

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Caitlin Patricia Phillips for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Chemistry presented on August 20, 2008. Title: Reorientation in Alternative Break Trips.

Abstract approved:

Jeffrey Hale

When a student participates in a service break trip, a process called reorientation occurs after the trip is over, when the student is trying to connect what they've learned on the trip to their normal lives. The objective of this project was to explore the concepts of volunteerism, community service, service learning, and alternative break trips, and to determine whether a reorientation process is important for making a student's experience more meaningful and what specific parts of a reorientation are important. 12 service break leaders participated in a survey about the reorientation process at their school. The surveys were conducted in an interview fashion and the data was analyzed to extract major themes about reorientation and its importance. Every person interviewed indicated that their school's program did include a planned reorientation as part of the overall process and believed that it was important to help students translate what they'd learned about community and service to their own lives back home. The participants gave many parts of reorientation that they felt were important. There were variations due to the size of the program, the type of school, and the experience level of the participants. However, four important concepts were cited by all the participants: planned reflections, a planned service activity, community education, and a team regroup.

Key Words: reorientation, service, community, Spring Break

Corresponding email address: phillcai@onid.orst.edu

©Copyright by Caitlin Patricia Phillips
August 20, 2008
All Rights Reserved

Reorientation in Alternative Break Trips

by

Caitlin Patricia Phillips

A PROJECT

submitted to

Oregon State University

University Honors College

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Chemistry (Honors Scholar)

Presented August 20, 2008
Commencement June 2009

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Chemistry project of Caitlin Patricia Phillips
presented on August 20, 2008.

APPROVED:

Mentor, representing Sociology

Mentor, representing Student Affairs

Mentor, representing Adult Education and Higher Education Leadership

Dean, University Honors College

I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Caitlin Patricia Phillips, Author

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I would like to thank Mr. Jeff Hale for his help, guidance, patience, and good humor while mentoring me through this project. In addition, I would also like to thank my friends and family for their constant support during this sometimes stressful process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
Definitions and Background.....	5
Overall Importance.....	13
Thesis Question.....	15
Study Method.....	16
Results.....	18
Questions 1-3.....	18
Question 4.....	18
Question 5.....	20
Question 6.....	21
Demographic questions.....	22
Analysis of results.....	24
4 Key Elements.....	24
Variations.....	27
Conclusions.....	31
Limitations.....	32
Practical Applications.....	33
Bibliography.....	34
Appendix: The Survey.....	36

“My interest or sympathy or indignation is not aroused by an abstract cause, but by the plight of a single person.”

--Eleanor Roosevelt

PREFACE

My own experience with volunteering and community service started when I was young. As a member of the Girl Scouts, being involved in one's community was encouraged and occasionally required. This early background gave me the drive to help people that I still feel today. In high school, I joined the Community Service Club. This was a small organization run by a few dedicated students and a young teacher just out of college and eager to change the world. Most of what we did involved small, single acts around the town where we lived. We raked leaves in neighborhood yards one fall day. We helped organize a street clean-up. We planted some trees along the main street. While I enjoyed the simple act of helping people, I struggled with feeling like we weren't ever making a real difference. Looking back with the perspective I have now, it seems to me that my struggles had to do with the fact that the club was only at a volunteering level of service. Although we called ourselves the Community Service Club, we never spent any time thinking about the actual community we were serving. We also never made any goals or statements of intent outlining how we wanted the community to benefit from what we were doing. Additionally, the club never sought to educate its members about the issues with which we were working. There was no service learning aspect: we got to the point of helping people, but never tried to address or learn about the issues and problems that caused these people to need help in the first place.

The next step in my own service journey was taken in college. I read an advertisement for OSU's Alternative Spring Break (ASB) program in the campus newspaper. I did not have any spring break plans and this sounded like a wonderful thing to be able to put on my resume and talk about in my medical school interviews. My expectations did not go much further than this. That first year was a huge eye-opener for

me. Through the educational aspects I learned about issues and problems in the world that I had never really considered before such as homelessness and low-income discrimination. Through the physical work done on the project, I learned some very valuable and practical skills. Through just being a part of the program, I met a lot of amazing people. I was exposed to some very different viewpoints and ways of living than my own and had my mind expanded in many different directions during the weeklong trip.

After the trip was over, I felt a little bit of a letdown. The week I spent on the ASB trip consisted of a complete immersion into a different community than I had previously known. Once I got back home, that immersion experience was over, and my normal life with my friends, family, work, and school took over again. I was able to see the other students that I had worked with on the trip several times during the next term, but the excitement and feeling of purpose from the week of Spring Break were gone.

