A Helping Hand?: The Perceived Benefits of Alternative Spring Break on Host Communities and the Actual Benefits from the Host Community Perspective

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Erika Proulx

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A HELPING HAND?

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to take a deeper look into the perceived benefits on host communities of short-term Alternative Spring Break programs associated with higher education institutions. A majority of the current literature is specifically student-development focused with regard to the impact of Alternative Spring Break trips. The motive for this study is to determine whether host communities are benefiting from these trips, however, the extent to which the goals and objectives of the sending organizations align with the host communities is extremely important in identifying if the host communities’ goals are being met by the sending organizations. Essentially, if the objectives of both the host communities and sending communities are not aligned, are the host community's needs being met? If their needs are not being met, are sending organizations fully reflecting on their Alternative Spring Break Trips, and do host communities truly benefit from these short-term Alternative Spring Break programs? Through an exploratory approach, the study surveys colleges and universities to gauge their objectives for these spring break programs and test whether those objectives were met. Host communities are also surveyed to gauge whether their objectives were met. The data was then compiled and analysed based on thirty-eight survey responses and then compared to identify any existing gaps between host communities and sending organizations' goals. Findings show that there are in fact gaps in objectives and meeting those objectives and recommendations are made to improve Alternative Spring Break programming for hosting communities.
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In an age of millennials entering into the world of higher education and the workforce, many young students are driven by the desire to contribute, give back, and serve. As this passion for service grows, as does the number of college students participating, and becoming involved in, community service work within communities in need (Schroeder et al., 2009). Often, these community service work is done in a short period of time, typically over a break from academic coursework. Short-term service trips hold several different components to their nature and make-up, however, for the purpose of furthering this study, I choose to focus on research surrounding those known as “Alternative Spring Break” service trips.

As the calendar mark reaches the month of March, college students are granted approximately a week-long recess from their academic coursework and studies. Many students choose to participate in the stereotypical riotous partying scene, taking them to warmer climates such as the Southern United States and Caribbean Islands (Sonmez et al., 2006). As an alternative to these types of spring breaks, many students often head home to visit loved ones, spend their free time catching up on their studies, or travelling with friends. In an attempt to counter the “traditional” trips while providing meaning and purpose to their week-long break, colleges and universities have been offering Alternative Spring Break programs to students dating back to the 1980’s. Alternative Spring Break trips are week-long trips in which students participate in a type of service, often in a community that is substantially different from their own.

With the rising number of millennials choosing this service option for their academic recess, much of the research thus far has been student focused, highlighting their perceptions, developments, and overall attitudes about their service experiences. Though this may be useful from the student development perspective, the research focusing on the hosting communities and their benefits, or lack thereof, seems to be missing. In order for Alternative
Spring Break service trips to become fully sustainable and positively impact their host communities, researchers need to take a deeper look into the motives of sending institutions and perceived benefits on host communities. Through analysing information from both sending organizations (colleges and universities) as well as host communities receiving the services, I intend to measure the extent to which the outlined goals and intentions of academic institutions align with those of the host communities.

This study will first take a deep dive into Alternative Spring Break service trips, delving into domestic and international components, and their multifaceted origins. Following this, I will present and explain the theoretical framework that makes up these trips through a review of previous literature. Finally, through an exploratory methods approach, I will survey sending institutions and host communities to gauge their objectives and intentions for these programs to see whether those objectives are met. I will finally analyze my data and identify gaps in the Alternative Spring Break trips, if they exist, intending to truly uncover if host community needs are being met.

A Review of Previous Literature

I will survey the literature by first giving a brief overview of short-term service and Alternative Spring Break (ASB) programs. I will then move into a section on terms and definitions to clarify complex terms. I will then state the literature on objectives of both sending universities and objectives of hosting communities. I will conclude by talking about the impacts of ASB programs on both sending and hosting communities.

An Introduction to Short Term Service & ASB’s

The altruistic attitudes of people hoping to make a difference and change the world are attitudes growing in popularity (Schroeder et al., 2009, Fontein, 2016). As these attitudes increase, so is the need for people to not only feel and think this way, but act in a way that can create positive change and “give back” to a cause or community in need. Volunteering is
just one-way people begin to act in order to create social change. The desire to combine travel and volunteering is a popular trend which produces a new type of tourism called voluntourism.

New and radical categories of tourism became established in the 1980’s, as described in Amelia Fontein’s “Vacationing for a Cause.” Fontein notes that Callanan and Thomas explain the shift from mass tourism to voluntourism (Fontein, 2016). Callanan and Thomas recognized the shift away from the traditional mass tourism that many students participate in, and instead include differing ways of tourism such as alternative tourism, responsible tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, and volunteer tourism (Callanan & Thomas, 2005).

I will provide further distinctions between related definitions and terms further in this section as many terms can have similar concepts.

The 1980’s and 1990’s brought change to the higher education sector, as colleges and universities looked to increase volunteer opportunities for students (Fontein, 2016). College campuses began a movement to institutionalize volunteerism and service, thus, the Alternative Spring Break program model began to take shape (Campus Compact, 2015). College and university students began to reject this consumption model and instead opted for service-related travel. Students desired more sustainable and socially responsible solutions to global issues, thus finding a structure for community engagement that reinforces their values in Alternative Spring Break programs (Wearing, 2001).

**Definition of Terms**

This section will provide a brief definition of overarching terms specific to the theory and practice of Alternative Spring Break programs that may need clarification as they are similar and complex in many ways.

**Mass Tourism Definitions:** Refers to the mainstream form of tourism in
which tourists pay for an experience or experiences that often occur in a community other than their own, experiencing different cultures and lifestyles (Wearing, 2001). Mass tourism is viewed in contrast to “alternative tourism,” which is considered preferable over “mass tourism” due to its sustainability (McIntosh & Zahra 2008). Echoing the sentiments of McIntosh and Zahra, mass tourism is described as having “frequently destructive tendencies” when discussed in comparison to alternative tourism (Orams, 2001).

Irmgard Bauer agrees with Wearing in that mass tourism is the mainstream format for tourism, emphasizing that mass tourism often offers booking specials, which the questionable ethics of commercial large-scale travel (Bauer, 2017). Callanan and Thomas offer a different perspective on mass tourism by which they compare it to new, radical tourism categories such as volunteer tourism, ecotourism, and sustainable tourism (Callanan & Thomas, 2005). These definitions will be further explored ahead.

Voluntourism Definitions: The generally utilized and overarching definition of volunteer tourism, often referred to as ‘voluntourism’ was defined by Stephen Wearings as a form of tourism: Volunteer Tourism applies to those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way during a holiday period that may involve aiding a community. The service may include poverty alleviation, restoration of environments, and research of society of environment (Wearing, 2001 pg 1).

Volunteer tourism is an increasingly popular form of travel attracting greater attention with researchers. (Guttentag, 2009). Volunteer tourism is recognized by many scholars as a promising sector of tourism that benefiting both tourists and host communities (e.g. Wearing, 2001, 2002; Broad, 2003; Brown and Morrison, 2003; Ellis, 2003; Uriely et al., 2003; Gunderson, 2005; McGehee and Santos, 2005; Clifton and Benson, 2006; Conant, 2007; McIntosh and Zahra, 2008; Lepp, 2008; Wearing et al., 2008).
Oaks and Mostafanezhad echo the sentiments of others when they note that there has been a rise in ‘volunteer tourism,’ or ‘voluntourism,’ in the past decade is characterized by the combination of travel and volunteering, typically in social or economic development or conversation-oriented projects (Oaks, Mostafanezhad, 2015). Similar to the other definitions, volunteer tourism also is central to the idea of altruism and improving the social, economic, or environmental well-being of a host community (Callanan & Thomas. 2005, Fontein. 2016).

Amelia Fontain furthers this definition by recognizing that the “altruistically motivated travel almost always includes some aspect of self-development and self-improvement for the volunteers (Wearing, 2001; Wearing & McGehee, 2013).” Despite minor variations noted above, many researchers collectively accept the Wearing definition of volunteer tourism.

