differences across

institutions limit the ability to transfer methods of selection processes from one institution to another. Furthermore, the study may be limited due to interviewer bias since the study consisted of comparing institutions' processes to the process here at their home university, Georgia Southern. The interviewer's familiarity with the processes of the home university certainly influences the lens with which the findings are interpreted.

Suggestions for Georgia Southern University

The main goal of redesigning the participant selection process is to reduce the amount of time it takes to place participants, while still creating trips that have a diverse group of students. An additional objective is to decrease the inconsistencies within the process, specifically with the grading of applications. The recommendations chosen were selected based on efficiency, the proven success of the processes, and how well the elements fit in with our institution and AB program. There were many great contributions from other institutions regarding potential changes to the Georgia Southern program. One example that stood out as an exciting possibility was the idea of a service day to help gauge group dynamics, level of commitment, and the attitude of potential participants. Given the context of our institution, Statesboro, and the availability of service projects, this was not a great fit for our program.

After analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of each institution's participant selection process, best and most effective practices from the institutions were used to generate a revised new participant selection process for Georgia Southern University's AB program. The new process will utilize the following recommendations:

Application

The current application includes multiple short answer questions that are time consuming.

The short answers also lead to several challenges with grading including a lack of

consistency and a large amount of time required from many people to review each

individual application.

The proposed change for the application is that participants will fill out an online

application. Most of the questions will be demographic, but there will be at least one

short answer question, asking the participant to explain their interest in the AB program.

The short answer will be referenced when matching participants to a specific site for their

trip. This new step will lead to increased consistency and take a significantly less amount

of time throughout the evaluation process.

Group Processing

The current group interview, known as Group Processing, includes two sections that

allow the site leaders to evaluate the participants through group discussion and a team-

based activity. They are able to assess attitude, critical thinking, ability to respond to

challenges, and other characteristics that may lead to success on an alternative break.

As part of the revised process, applicants will still attend a mandatory Group Processing

night. In the past, participants have been able to go on trips without attending this event.

However, participants will automatically be placed on a waiting list if they do not attend

this event. There will be two sessions offered on two different days, allowing participants

to choose what night to attend based on their class and work schedule. The following will take place during Group Processing:

    a. Six participants will be seated a table with two site leaders. A video about a current event will be showed and site leaders will ask questions about the video, as well as about participants' reasonings for participating in AB. Participants will take turn answering questions and each site leader will score three different participants based on a rubric. This period of time during Group Processing serves as an informal group interview.

    b. Participants will complete a team activity during the second part of the evening. This will include a team challenge, allowing site leaders to gauge participants' attitudes as well as the group dynamic. Site leaders or board members will evaluate participants on the following categories during this activity: teamwork, communication skills, and enthusiasm.

    c. Finally, co-site leaders will spread out across the room, according to the trip they were assigned. Participants will be placed in a group of five to ten students. The groups will then rotate to each trip's site leaders. Here, the site leaders will explain more about the social issue that they will be working with and will touch on the type of service they will be completing. Participants will be given a period of time to ask questions. This time also allows site leaders to gauge interest of certain participants in their specific trip.

    d. At the end of the night, all applicants will have the opportunity to rank each trip with a value of 1 (top choice) through 4 (bottom choice. They

can also choose to rank a trip with a "0" meaning they are not interested in that trip at all.

Our goal is to maintain a personalized application process so site leaders and board members can thoroughly familiarize themselves with applicants. Unfortunately, with up to 150 applicants at one time, it would take too much time to interview participants individually. The first part of Group Processing will allow site leaders to host an informal group interview, giving leaders the opportunity to evaluate the responses of participants. The second step of Group Processing will enable leaders to gauge the group dynamic of participants. During the final step, the participants can ask questions about the trips while allowing site leaders to converse with specific participants that are interested in their trip. Placing participants on a waitlist if they do not attend is an important change to the process. This change was made in order to increase the level of commitment when applying for a trip.

Evaluation Scores

Currently, participants' scores are combined to give an overall score. This score is used to order the participant pool from highest to lowest. The highest ranking participants, based on their overall score, are matched to their top choice. As trips begin to fill up, the Coordinator is sure to double check the diversity of the team- racial, classification, major, experience with AB, etc. This continues until all trips have been filled, and any remaining participants are placed on a wait list.

In the future, the evaluation scores from Group Processing will be totaled for each participant. The scores will then be put in order from the greatest to least. Potential participants will be divided into sections of ten applicants. This section will determine the time that applicants will be allowed to sign up for trips. For example, the top ten applicants will be allowed to sign up starting at 9:00 am, while the second group's form will open at 10:00 am.

This step was put into place to reward those who exhibited the characteristics that correlate to being successful on an AB trip.

Online Form

In the revised process, applicants will go online when their individual form opens and each applicant will select a trip. The applicant will receive a message if their first choice trip is at capacity. The applicant will have a choice to select another trip or state that they no longer want to participate. It is important to note that the applicants will receive a message, stating that their trip selection is not final. The form will inform them that the Coordinator has the right to make any changes to selections.

We liked how many of the programs allowed students to have a great amount of influence over which trip they go on. Therefore, we will allow students to pick their most favored trip when their form opens. This will give students greater autonomy in selecting trips and will hopefully decrease the amount of students that drop out from the process. It

is important to note that students will be informed that the trip they select is not a final placement; the Coordinator reserves the right to change placements.

Finalizing Team Rosters

Finally, the Coordinator, site leader, and board members will discuss the prospective rosters. Changes will be made and the final trip decisions will be sent to participants.

It is essential for the Coordinator to review rosters before making placements final. This step is in place in order to ensure that the trip has a sufficient amount of drivers and to help guarantee that the trip is diverse.

Additional Recommendations

It is important to note that a significant change to the site leader selection process will be made in the upcoming year. After filling out an online application, all potential site leaders must participate in an individual interview. The interviews will be hosted by the Coordinator and either the graduate assistant or a fellow board member.

Assessment

The Coordinator will work with the Office of Strategic Research and Analysis to create a survey that will measure the success of the new protocols. It is our intention to conduct interviews with site leaders and participants who have experienced both the old and revised processes. This will allow a clearer understanding of how the revisions impacted the process, while illuminating further potential changes to the selection process.

Conclusion

This research project has allowed us to explore the participant selection process from a new angle. Exposure to the various AB programs revealed a wide range of approaches to participant selection. This analysis has enabled us to improve our participant selection process, making it a more efficient and effective process. The evaluation of the redesigned process will allow us to gauge the overall effectiveness of these changes. We are excited to see how these improvements will positively affect the experience of participants and site leaders who elect to join the AB program at Georgia Southern University.

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