The next year, I had an opportunity to be in a leadership position for the ASB trip. This introduced brand new challenges and chances for growth as I was helping plan and lead the trip, as well as guiding other participants through orientation and reflection activities. The program itself changed a lot that year as well and we focused a lot more on the educational aspect of the program. We worked with the homeless population down in Santa Cruz, CA that year and did many activities leading up to the trip educating ourselves about homelessness as a larger social issue, and the homeless populations down in Santa Cruz and here in Corvallis. Not only did I feel much more prepared for the trip itself, I was also able to see the significance of what we were doing related to my own life and my own community.

This positive pattern continued and my last year in the program was by far the best one. The trip leaders and facilitators worked very hard to help the participants have the most meaningful experience they could. Our goals were to not just have a great week making a positive difference down in the Santa Cruz community, but also to help create an environment of service learning that the students could immerse themselves in and carry with them even after the trip was over. We focused on post-trip activities as well, to bring home the message as best we could that the feelings and actions on the trip did not have to end when the trip was over. We planned these post trip activities to give the participants a chance to socially meet when the trip was over as well as debrief about the things they had seen and learned during the week. We also organized a service project after the trip was over back in Corvallis. We wanted the participants to see that they could make a difference no matter where they were and that service learning can continue their whole life and not just during the Spring Break week.

Reorientation in Alternative Break Trips

Introduction

Biologically, a community is defined as a group of interacting organisms sharing an environment (Merriam-Webster 2008). For humans, community means much more than this; factors such as intent, belief, preferences, needs, risks, and more are present affecting the identity and interactions of the members of the group. The sociological definition of a community has evolved and expanded over the years to describe individuals who share characteristics, regardless of their location or type of interaction (Merriam-Webster 2008). Regardless of the source of the meaning of the word, they all share a common thread: they indicate the strength of the ties between the members of the group, whether they be cultural, ethnic, or moral.

An important thing to be aware of with human communities is the way they are connected. James Dalton uses a metaphor of the Russian nesting doll to describe these connections. The smallest “doll” is the individual. The next largest “doll” represents that individual’s micro-systems such as families, friends, classmates, work colleagues, or anyone else with whom the person repeatedly engages in direct, personal interactions. The next “doll” consists of organizations. These are characterized by a formal structure of some kind and include schools, workplaces, and religious congregations. The next biggest “doll” represents localities. Localities involve geography of some kind such as towns, neighborhoods, and countries. Finally, the biggest, outermost “doll” represents macro-systems. These are cultures, governments, societies, or belief systems (Dalton 2007).

The key to this metaphor is that each of the “dolls” is contained within all the larger ones. For example, a workplace will consist of many close work colleagues while at the same time being a larger part of an entire company. The obvious limit to this metaphor is that it leaves out the relationships between the levels. A personal friend (from the micro-systems level), for example, can also work with the individual, live in their neighborhood, and be a part of the same culture.

When a person becomes aware of these layers of community surrounding them, they begin to develop a sense of community. Understanding that you’re a part of all those bigger “dolls” helps you feel like a part of something bigger and more important than yourself. A person can see those interactions and relationships and how what one individual does can effect great change in all their different communities and have a big impact on those around them.

Volunteerism and community service are two ways in which people strive to positively affect their community and create for themselves a sense of belonging. When a person is aware of the different layers of community surrounding them and feels like they belong, a very simple way of engaging in these communities is by helping those around them. The process works the opposite way as well: when a person helps those around them and chooses to put themselves in a different group than they normally would, it becomes much easier for them to expand their definition of community. By working with others, they begin to see the different layers of community around them and feel a greater sense of belonging.

Service learning and, more specifically, alternative break trips are a way for people to intentionally engage in this sort of volunteerism and community service, once

they've become aware of those layers of communities and want to engage with those around them. During such experiences, people are able to serve others while also learning things about themselves and the communities with whom they're working. Whatever reason a participant chooses to engage in these activities, they will come away from the experience with a greater sense of who they are and what their role is in the many communities they find themselves. Ideally, the participant would also begin thinking and acting in a more global way and strive to keep their view broad and continue to positively affect those around them.