**Ecotourism Definitions:** Although there are many different definitions of ecotourism, the most commonly accepted comes from *The International Ecotourism Society* (TIES) when it stated that, “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015). The definition will vary from author to author; however, many scholars have reached a consensus on the TIES definition. Ecotourism as a concept emerged early in the 1980’s, around the same time that Alternative Spring Break concepts began to arise (Weaver, 2001; Weaver & Lawton, 2007).

Echoing TIES in their definition, others also note the concepts of sustainability, environment, and nature as key factors that contribute to ecotourism (Blamey, 2001; Weaver, 2001). Clifton and Benson (2006) state “Casual displays of wealth by visitors in more remote areas experiencing low levels of income which are the focus of research ecotourism can accentuate cultural as well as economic differences between visitor and resident, leading to
jealousy or aspirations particularly in younger members of the resident community which may be impossible to achieve” (p. 242). Clifton and Benson reveal a more complex understanding of the objectives of ecotourism and dynamics between visitors and residents of host communities.

Furthermore, ecotourism is a topic of discussion in Fontein’s work, emphasizing that ecotourism is commonly categorized as ‘alternative” tourism, as previously mentioned (Fontein, 2016). Ecotourism varies in diversity and experience, leading some researchers to utilize scales or spectrums to judge and categorize the varying types of ecotourism experiences (Laarman & Durst, 1987; Orams, 2001). Regardless of any differences in experience, ecotourism often shares benchmarks for success: discovery (personal and natural), encounters with the unexpected, and the “opportunity to appreciate the diversity of the natural world and human cultures” (Wearing, 2001, p. 49, Fontein, 2016).

**Alternative Spring Break Definitions:** Alternative Spring Break trips are a fairly new concept for many higher education institutions (Bowen, 2011; Rhoads & Neururer, 1998; Sandeen, 2003; Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). Often noted as ASB, for short, Alternative Spring Break programs carry several different complexities that make them unique. Break Away, an organization founded in 1991 as a resource to colleges and universities to plan these ASB’s, defines Alternative Spring Breaks as a way for students to create meaningful opportunities (Break Away, 2015; Straus, 2011). ASB’s are an increasingly popular movement among North American college students, experiences that are often known to occur throughout the students “Spring Break,” sometime within the month of March (Break Away, 2015. Fontein 2016. Schroeder et al., 2009). The experience ranges in length, approximately a week-long service-oriented trip that involves college aged students. Typically, students travel to a community unlike their own, with a student
development professional, in order to provide service to a host community (Break Away, 2015).

Fontein’s definition suggests these programs intend to provide meaningful travel and service experiences to volunteers while providing benefits to communities in the form of environmental or social justice work (Fontein, 2016). Amelia Fontein argues that ASB trips “lack adequate evaluative measures that take multiple stakeholders” viewpoints into consideration (Fontein, 2016). Fontein again understands ASBs as “a distinct form of volunteering, which provides host organizations with a short, intense burst of volunteer labor: 10-12 volunteers, for five days, once a year (Fontein, 2016).” Typically, trips consist of an area of focus or topic, such as children, natural disaster relief, education, health, environment, indigenous peoples, and many more (University of Missouri, 2005; University of Vermont, 2015).

A History of Alternative Spring Break

The outbreak of ASB’s became a subcategory within the voluntourism industry; students quickly began to consider their options to sustainably utilize their Spring Break holiday. Spring Break is commonly known for students galivanting to tropical seaside resorts and engaging in activities such as “binge drinking, illicit drug usage, unsafe sexual practices, as well as occasional criminal violations (Sonmez et al., 2006).” The transition from this rambunctious spring break option to the engagement in an Alternative Spring Break mission trip became popular beginning in the 1980’s (Fontein, 2016; Weaver, 2001; Weaver & Lawton, 2007).

By the time Break Away became a resource for colleges and universities in 1991, students were flocking to these ASB’s with hopes of maximizing their holiday experience. Alternative Spring Breaks can vary in duration and destination, with schools offering these trips throughout the academic year on various weekends, Thanksgiving Break, and Winter
Break and Spring Break (Fontein, 2016). In order to provide a highly focused scope to understanding the goals and impact of ASB trips, this study will look exclusively at ASB travel of college programs in the United States.

Historically, locations for ASB’s are often categorized as those different from one’s own community, mixing cultural experience with a desire to provide aid or a skill set (Break Away, 2015). Many colleges and universities within the United States are deploying both domestic and international trips, with the international sector experiencing a 10% increase in 2010 as students branch out to differing cultures (Straus, 2011).

**Mission/Objectives of Sending Institution**

Through the subsequent review of literature, I will first look at the mission and objectives for sending institutions of ASB’s such as colleges and universities, followed by the mission and objectives of hosting communities for acting as hosts. I will then report on previous findings of impact both on the sending institution side as well as impact on the host community as noted in previous literature.

Fontein notes the idea that the literature on Alternative Spring Break programs and the evaluations and research behind them are extremely limited, and have yet to explore some of the potential negative impacts that the program may have (Fontein, 2016). Many studies that do research ASB’s, however, are primarily student focused and look at the outcomes and impacts of volunteers, while few take note of the impacts on the host communities themselves (Fontein, 2016).

In contrast to the Priest’s radical view of short-term service trips, Schroeder et al. note that in order to have a non-damaging international short-term experience, the planning must be substantial and be done by an experience group of facilitators (Schroeder et al., 2009).

Erika Nelson and Thomas Klak agree with Schroeder et al. on scholars in their article, “Equity in International Experiential Learning: Assessing Benefits to Students and
Host Communities,” stating that successful short-term trips abroad must be both carefully planned, and intense in nature (Nelson & Klak, 2012). Nelson and Klak additionally reference a paper published by the Council on International Education Exchange by Cressey and Trooboff, in which they reference short-term study abroad in a similar manner to short term service, offering a beautiful comparison:

Seeing a foreign culture ‘as a man sees flowers from a galloping horse’ while useful and often educational, is not study abroad; … As the Chinese saying instructs us, if you want to see the flower, dismount, get close to the flower, have a conversation with the flower, and learn from the flower. In study abroad this means… specific strategies [should be] in place to ensure that these conversations and this learning actually occur. (Cressey and Trooboff 2005, p.3)

Cressey and Trooboff eloquently show how the short-term aspect of the trip, regardless of whether it is study abroad or a service break trip, is best practiced in the deepest and intense ways of participation.

In order to conceptualize the research as it is given, it is significant to look at the mission and objectives of the sending colleges and universities as noted in previous literature. As shown in the previous section, Schroeder et al. continue the narrative that short-term service objectives and impact have been virtually ignored, despite the fact that it is growing on college campuses dramatically (Schroeder et al., 2009). For this reason, in recent years, scholars are diving into the research to identify the tangible positive outcomes of short-term service programs, including Alternative Spring Break. Within this section and the following, I plan to unpack the positive and negative outcomes captures in the research thus far so as to utilize these results when beginning my own research.
Identifying positives in something that is so wholeheartedly altruistic in nature and devoted to the common good seems to be straightforward. However, in order to dive into this research, it is important to find what scholars have found to be their missions and objectives thus far in order to move forward for future short-term alternative spring break trips. To be put simply, there is a far from exhaustive list of positive impacts identified through these trips, some to be identified in Guttentag’s work: the work that the volunteers achieve, the revenue that host communities or sending organisations can generate, the environmental conservation that the sector commonly promotes, the personal growth that volunteers may undergo, intercultural experience involving volunteers, and hosts that can foster a better understanding between cultures (Guttentag; 2009). These are all evident and mutually beneficial positive outcomes, for the most part. The whole idea behind these programs essentially is for them to foster mutually beneficial relationships and reciprocity among sending institutions and host communities (Guttentag; 2009).

Raymond and Hall’s work, “The Development of Cross Cultural (Mis)Understanding Through Volunteer Tourism,” argues that in order to make these short-term service trips successful, cross cultural understanding, no matter if the community is domestic or international, should be a more explicitly stated goal as opposed to a natural outcome for the students participating in the program (Raymond & Hall, 2008). Raymond and Hall’s call for more clearly stated goals emerges as an important observation of the current shortcomings of short term ASB trips.

Looking deeper at what makes an ASB trip have intended positive outcomes for both host communities and sending universities, Break Away has developed a list of eight components that create a successful ASB trip. First, the need for strong, direct implementation of service is necessary, in the fact that students must be active participants and fully engaged in the work they are doing (Break Away, 2015). Second, the ASB trip
must be alcohol and drug free, so as to allow no outside distractions or obstacles to interfere with the service work. Some host communities note that one of the largest disturbances from “American” Alternative Spring Break groups come from their rowdy drinking activities (Break Away, 2015).

Third, Break Away suggests a heavy emphasis on diversity and social justice, and fourth, suggests trainings and orientations which are discussion oriented and allow for a space to look at the systems of power, privilege, oppression, and how these may play a role in their host community being visited (Break Away, 2015). Fifth and sixth focus primarily on the student as they are being trained with the necessary skills to succeed as well as being educated on the matters and issues which their host community they will be visiting may be facing (Break Away, 2015). Suggestion number seven relates to post-trip communication, which should be conducted through reflection. Finally, number eight relates to reorientation, which is integral to the students’ development following these intensive trips (Break Away, 2015).

Other researchers strongly agree with this model for positive Alternative Spring Break trips. Nelson and Klak make similar recommendations for enhancing the impacts of short-term trips on the students as well as host communities (Nelson & Klak, 2012). Schroeder et al. hope for these enhancements as they make their own list of six recommendations, some including similar notions which Break Away: knowledgeable program leaders, and student and communities being prepared in the appropriate ways (Schroeder et al., 2009). Additionally, Schroeder et al. make another recommendation to ensure that the program establishes long-term relationships and thus avoids the “drive by” factor which can produce harmful outcomes on host communities (Schroeder et al., 2009).

As Nelson and Klak note in their work, one way to enhance these relationships and build them on a long-term scale, even if the trip is considered short term, is to increase the
amount of student participation. Students becoming enriched in the local food and culture, including the preparation of meals alongside community member, as well as contributing to the reciprocity component and friendship building, can make a positive impact (Nelson & Klak, 2012).

The existing literature highlights many positive attributes that short-term service trips as well as ASB trips have the potential to impact host communities and their student participants. However, not all researchers are as gracious with their suggestions for ASB’s, and thus take a more critical approach to these short-term service trip approaches. Briefly discussing the duration of the trips, several scholars have differing viewpoints on what “short-term” service trips consist of. Daniel Guttentag defines “short-term” as service being conducted under one year’s time (Guttentag, 2009). Opposing this viewpoint is scholar Megan Smith who understands a short-term program as one which is generally lasting less than three months (Smith, 2015). Continuing the discussion of duration are once again Joseph and Paul Priest as they note the duration of the trips do not require giving up of jobs or leaving family members for long periods of time (Priest & Priest, 2008).

**Mission/Objectives of Host Community**

This section will introduce the previous literature on the negative consequences and outcomes these trips may have. A persistent question arises as to why communities host Alternative Spring Break programs if there is little to no research showing that they are providing efficient and quality services. Schroeder et al. notes that results from a research project on the host community impact of college students participating in university-sponsored international experiences. This study finds that little reliable data is available on the impact that our students have on host communities (Schroeder et. al. 2011). However, I intend to make more explicit the mission and objectives on hosting communities and consider the impact of ASBs on those host communities.
Host communities can create revenue from sending organizations and their students through transactions that may occur before, during, and after the program (Guttentag, 2009). For example, many ASB hosting organizations require a registration fee for groups choosing to volunteer with them in order to cover the costs of food and basic needs for volunteers. Hosting communities may also increase revenue on students’ arrival as students contribute to the local economy, including supporting local stores and vendors. Following an ASB, host communities may also gain an increased awareness of their organization or community as a whole, creating more opportunities for economic gain and involvement.

Accompanying that economic gain from potential connections involves the spreading of intercultural understanding and experiences that can foster relationships and understanding between cultures (Guttentag, 2009). This particular goal is generally understood as mutual in nature for both the sending institution and hosting community. Throughout the duration of the trip, host communities intend for volunteers and to connect emotionally and culturally with host community members so as to create a cultural understanding between people who may be very different.

**Impact of Sending Institution**

The literature on impact and outcomes of ASB’s is limited in scope. Although the Priest brothers make this previous positive view regarding the short-term length of these trips, this does not capture the totality of their understanding of the efficacy of ASBs. They begin their article by voicing their oppositions to the durations of the trips:

When students more and more brought up the subject of short-term missions, I reacted negatively- with every anthropological bone in my body. I had, after all, pursued a PhD in anthropology with the goal of helping professionalize missionary service. I believed cultural and linguistic understandings were important in cross cultural service which
needed, therefore, to be long-term and underpinned by extensive missiological training.

(Priest & Priest, 2008)

The Priests were not alone in questioning and critically analyzing short-term service programs. Throughout the previous literature, many researchers have noted the lack of scholarly literature on short term service trips, with specific focus on the impact on host communities (Dorado & Giles, 2004, p.126; Sandy & Holland, 2006, p.30).

This lack of scholarly research is a profound issues within Robert Rhoads and Julie Neururer’s article, “Alternative Spring Break: Learning Through Community Service.” They note that the learning outcomes of students and the benefits of engaging in this type of work are vastly unknown (Rhodes; Neururer, 1998). Specifically, “although widely judged as beneficial, the outcomes of such involvement are less than clear.” This suggests the literature can be expanded by considering the student point of view (Rhodes; Neururer, 1998).

Since their research in 1998, a considerable amount of research has been student driven and focused on individual development within the ASB field. Another area that lacks understanding is the little research that has been carried out on host community reactions to the impacts of these programs (Fredline; Faulkner. 2000). Fredline and Faulkner utilize their social representations theory to compare studies of host community reactions to tourism, in comparison to community perceptions and systems of preconceptions through which they create cultural meanings (Fredline; Faulkner. 2000).

Wood et al. look at the lack of research in the article, “Community Impacts of International Service Learning,” where the authors are shocked at the value placed on respect for host communities. (Wood et al. 2011). To then find that little research has evaluated these programs or even measured their success, greatly identifies gaps in literature and room for expansion in this field (Wood et al. 2011).
Impact on Host Community

Is the experience of a week really going to last a lifetime? The subsequent literature will report on the impact of ASB trips on hosting communities. In the article “They See Everything, and Understand Nothing: Short Term Mission and Service Learning,” Robert and Joseph Priest reference the short-term mission movement in North American universities, recognizing the “huge” progression and popularity ABS has had (Priest & Priest, 2008). Often, an increase in tourism in a community can be viewed as economically beneficial to the local community through the stimulation of local businesses, markets, and infrastructure (Smith, 2015). Robert and Joseph Priest define this movement as a populist movement critically speaking of these trips as “missiologically unsophisticated and frequently anti-intellectual” (Priest & Priest, 2008).

Despite good intentions, often objectives can create poor outcomes. To view impact, I will review the literature on the impact of ASB programs on hosting communities. Within the small amount of available research on ASB’s and short-term service trips’ success, there is a combination of positive and negative feedback that I find significant in taking an unbiased view and reporting on both.

Raymond and Hall question the legitimacy of these short-term service programs and their benefits, questioning them as a form of neo-colonialism or imperialism while viewing issues of power inequalities, inappropriate undertaking of roles, and more (Raymond & Hall, 2008). The primary worry for Raymond and Hall lies with the idea that short-term trips, at times, cannot allow for relationships to be built. This was shown through a study of a two-week trip where preconceived ideas were confirmed rather than challenged by students (Raymond & Hall, 2008).