Getting from the point of being a volunteer who engages in community service when on a trip specifically designed for that purpose to the point of being an active citizen who seeks to learn and serve whenever possible is an important goal of those who put on such trips. Reaching this goal is sometimes difficult, depending on the type of group doing the volunteering, and the setting in which the service is done. Reorientation is a process that many leaders of these trips use to reach this goal and create active citizens out of their members. This thesis will explore those elements of community, service, active citizenship, and the reorientation process.

Definitions and Background Research

There are several different categories of service – volunteerism, community service, and service learning. These categories are not dependent on each other and a specific act of service could potentially fall under any of the three categories. They are a way of defining the experience from the perspective of the volunteer, rather than defining the service itself.

The first category of service is volunteerism. Volunteerism is defined as the policy or practice of volunteering one's time or talents for charitable, educational, or other worthwhile activities (Merriam-Webster 2008). Furthermore, to volunteer is to perform or offer to perform a service of one's own free will (Merriam-Webster 2008). People volunteer for many different reasons. Some consider it a duty or obligation to give where they see need. Others might do it for recognition or praise or just to get that indescribable good feeling inside when you know you've done a little something to help the world.

The next category is community service. Very simply, it is defined as services volunteered by individuals or an organization to benefit a community (Merriam-Webster 2008). On the surface, this may seem identical to volunteerism, and often feels the same as you're doing it no matter what you call it. However, there is an important distinction found directly in the name of the act: *community* service. The difference lies in the volunteer's intentions. One is no longer just serving a need that he or she sees. One is, instead, specifically aiming to help and improve his or her community in some way. It could be looked at as having a larger, broader goal in mind. The act of service may look

the same as volunteerism, but the intentions of the person doing the act are different. Similarly, the short term outcomes are the same as with volunteerism, but in the long term, the person performing community service is doing so to intentionally benefit their community. In any type of community service, the community being helped can span any of the many layers surrounding an individual discussed in the introduction.

The next category of service can actually include volunteerism and community service. It is known as service learning. Service learning can be considered in a couple of different ways. The first is to see it as a kind of community service that is integrated into some sort of classroom setting. For example, a student could take a class that is all about volunteerism and social activism. Many middle and high schools are starting to integrate this sort of service learning into their curriculum. Using this definition, service learning becomes more complicated when a student is doing the service simply for a credit or a grade rather than solely for altruistic reasons.

The roots of service learning in higher education began a long time ago. In 1903, John Dewey published a set of papers that established the basic intellectual foundations of service learning. He was a strong supporter of what he called “experiential learning”. Dewey believed that a person’s frame of reference for learning came from an “organic connection between education and personal experience.” The basic idea here is that for true learning to occur there must be some kind of hands-on application of what you’ve been learning about conceptually (Berman 2006).

Throughout the 20th century, as colleges have grown and become more inclusive, many organizations that became involved with the college student community integrated community service into their identity. These organizations are still around today like the

YMCA, 4-H, the Boy and Girl Scouts, the Greek system, and many campus ministry groups (Jacoby 1996).

In the 60s and 70s, things began to progress a lot more quickly. Urban uprisings and the declared war on poverty brought national attention to many social problems (Stanton 1999). The civil rights movement challenged both institutions of higher education and students to participate in the growing demand for social justice (Jacoby 1996). The Peace Corps was established by John F. Kennedy in 1961 and VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) was established by Lyndon Johnson in 1964 (Berman 2006). College populations were getting more diverse and teaching philosophies were transitioning from teacher centered to student learning centered styles (Stanton 1999).

“Service learning” as we understand it now was first defined in 1967 by the Southern Regional Education Board. They believed that “Those who serve are also learners and have significant control over what is expected to be learned” (Stanton 1999). In the early 1970s, the National Student Volunteer Program began publishing *The Syntegist*, a journal further linking academic learning and community service (Berman 2006). *The Syntegist* published Robert Sigmon’s service learning principles in 1979 that stressed the reciprocal nature of the experience. Sigmon’s principles also link him to Dewey by advocating structured times for reflection to help students learn about what they’re doing rather than just doing it (Berman 2006).

This movement was not without its struggles. Especially in the 70s and 80s when definitions were being established and colleges and universities were deciding their role in public service and whether they should be solely focusing on educating students for their future or also using their position in society to make a positive social impact

(Stanton 1999). Slowly, opinions shifted from the former view to the latter. In 1985 the Education Commission of the States began Campus Compact: the Project for Public and Community Service. This is an organization of college and university presidents who have pledged to encourage and support academically based community service at their institutions. Today, it has over 400 members (Jacoby 1996).