Guttentag similarly argues these points, suggesting numerous possible negative impacts which volunteer tourism trip can cause, including a neglect of local’s desires, a
hindrance of work progress and completion of unsatisfactory work due to lack of proper skills, a reinforcement of conceptualizations, and rationalizations of poverty (Guttentag, 2009). Much of the literature, including Schroeder et al., recognizes that there is “little reliable data available on the impact that our students have on host communities,” furthering Guttentag’s previous sentiments (Schroeder et al., 2009).

Mary Conran notes that this specific sector of the travel voluntourism industry perpetuates a sense of the “helping narrative” among students, instantly creating two groups: the saviors, and those needing to be saved (Conran, 2011). This undertone of White Saviorism is in fact very present in many of the ASB trips. Guttentag brings up the notion that “every little bit helps,” which may not always be accurate in every community (Guttentag, 2009). At some-times, the cost of having unskilled volunteers may actually outweigh the benefits, as shown in this quote: “If you get somebody who’s never gotten their hands dirty, in order for them to be any value to us, we have to stop and teach them. Sometimes when you add it all up, it’s a negative. We’ve thought of telling them to go away (Carey, 2001).” This example is the driver behind the misunderstood reasons students want to participate in these trips, which could involve this superiority complex.

The concept of the demonstration effect is suggested by Guttentag and followed by Wall and Mathieson. The demonstration effect is a term denoting the process in which a host culture is impacted when tourists/visitors/outsiders draw attention to their lifestyles and specifically wealth (Guttentag, 2009). This in turn, causes “unintended cultural change” in which the students or tourists were not intending to make within their short-term trips (Guttentag, 2009). This effect only furthers the narrative that students can create as the “them” and “us” categories.

A further example of the dichotomy between students and host communities is stated by Nelson and Klak demonstrating segregation, even if it was unintended:
When the students were called to eat, they were directed to a small dining area created for the occasion and arranged buffet style with white cloth table linens and metal utensils. In contrast, local people walked uphill to the open-air cookhouse and took their lunch on scattered benches and crates. (Nelson Klak 200)

A term for this unintentional alienation between students and host community peoples can be referred to as “the tourist gaze,” which Urry (1990) labels as the objectification of people from each other.

Megan Smith critiques the volunteer work of a short-term medical service trip stating that “despite small successes, the realities of the diminished power, autonomy, and culture unique to an area considerably outweigh the current perceived benefits (Smith, 2015).” Smith introduces anthropologist, Paul Farmer, who wagers that “conspicuous consumption in the face of famine and disease may lead to resentments of which we are only dimly aware” progressing the separation narrative between American students and the host communities (Smith, 2015).

Schroeder et al. note that, like tourism, short-term time abroad can create impacts and consequences that at times are non-preventable (Schroeder et al., 2009). The literature, although lacking, is split on the positive and negative outcomes of ASB’s and short-term service trips. Through this review of literature, I have aimed to provide a well-rounded overview of the history behind Alternative Spring Break Programs, defined several tourism, volunteering and accompanied terms, and finally dove into the positive and negative research already being done on ASB’s and sending students to host communities.
Methodology

This study uses a mixed methods exploratory approach to compile data on the objectives and intentions of sending institutions and continued this approach to evaluate the objectives of communities hosting ASB programs. I conducted two related surveys. One was sent to sending institutions and one sent to hosting communities. The hosting communities survey was domestic as well as international, to gather further understanding about ASB service trips in order to enhance the field.

Surveys

Creating and conducting surveys had allowed me to sample a variety of populations through sending institutions in the Northeastern part of the United States as well as domestic and international host communities. I created two surveys, one for the sending colleges and universities, and one for the communities hosting these ASB programs. I administered my survey through email [See Appendix A for a copy of the initial email inquiries].

For the sending university survey, I created a list of twelve survey questions (Appendix B) based on my theoretical framework and pre-existing literature on the sending institutions goals and objectives for their ASB programs. I created my questions in an attempt to collect demographic, mission-driven and goal-oriented related data based on the theoretical framework and literature outlined in my literature review. The ranking model question is grounded in existing literature in motives for Alternative Break programs (Guttentag, 2009). I created questions for the hosting communities survey in order to gauge their intentions and objectives for hosting ASB programs and gauging whether their needs have been met through previous ASB trips (Appendix C).

To distribute the surveys, I sent my survey through individual emails to those people at colleges and universities involved in the Alternative Spring Break programming and included my survey link within the email. I additionally sent my survey through individual
emails to people representing hosting communities, including volunteer coordinators, directors, etc. and included the survey link within that email as well.

In total, I collected 38 survey responses, 20 of which were from sending institutions and 18 of which were from hosting communities. The survey was intended to be completed by Alternative Spring Break Program coordinators from each college/university however, I did not include a question on the survey for the responder to indicate their title at their school. For the hosting communities, the survey was intended to be completed by volunteer coordinators or directors of the organizations, however I did not include a question for the participant to indicate their title.

**Limitations, Anonymity, Positionality**

I encountered the following limitations while conducting my research: time, number of schools surveyed, and number of host communities surveyed. Time was a major limitation as I only had approximately 4 months to complete data collection, analysis, and writing. With this lack of time, I was only able to gain 38 total survey respondents, although I had hoped to reach several more. Due to the timing as well, I was surveying respondents during one of the busiest times of their year – during the planning, implementation, and hosting of Alternative Spring Break programs. This resulted in a lack of several responses and was a limitation in my data collection process. Another limitation throughout my data-collection process fell upon the lack of direct positions and titles by many of the college and hosting institutions. For example, several ASB programs are organized through Mission and Ministry, thus, finding the correct person to send the survey to complete and get accurate data was a large limitation.

I was able to ensure anonymity by using Qualtrics as a platform for my survey collection in which respondents were only asked for personal information such as their name if they self-selected to participate in a phone interview. This information was then kept secure
through password protection. In addition, any identifiable information was removed from all quotes used in the study.

I was able to ensure anonymity by using Google Forms as a platform for my survey collection which allowed participants to opt in to adding their email address if they so choose, which often identified their school or hosting organization. Through this platform, all information was kept secure through password protection. All quotations and data points utilized throughout the data were de-identified as well. While it was not my intention to allow my interest in Alternative Spring Break programs to affect my research, I did proceed with the study knowing that I have a somewhat negative bias towards sending institutions and their objectives for this programming on hosting community’s needs. There is a chance that my perceptions of ASB programming impacted the lens through which I analyzed the data.

Findings

The findings from surveys and short answer responses are outlined below. These findings give an understanding of the goals and objectives for sending institutions participating in ASB programming, and hosting communities who host ASB volunteers.

Survey Responses

Sending Institution Data: Of the 20 responses collected, all 20 were valid, with the exception of one question which I will address later. Of my specific sample of 20 responses, 75% of respondents noted that their sending institution ASB program has not set a long-term goal or goals, as classified as a goal within a range of three or more years. Therefore, the remaining 25% of participants have set a long-term goal or goals.

Participants were asked, on a Likert scale between one and four – one being strongly disagree, two being disagree, three being agree, and four being strongly agree – to answer the following: I am concerned about how difficult it is to meet these goals and objectives. The goals and objectives, if existing, were noted in a short answer response that will be noted in
the open-ended response section of my findings. As noted in Figure 1., zero respondents in my sample strongly agreed with the statement, where 20% strongly disagreed. 45% of respondents answered that they “agree” with the statement that they are concerned about how difficult it is to meet their goals and objectives, if outlined.

![Bar chart](image)

**Figure 1:** “I am concerned about how difficult it is to meet these goals and objectives”

Responding to Likert scale with the same ranking as the previous question, respondents answered: I believe that an Alternative Spring Break event (a single trip) is long enough to create a lasting impact on our host communities. Of my sample size, 47.4% of participants disagreed with the statement, while 21.1% strongly disagreed. 26.3% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement. This information is noted in Figure 2.
When asked to respond, to the top three expected outcomes of sending institutions Alternative Spring Break trips, respondents were given ten answers from which to choose their top three responses. Based on average number of responses, the most common answer was the expected outcome for students to gain knowledge on social justice issues. Ranking 2nd and 3rd based on average number of responses were the objectives to have students grow spiritually, and well as assist in hosting communities’ goals. The complete list of choices can be seen in Appendix D.

**Ranking Question Sending Institutions:** A large portion of the survey surrounded a ranking question where participants were asked to rank between 1-10 based on their most important goals and objectives within these Alternative Spring Break programs. Within my sample of 20, only 11 responses were valid for this question; the rest were not included for various reasons, which I note in my limitations. All ten choices and their average number of responses can be seen in Figure 3 below.
Within this question, I separated the responses into different themes to better differentiate between the types of responses participants could choose. The two themes I chose were student themed responses (i.e. students’ academic growth), and hosting community themed (i.e. helping host communities achieve goals). Within my sample size, 58% of responses favored student themed questions, making 42% of responses favoring host community themed questions. A response being favored is determined as ranking between 1-5, in the top 50% of the questions.

Figure 4 shows the answers that got the highest number of responses, including students representing colleges and universities, as well as students learning about social justice issues. Figure 5 shows the opposite; the answers that ranked the lowest among the sample were students’ academic growth, and helping host communities complete projects.
Hosting Community Data: Of the 18 hosting community responses collected, all 18 were valid, with the exception of one question which I will address later. Of my specific sample of 18 hosting community responses, 47.1% of respondents noted that their community ASB program has not set a long-term goal or goals, as classified as a goal within
a range of three or more years. Therefore, the remaining 52.9% of participants have set a long-term goal or goals.

![Graph showing community needs met](image)

**Figure 6: Community Needs Were Met**

Host community respondents were asked to respond to a Likert scale based on whether they feel their community needs were met by sending institutions within this one-week ASB program. Of participants who responded, eight strongly agreed with the statement that they felt their community needs were met. Additionally, 6 respondents agree, while 3 respondents found themselves either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Hosting community representatives were asked whether sending institutions had explicitly stated a goal while communicating of their ASB trip. Of the sample, 61.1% of respondents noted that no goal was specified, and 38.9% noted a goal was established between sending institutions and hosting communities.

**Ranking Question Hosting Communities:** Of the 18 responses, only 8 were valid responses which thoroughly responded to the prompted question. Within the ranking question, respondents were given ten responses which they could rank on a scale of 1 to 10 based on their objectives and goals, with 1 being their most important objective for ASB.
trips, and 10 being their least important. Just as I did with the sending institutions survey, this question was broken down into student themed responses and host community themed responses. Of the hosting community responses, 54% favored host community themed questions. 44% favored student development themed questions in their top five choices while ranking.

![Average Score of Responses](image)

**Figure 7: Average Score of Hosting Community Responses**

Looking at the data responses, there was no significant responses ranked as participants number one response. Each participant chose a different most important response. Figure 8 shows the responses ranking lowest among participants, being expanding cultural knowledge, engaging community members with student volunteers, and immersing in a cross-cultural experience.
**Open-Ended Responses**

**Sending Institution Open-Ended Response Data:** Of the open-ended responses, sending institution respondents were asked to elaborate on their goals, if they noted any. Out of 20 responses, 15 respondents opted not to answer the question, being that they did not have a goal or did not wish to elaborate. Several respondents noted personal goals identified with their specific institutions, such as offering more international ASB programming, providing more resources for students volunteering on ASB trips, and offering global ASB programs for academic credit. Sending Participant (SP) #9 noted that their long-term goal was to “Create a pipeline for long term and locally engaged community building [and] service, and create connections between students and non-profit community partners.”

In response to the same question, SP #19 responded, “Our goal is to continue to offer opportunities for student to critically engage with local, national, and international
communities in ways that promote spiritual development, critical thinking, civic engagement, and a hermeneutics of social justice.”

When asked through a Likert scale, noted in the previous section, of respondents’ level of concern regarding the achievement of their outlined goals, if any, respondents had the opportunity to choose between 1 and 4. Choosing 1 was “not concerned at all”, 2 meant “somewhat concerned,” 3 meant “concerned” and 4 meant “very concerned.” The average response was 77% of responses fell either in the “somewhat concerned” or “concerned” ranking (two or three). Of these responses, zero noted that they were “very concerned” with achieving their outlined goals. Participants ranking outside of this 77% and not having any concerns with their program answered the open-ended response confidently and concisely.

Of participants who did fall within this 77% category of concern, the open-ended responses can be broken up into two different categories: the concern of time, and the concern of seriousness of the communities. SP #8 noted, “It is hard for students to meet our objectives in the short amount of time that we work with them.” SP #18 stated, “Building lasting relationships with our participants and partners is difficult, as we cycle through new students every year.”

Those expressing their concern, such as SP #5, noted, “I am concerned insofar as I take this work very seriously. I realize that there are multiple opportunities a) to harm rather than help host communities and b) for a student to come away from an experience with their own (warped) worldview re-cemented as opposed to challenged.” Similarly, SP #20 summarizes their concerns:

Because of the current nature of our decentralized ASB trip structure, I am always concerned about the varying quality of relationships, impact, and intent of each trip; some trips are working with long standing partners in a genuine educational and cultural exchange that makes local impact, while other trips are one-and-done to
locations hard-hit by natural disasters. It is nearly impossible to say all the trips have similar goals or outcomes.

The final open-ended response question asked participants if there were any unexpected or unintended outcomes from their ASB programs. Primarily, responses surrounded student development, as SP #1 noted students changes in career paths and exploring options for postgraduate years of service. SP #11 discussed the creation of a student club on campus to represent one of the sending institution’s community partners for fundraising and advocacy purposes. SP #6 notes, “...students are pushed out of their comfort zones, which forces students to support and learn on each other.”

**Hosting Community Qualitative Data:** Of the hosting communities, 5 out of the 18 were international communities, the remaining being domestic sites. When asked their long-term goals, 9 respondents chose either to refrain from providing an answer, or did not have any goals. Of the remaining 9 hosting communities, Hosting Participant (HP) #7 noted that their organization’s goal was to “[create] ongoing expansion of the program and ability to host medium- and long-term volunteers.” Other goals expressed in the open-ended responses were to increase awareness of community, fill all March volunteer weeks with ASB programs, and create lasting connections that may lead to donations and financial opportunities.

Participants were asked about the greatest positive outcomes of having students participate in ASB programs in their community, with the option to state at least three outcomes but no more than five. HP #1 stated the most important were,

Education on the struggles and injustices faced by these communities (and the developing world in general), as well as the impact that developed countries (e.g. USA) has. Also, when groups from a place like the USA come to visit those on the
"margins" of society, they bring hope. Normally they are ignored by the rest of the world.

HP #18 similarly noted that “restoring worth, value, and hope while letting our community know they are valuable, teaching others about the city and the value of the people in it, bettering the neighbourhood” were top outcomes as well. HP #2 noted the largest objective was monetary donations and sponsorship.

Participants responded to the Likert Scale question: I feel my community needs, as specified, were met within this one-week Alternative Spring Break program. HP #4 ranked a 2 on the Likert Scale, meaning “disagree” stated, “Not everyone who comes to volunteer here is impacted the same way. Most [students] are impacted positively, but some just don't "get it" or otherwise agree with what they learn and experience here” HP #16 responds to the prompt by stating:

We don't see one-week Alternative Spring Break programs as a means to meet or solve needs of a host community. Rather, it is an opportunity to join with said community and serve alongside for a time, with the benefits previously mentioned. It isn't about “fixing" people or situations.

Focusing on challenges, participants were given the opportunity to expand on their own challenges from hosting these ASB programs. HP #1 stated that the majority of the challenges they experience come from students lacking in participation throughout the week due to fatigue or little conversation. HP #4 noted,

The biggest challenge is getting volunteers to get beyond their own paradigm and embrace ways of thinking and being which are in stark contrast to their own.