Things started getting a lot more organized in the 90s. In 1990, the guide “The Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning” was presented at a national conference. This guide was used by teachers and administrators to help establish community service programs on their campuses (Berman 2006). In 1991, Break Away was established as a resource for colleges who are looking to start a service break program. It gives outlines about what makes valuable break experiences and connects colleges to organizations in need. Hundreds of student groups and service organizations are part of the Break Away network today (“About Break Away” 2008).

In 1994, AmeriCorps was started. Since then, this organization has provided many communities and schools with in-house service learning volunteers. In 2001, the first International Conference on Service Learning was held in Berkley, CA. Also in the 2000s, many states and individual schools began adopting service learning requirements for graduation from middle and/or high school (Berman 2006).

Today, community service, service learning, and alternative break trips are making it into popular culture and the language and lives of college students. After Hurricane Katrina hit, MTV partnered with United Way of America to help show coverage of Spring Break that MTV usually doesn’t focus on. The goal, according to Ian Rowe, vice president of public affairs at MTV was to “normalize this behavior of using

spring break in a more positive fashion.” (Palmer 2007). Additionally, a lot of colleges and universities are intentionally investing time and money into actively encouraging service learning guided activities. Much of this movement is in direct response to student demand. All of these are designed to compliment, not interfere with a student’s already busy schedule. There is also a focus on creating partnerships between charities and students (Sommerfeld 2000). Some examples of these partnerships include:

- Community service scholarships (OSU example: the Students in Service program)
- Community service internship stipends
- Academic credit for service
- Student positions in college offices (OSU example: the student-run Community Service Center)
- Transportation help (e.g. free shuttle service to Habitat for Humanity builds)
- Student housing with community service themes (OSU example: Halsell and Bloss halls)

For the purpose of the study conducted in this thesis, service learning was considered from the following perspective: as a way to combine active service and/or volunteerism with specific learning objectives. By making this combination, the concept of service learning seeks to positively affect both the organization being served and the volunteer (“What is Student Service Break?” 2008). Volunteerism almost always positively affects the volunteer, at the very least by giving them a little boost of good feelings. Community service also has a positive affect on the volunteer: if one is a part of

the community they are trying to help, then they are also helping themselves. Service learning attempts to positively affect the participant's experience even more by actually working to incorporate aspects of education and reflection to guarantee that the volunteer is taking something away from their experience.

Service learning is the basis of many Alternative Break programs. An alternative break program, or service break program is defined, for this study, as any program based on a college campus, whose purpose is to provide students and/or staff with a trip during a school break that focuses on community service and service learning. Although many schools only have an Alternative Spring Break program, the definition was expanded for the purpose of this study to include any other school breaks (such as Winter and Summer) to get a broader view of the subject. The research topic was limited to programs which have some kind of direct connection to a college or university. There are many churches and private organizations that are involved with community service and who organize similar trips for students during breaks. However, most faith-based organizations have different goals in mind beyond service learning that may not necessarily translate as well to people outside of that faith. Although these projects are just as valid and valuable as any other service done, faith-based programs were excluded from this study.

While the individual programs vary, any alternative break trip will follow a similar formula. The trip involves groups of college students being placed in an area, usually unfamiliar, to engage in service during their school break. Often, the students perform short term projects for local agencies in the community. There is always an educational aspect where students learn about issues in the area such as poverty, racism, hunger, literacy, or the environment.

The objectives of an alternative break trip combine volunteerism components with service learning components, by adding educational aspects. The individual programs accomplish this by immersing students in a different environment and involving them in a community based service project. This gives them opportunities to learn about the problems and issues faced by members of communities with whom they otherwise wouldn't often have direct contact. As a part of this process, participants create lasting relationships and expand their own definitions of community to include the other students they're working with as well as the people in the area with whom they are doing service.

There are many important parts to an alternative break trip. Although there is no recognized generic model, many schools use the organizational design created by Break Away. Break Away is a national program that serves as a resource for schools that are starting up an alternative break program. Break Away has a set of what they call Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break. Most programs include some combination of these elements:

- Strong, direct service: programs provide an opportunity for participants to engage in direct or "hands-on" service that addresses critical but unmet social needs.
- Orientation: participants are oriented to the mission and objectives of both the break program and the host agency or organization with which they will be working.
- Education: programs establish and achieve educational objectives to give participants a sense of context and understanding of both the region in which they will be working and of the problem they will be addressing.