Sometimes it is a real challenge to get people to realize that what we do and how we do it is based upon 20 years of trial and error and personal experience; yet often we get criticisms which are based on the personal paradigm and limited experience of the
volunteer, rather than their considering the vast experience of the people who run our program. Knowledge comes from books and education, but wisdom comes from experience....especially the shared experience of many.

Within this sample of data, this open-ended response from HP #4 highlights the importance of what hosting communities wish to see change in their visiting students, and some of the challenges that students play a role in contributing to hardships in communities.

HP #16 stated;

It's challenging to make sure that volunteers realize it's not about them, but rather where they would best fit alongside the community in partnership. Many projects are not completed start-to-finish in one week; many are ongoing. We don't manufacture worksites to meet the needs of volunteers. Transportation logistics can be a challenge at times. It can be a challenge helping volunteers understand when certain construction projects are beyond their skill level (the balance between teaching new skills and delivering quality work). Occasionally, we find volunteers who believe any volunteer service is good volunteer service. We try to help volunteers increase their awareness that we are all "Us." What we give should be nothing less than what we would want/expect ourselves.

When asked, ‘what do you think is single greatest impact that Alternative Spring Break has on your community?’, respondents generally had two top answers. The first being the relationships built within the communities between hosting communities and student participants, and second the tangible projects that are completed for the communities.

Looking at unexpected or unintended outcomes of hosting ASB trips, multiple participants noted the affects these trips can have on both the community and on the hosting staff. HP #1 stated,
We have taken steps in recent years to put a limit to how many groups we are receiving each year. Although neighbors have never expressed it, when we have back to back groups it can be tiring for the community. An unintended outcome would be the feeling of putting a burden on the community to help receive the groups. Again, this has never been explicitly shared, but it is something that we sense. We have limited the number of groups and that has helped in this area.

HP #3 noted that the effects of the ASB trips has contributed to staff burnout when they have hosted many groups in a row.

**Discussions Section**

The research presented in this capstone show clear challenges that Alternative Spring Break hosting communities face as well as the blind spots that may be unseen within ASB programming initiated by sending schools. Due to the lack of previous knowledge on hosting community perceptions and perceived benefits from ASB programming, there are identifiable gaps in ASB programming that may be harmful to the hosting communities.

Of the many findings in the study, I think it is important to use a critical lens when viewing the percentage of sending institution respondents who noted that their school’s ASB program has not set long term goal(s), being 75% of my sample size. Although this is just within my sample size, I would be interested to hear from these participants why they do not have long-term goals and whether they hold more of a short-term view on their trips.

Sending institutions were asked to answer on a Likert scale; I believe that an Alternative Spring Break event (a single trip) is long enough to create a lasting impact on our host communities. Of my sample size, 47.4% of participants disagreed with the statement, while 21.1% strongly disagreed. Therefore, 68.5% of my entire sample either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with that statement. While there was no open response to follow up this question, if 68.5% felt as though they could not make a lasting impact on hosting
communities, the perceived impact of ASB programs from the perspective of sending institutions is largely out of alignment with the intentions behind such programs. A question emerges as to whether the limited timeframe of ASB programs is the primary reason that the majority of sending institution perspectives question to lasting impact of their programs.

Similarly, hosting communities were asked whether they felt their needs were met by sending institutions within this one-week ASB program. After further review of this question, it was deemed problematic due to the way in which this question was framed. There was an error on the part of the researcher, as it did not allow for host community participants to define what their needs were or if they had been vocalized to the sending institutions. When put in context compared to challenges, responses suggest that the needs of host communities were not necessarily met. Open-ended responses greatly contradicted those of the quantitative data in the bar graph, leading to misinterpretations in the data.

Also, within the sending institution sample, participants were asked whether they were concerned on a Likert scale of 1-4, the average responses within my sample were 77% in the “somewhat concerned” or “concerned” ranking (two or three). It was certainly striking to see that 77% of sending institutions within my given sample were concerned to some extent regarding whether their goals are being achieved on ASB trips. When given the opportunity to elaborate through an open response, the responses aligned with some of the previous literature seen. Primarily, the concern of time, as noted by SP #8, was largely an aspect as they stated, “It is hard for students to meet our objectives in the short amount of time that we work with them.” This aligns with previous literature of Raymond and Hall whereas they note that the primary worry lies with the idea that short-term trips, at times, cannot allow for relationships to be fully built (Raymond & Hall, 2008). They showed this playing out within a two-week study of a two-week ASB trip where preconceived ideas of students were confirmed instead of challenged (Raymond & Hall, 2008).
This idea is particularly interesting as SP #5 noted very similarly that, “I am concerned insofar as I take this work very seriously. I realize that there are multiple opportunities a) to harm rather than help host communities and b) for a student to come away from an experience with their own (warped) worldview re-cemented as opposed to challenged” which echoes the sentiments of Raymond and Hall beautifully.

Additionally, noting the challenge of time is SP #18 when they state that building lasting relationships with our partners is difficult as we cycle through new students every year, relating back to the “drive by” factor noted in previous literature. Again, Schroeder et al. make a recommendation to ensure that the [Alternative Spring Break] program establishes long-term relationships and thus avoids the “drive by” factor which can produce harmful outcomes on host communities (Schroeder et al., 2009). The idea that sending institutions are aware they may be producing this “drive by” factor on hosting communities identifies that there may be gaps in the communication as well as literature on hosting communities’ perceptions.

Looking deeper at the hosting community qualitative data, it was extremely beneficial to hear from hosting communities why they host ASB programs and the challenges that they may face. When asked what the most important reasons for hosting these ASB programs were, HP #1 stated that the “education on the struggles and injustices faced by these communities (and the developing world in general), as well as the impact that developed countries (e.g. USA) has. Also, when groups from a place like the USA come to visit those on the "margins" of society, they bring hope. Normally they are ignored by the rest of the world.”

The participant labelled their community as being on the “margins” of society, further reinforcing the conceptualizations and rationalizations of poverty that many first world visitors in these communities hold, as noted by Guttentag (2009). Although this host
community participant speaks of the hope that is brought to hosting communities when students from the United States visit to serve, it is unsettling the helping narrative that can also be attached to that kind of statement, as noted by Conran in previous literature, and that there are two groups – the saviors and those needing to be saved (Conran, 2011). These helping narratives are something that can potentially be very dangerous for hosting communities’ peoples and may create harmful rather than helpful scenarios.

Reiterating this helping narrative additionally brings into play the demonstration effect, where tourists and students perform service yet create unintended cultural change due to their behaviors and conceptions. When HP #1 noted that “places like the USA” come to visit the “margins” of society, they immediately place themselves in a “them” versus “us” categories emphasized in this demonstration effect and reinforced through ASB programming at times (Guttentag, 2009).

Another revelation seen within the data was found when HP #4 elaborated that “Not everyone who comes to volunteer here is impacted the same way. Most [students] are impacted positively, but some just don’t "get it" or otherwise agree with what they learn and experience here.” Urry describes this as the “tourist gaze,” as students can create an unintentional alienation between themselves and the people of the hosting communities because they are not understanding and processing what they are experiencing or learning (Urry, 2009).

Similarly, HP #16 notes that ASB programs are not seen as a means to meet or solve the needs of the host community, and that it is not about “fixing” people or situations. Here, the participant is creating a space for the “helping narrative” to not be utilized in situations in their community, by stating rather it is an opportunity to join communities and not “solve” or “fix” problems (Conran; 2011). It is extremely significant that HP #16 recognizes this within
their community and communicates this with their incoming sending institutions so as to prevent the helping narrative from expanding into the community.

Looking at the challenges faced by hosting communities, the data supports the previous literature on the many challenges that can arise from larger systemic issues as well as varying by trips and volunteers. HP #4 specifically noted that the biggest challenge was getting volunteers to get beyond their own paradigm and embrace the ways of thinking and being which are in stark contrast to their own. Additionally, HP #4 stated that “often we get criticisms which are based on the personal paradigm and limited experience of the volunteer, rather than their considering the vast experience of the people who run our program. Knowledge comes from books and education, but wisdom comes from experience….especially the shared experience of many.” This view reiterates the concern in the literature that the saviorism helping narrative driving ASB programs may be unintentionally promoting the idea that these communities need to be saved.

HP #16 continues to fight against this helping narrative when stating, “Occasionally, we find volunteers who believe any volunteer service is good volunteer service. We try to help volunteers increase their awareness that we are all "Us." What we give should be nothing less than what we would want/expect ourselves,” emphasizing that there is no “us” versus “them” conceptualizations in this trip dynamic but rather good and meaningful work needs to be done (Guttentag, 2009).

Looking directly at the type of work that is being completed at these hosting communities, much of the literature, as well as the following data, suggests that lack of proper skills and hindrance of work progress may in fact create more harm than good due to unskilled workers (Conran, 2011). Carey notes that the cost of having unskilled volunteers may actually outweigh the benefits, saying, “If you get somebody who’s never gotten their hands dirty, in order for them to be any value of us we have to stop and teach them.
Sometimes with you add it all up, it's a negative. We’ve thought of telling them to go away (Carey, 2001).

Within the data collected, HP #16 similarly states this concept of unskilled labor as one of their challenges in hosting these ASB programs. The participant noted that, “It's challenging to make sure that volunteers realize it's not about them, but rather where they would best fit alongside the community in partnership” emphasizing that the focus for this hosting community is not on student development, but rather on meeting the needs of the hosting community. This touches on Guttentag’s note about neglecting local’s desires, as student volunteers being self-driven in their motives to do service trips (Guttentag, 2009).

HP #16 additionally writes, “Many projects are not completed start-to-finish in one week; many are ongoing. We don't manufacture worksites to meet the needs of volunteers. Transportation logistics can be a challenge at times. It can be a challenge helping volunteers understand when certain construction projects are beyond their skill level (the balance between teaching new skills and delivering quality work).” This continues the narrative that unskilled labor is a challenge to hosting communities and at times can be more harmful than effective in delivering projects and tangible results.

A final challenge hosting communities face is the direct impact on the hosting communities as a result of running ASB programs. Aside from potential resource depletion and conspicuous consumption in the face of famine, as noted by Paul Farmer, communities can get easily exhausted of resources, culture, health and wellbeing. HP #1 noted that although community members have not vocally expressed such concerns, an unintended outcome may be the burden being put on the community and the tiresome factor of hosting. Due to this, this community has chosen to limit the number of groups received in the community each year to be hyper aware of the direct impacts on their community.
Conclusion

Recommendations for further ensuring that hosting communities and sending institutions needs are met would be to establish, prior to trip departure, mutually beneficial goals. By participating in this mutual goal setting process, hosting communities have the opportunity to explicitly state their goals for hosting students, while sending institutions are able to make clear and evident their purpose for sending students to these communities.

Within both the research as well as the findings, one piece of evidence that there are gaps in these trips are the alarming statistics that identify the length of these service trips do not necessarily align with long-term sustainable service. Therefore, if ethical and sustainable service is intended on hosting communities, a way in which to make these trips and the work completed on them, sustainable, needs to be identified. If the long-term goal of sending institutions is to make a lasting impact and difference in communities over time, then these one-week ASB trips do not seem to be the solution.

Rather, if these one-week ASB trips are indeed intended to focus primarily on student development and not fully address and meet the needs of hosting communities and its members, perhaps these trips require a shift in focus. I recommend that if these ASB trips are truly devoted to student development and are primarily motivated by school-oriented goals from the sending institution perspective, then let these trips be what they are: student development trips. Rather than creating this image that these ASB trips are service trips and risk promoting the white saviorism narrative that many scholars speak of.

If the primary focus of these trips is indeed to creating a lasting sustainable impact, I would recommend that sending universities evaluate their programs and potentially find ways to make them longer. Students and faculty could also attend multiple trips to the same host communities, all while listening to the precise needs of hosting communities to ensure they
are sustainable. Therefore, recommendations for future ASB programming would center on the creation of a plan for long term sustainable engagement, practicing mutual goal setting to establish clear and concise goals prior to ASB trip departure, and addressing whether these trips are student development based or service-based considering the time frame allowed for impactful service.
References


Appendices

Appendix A

Initial Email Inquiries

Dear [college/university officials],

I am writing to ask you to contribute to a research study on Alternative Spring Break programs. My name is Erika Proulx, and I am a graduate student in Merrimack College’s Community Engagement program. I am writing a master’s research capstone titled, “A Helping Hand! The Perceived Benefits of Alternative Spring Break on Host Communities and the Actual Benefits from the Host Community Perspective.” My aim is to contribute to the current literature on Alternative Spring Break Programs by examining whether the stated objectives of colleges/universities and the communities that host them for Alternative Spring Break trips are aligned and met.

I would like to ask for your assistance in contributing to this study by taking a short survey to gather data from colleges and universities on their objectives for Alternative Spring Break, due to [college/university name] involvement in Alternative Spring Break service trips. I would be happy to explain my study in more detail, as I have just been IRB approved and have developed my research further.

Thank you in advance for considering my request. Please feel free to contact me or my research adviser, Dr. John Giordano (jgiordano@merrimack.edu), if you would like any more information on my research.

Respectfully,

Erika Proulx, M.Ed candidate
Merrimack College
A HELPING HAND?

Dear [hosting organization name],

I am writing to ask you to contribute to a research study on Alternative Spring Break programs. My name is Erika Proulx, and I am a graduate student in Merrimack College’s Community Engagement program. I am writing a master’s research capstone titled, “A Helping Hand: The Perceived Benefits of Alternative Spring Break on Host Communities and the Actual Benefits from the Host Community Perspective.” My aim is to contribute to the current literature on Alternative Spring Break Programs by examining whether the stated objectives of colleges/universities and the communities that host them for Alternative Spring Break trips are aligned and met.

I would like to ask for your assistance in contributing to this study by taking a short survey to gather data from community organizations who host volunteer groups on their objectives for Alternative Spring Break. Due to your organization’s involvement in Alternative Spring Break service trips, you can help contribute to research on service trips and reflect on your experiences through a short survey. I would be happy to explain my study in more detail, as I have just been IRR approved and have developed my research further.

Thank you in advance for considering my request. Should you choose to move forward with this survey, please use the following link to a google form: [http://bit.ly/HostCommunitySurvey](http://bit.ly/HostCommunitySurvey). Please feel free to contact me or my research adviser, Dr. John Giordano (giordanoj@merrimack.edu), if you would like any more information on my research.

Respectfully,

Erika Proulx, M.Ed candidate
Merrimack College
Appendix B

Sending University Survey Questions

“A Helping Hand? The Perceived Benefits of Alternative Spring Break on Host Communities and the Actual Benefits from the Host Community Perspective.” Sending Institution Survey

* Required

Email address *

Your email

Consent to Participate in Research Study

Consent to Participate in Research Study

Title of Study:
A Helping Hand? The Perceived Benefits and Gaps to Short-Term Alternative Spring Break Programs on Host Communities
Investigators: Erika Proulx, Merrimack College
IRB Number: IRB-FY18-19-45

Introduction
You are being asked to be in a research study of Short-Term Alternative Spring Break Programs investigating the perceived benefits to host communities through observing the goals and objectives of both the sending institutions as well as the host communities of these trips. You were selected as a possible participant because you work in a college/university setting which is affiliated with the organization or implementation of Alternative Spring Break programs. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study
The purpose of the study is to contribute to the current literature on Alternative Spring Break Programs and the extent to which the trips are perceived as beneficial by host communities through an assessment of sending organization’s objectives in comparison to host
Purpose of Study
The purpose of the study is to contribute to the current literature on Alternative Spring Break Programs and the extent to which the trips are perceived as beneficial by host communities through an assessment of sending organization's objectives in comparison to host community objectives. Ultimately, this research will be presented as a capstone research paper and may be shared publicly on Merrimack College Scholarworks. No individual participants, colleges/universities, or host organizations will be identified in this study.

Description of the Study Procedures
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete the following survey that will take 15-20 minutes.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study
There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks.

Benefits of Being in the Study
There are no expected benefits of participating in this study.

Confidentiality
The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and/or all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. Participants in the study will be deidentified in all saved files. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments or Compensation
You will not receive payment/reimbursement for participating in this study.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw
The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time without affecting your relationship with the investigators of this study, Merrimack College or any study partners. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview or survey at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns
You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Erika Proulx at proulxe@merimack.edu or by telephone at (603) 714-1380. You may also contact the Merrimack College faculty supervisor of this research Dr. John Giordano at giordanoj@merimack.edu. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigators, you may contact the Chair of the Merrimack Institutional Review Board at (978) 837-5280 or by email at irb@merimack.edu. If you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you can report them to the Chair of the IRB at the contact information above.
“A Helping Hand? The Perceived Benefits of Alternative Spring Break on Host Communities and the Actual Benefits from the Host Community Perspective.” Sending Institution Survey

**Survey Questions**

In what state is your college/university located? Check one.

- [ ] NH
- [ ] MA
- [ ] ME
- [ ] Other

Does your school program offer international based Alternative Spring Break trips?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Does your school program offer domestic Alternative Spring Break Trips (within the United States)?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
Has your school program set a long-term goal or goals (3 years or more) for your Alternative Spring Break?

○ Yes

○ No

If yes, what is the goal(s) ?

Your answer

Through which office are your Alternative Spring Break trips organized? Please select one.

○ Student Involvement

○ Mission & Ministry

○ Office of the Provost

○ Academic Affairs

○ Study Abroad

○ Civic Engagement and Service Learning

○ Other: ________________________________
Please RANK the following statements from 1-10 based on the importance to the goals and objectives of your Alternative Spring break trip; with 1 being the most important goal or objective, and 10 being the least important goal or objective. Use the slider at the bottom of the question to view all 10 columns. PLEASE ONLY CHOOSE ONE RESPONSE PER COLUMN.

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<td>Students represent the college/universities core values</td>
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<td>Students' academic growth</td>
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<td>Students' spiritual growth</td>
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<td>Students' gain knowledge on social justice issues</td>
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<td>Assist host communities in achieving specific goals</td>
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<td>Help host communities complete projects</td>
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<td>Help host communities create cultural immersion experience for US students</td>
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<td>Help host community members experience another culture</td>
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<td>Creating lasting relationship with host communities</td>
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<td>Students learn how to serve others</td>
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</table>
Please respond to the following: I am concerned about how difficult it is to meet these goals and objectives.

1  2  3  4

Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree

Please briefly explain your answer to the above question:

Your answer

How long do your Alternative Spring Break events typically last?

○ Less than a week (under 6 days)

○ A week (6-8 days)

○ More than a week (greater than 8 days)

Please respond to the following: I believe that an Alternative Spring Break event (a single trip) is long enough to create a positive lasting impact on our host communities.

1  2  3  4

Strongly Disagree  ○  ○  ○  ○  Strongly Agree
Alternative Spring Breaks often state a set of outcomes. What are your top three expected outcomes from your Alternative Spring Break Program? Please check only YOUR TOP THREE CHOICES.

☐ Positive Student Development

☐ Students better understanding of social issues

☐ Students better understanding of host community’s specific goals

☐ More recognition of College/University

☐ Create lasting relationships with community partners

☐ Provide aid to organizations in need

☐ Bring recognition and awareness to host communities and their social issues

☐ Financial gains of College/University

☐ Students increased awareness of other cultures

☐ Wholly meet host communities needs as outlined in their goals for the trip

☐ Other: ________________________________

12. Were there any unexpected or unintended outcomes from your Alternative Spring Break Trip?

Your answer

Thank you for your participation in this survey. If you have any questions about this survey or how the data will be used, please contact proulxe@merrimack.edu
Appendix C
Hosting Community Survey Questions

“A Helping Hand? The Perceived Benefits of Alternative Spring Break on Host Communities and the Actual Benefits from the Host Community Perspective.” Host Community Survey

* Required

Email address *

Your email

Consent to Participate in Research Study

Title of Study:
A Helping Hand? The Perceived Benefits and Gaps to Short-Term Alternative Spring Break Programs on Host Communities
Investigators: Erika Proulx, Merrimack College
IRB Number: IRB-FY18-19-45

Introduction
You are being asked to be in a research study of Short-Term Alternative Spring Break Programs investigating the perceived benefits on host communities through observing the goals and objectives of both the sending institutions as well as the host communities of these trips. You were selected as a possible participant because you work in a college/university setting which is affiliated with the organization or implementation of Alternative Spring Break programs. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study
The purpose of the study is to contribute to the current literature on Alternative Spring Break Programs and the extent to which the trips are perceived as beneficial by host communities through an assessment of sending organization's objectives in comparison to host community objectives. Ultimately, this research will be presented as a capstone research paper and may be shared publicly on Merrimack College Scholarworks. No individual participants, colleges/universities, or host organizations will be identified in this study.
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Informed Consent
Continuing with this survey indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above.
"A Helping Hand? The Perceived Benefits of Alternative Spring Break on Host Communities and the Actual Benefits from the Host Community Perspective." Host Community Survey

* Required

**Survey Questions**

In what town/city and country is your community located in? *

Your answer

How long have you been hosting students for Alternative Spring Break Programs?

- [ ] Less than 3 years
- [ ] 3 to 10 years
- [ ] More than 10 years
- [ ] Other: 
Please RANK the following on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the most important goal, and 10 being the least important. What is your main goal/purpose of hosting students on Alternative Spring Break trips? Use the slider at the bottom of the question to view all 10 columns. PLEASE ONLY CHOOSE ONE RESPONSE PER COLUMN.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Expanding the knowledge of your culture</th>
<th>Getting community projects completed</th>
<th>Getting assistance on long-term projects</th>
<th>Spreading awareness on social justice issues relevant to your community</th>
<th>Financial interests from volunteers</th>
<th>Immersing in cultural experiences with students</th>
<th>Creating lasting relationships with community partners</th>
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### A HELPING HAND?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Creating lasting relationships with community partners</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing positive experiences for student growth and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing community members to engage with students of different backgrounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating connections for future service opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Has your host community set a long-term goal or goals (3 years or more) for your Alternative Spring Break program?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

If yes, what is the goal(s)?

Your answer

What are some of the biggest positive outcomes of having students participate in your community? Please indicate at least three, but no more than five.

Your answer
Survey Questions

Was there an explicit goal of the trip as articulated by the sending college/university?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, what was it?

Your answer

I feel my community needs, as specified, were met within this one-week Alternative Spring Break program.

1 2 3 4

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Please explain your answer to the above question:

Your answer

Were there any challenges your community faced while hosting students for an Alternative Spring Break program?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, could you explain what some of those challenges were?

Your answer
If yes, could you explain what some of those challenges were?

Your answer

What do you think is single biggest impact that Alternative Spring Break has on your community?

Your answer

Were there any unexpected or unintended outcomes of hosting an Alternative Spring Break Trip?

Your answer

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.
Appendix D

Top 3 Expected Outcomes Options

13. Alternative Spring Breaks often state a set of outcomes. What are your top three expected outcomes from your Alternative Spring Break Program? Please check only YOUR TOP THREE CHOICES.
Check all that apply.

☐ Positive Student Development
☐ Students better understanding of social issues
☐ Students better understanding of host community’s specific goals
☐ More recognition of College/University
☐ Create lasting relationships with community partners
☐ Provide aid to organizations in need
☐ Bring recognition and awareness to host communities and their social issues
☐ Financial gains of College/University
☐ Students increased awareness of other cultures
☐ Wholly meet host communities needs as outlined in their goals for the trip
☐ Other: __________________________________________