- Training: participants are provided with adequate training in skills necessary to carry out tasks and projects during the trip.
- Reflection: during the trip, participants reflect upon the experiences they are having. Applying classroom learning and integrating many academic disciplines should occur. The site leaders should set aside time for reflection to take place, both individually and in a group setting.
- Reorientation: upon returning to campus, there should be a re-orientation session for all participants where they are actively encouraged to translate this experience into a life-long commitment to service.
- Diversity: strong alternative break programs include participants representing the range of students present in the campus community.
- Alcohol and other drug free: programs must be aware that issues of legality, personal safety, and group cohesion are of concern when alcohol and other drugs are consumed on an alternative break.

These eight elements can easily be altered, redefined, or recombined for whatever type of program a particular school is creating (“About Break Away” 2008).

Overall Importance

College is a very important and formative time of a person's life. Often for the first time young people are expected to make their own decisions, be in control of their own lives, and figure out their beliefs and values. It is usually at this time of a person's life that they decide where their place in the world is, and how the different layers of their varying communities fit together and interact. It's important for colleges, therefore to be able to provide as many opportunities as possible for a student to get involved in to help them find that place and those connections. Many colleges have community service programs and many also have some sort of Alternative Break Trip for students and faculty to participate in. If a student is given a chance to serve in some way and help those around them, it can help them as well in many ways, such as increasing self-esteem, providing a balance to their schoolwork, providing leadership opportunities, and inspiring them about their future careers.

In addition to being beneficial to the individual, giving students the chance to become service learners is also very beneficial to the community. Break Away, the national service break organization uses what they call the "Active Citizen Continuum". This continuum outlines several stages that a person involved in service goes through and what parts of a service break trip brings someone from one stage to the next. The stages and transitions are outlined as follows:

- 1st stage in the continuum: Member. A member is not concerned with his or her role in social problems

- Pre-Break Transition. Before the trip, facilitators and leaders will prepare students for on-site experiences and provide basic education about site-specific social issues. They will guide the group through orientations and trainings, pre-break service projects, icebreakers and group-building activities, and pre-trip reflections.
- 2nd stage in the continuum: Volunteer. A volunteer is well-intentioned, but not well-educated about social issues.
- On-Break Transition. During the trip, facilitators and leaders will encourage participants to look critically at the root causes of social issues and challenge participants to evaluate the role that they can play in the community. Ways to help with this transition include providing strong, direct service, on-site education, community involvement, and daily reflections during the trip.
- 3rd stage of the continuum: Conscientious Citizen. A conscientious citizen is concerned with discovering root causes and asking “Why?”
- Post-Break Transition. Facilitators and leaders will help participants find avenues for continued community involvement after the trip is over and will support participants’ efforts to take the next action steps in whatever issue sparks their interest. This is where the reorientation process happens.
- Final stage of the continuum: Active Citizen. An active citizen sees their community (however they choose to define it) as a priority in values and life choices (“Break Away” 2008).

Thesis Question

Though it varies somewhat from school to school, reorientation always follows the same general guidelines. Reorientation occurs after a service break trip is over, during the post-break transition. The process can take many different forms such as continued education, continued reflection, or continued service. The goals of a reorientation are to make a student's experience more meaningful by helping them connect the trip to their normal lives and translate the things they learned during the trip into an active service lifestyle. This study will be driven by the following question: is reorientation important to making a student's alternative break trip experience more meaningful and, if so, what specific parts of a reorientation are important? In other words, does reorientation meet its goals, and what parts help it get there? Many programs include some sort of reorientation process, but there is no generic model for creating one that would fit for any school. This study will determine what, if any, are the important parts of a reorientation that can translate to any college or university alternative break program.

Study Method

In order to address the research question, 12 interviews were conducted over a three month period in spring 2008. The basic goal was to use the knowledge of service break trip leaders, facilitators, and planners to get an overall view of what is important about reorientation. From personal experience, a survey with a scale or with yes/no questions, would have most likely been filled out quickly, with little depth or thought put into the answers. Despite the fact that the data analysis would have been easier, this type of survey was not distributed. The audience that was actually going to be taking the survey was considered. People who are involved in the planning and implementing of service break trips tend to be very proud of their programs. This pride leads them to want to share what they've seen and done with others, especially if they have an interested and captive audience. Based on this, the survey given was conducted in more of an interview process involving a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the interviewee.

Each of the interviews was conducted over the phone or in person by the researcher. The interviews began by giving definitions of an alternative break trip and of reorientation. A copy of the actual questions of the interviews can be found in the appendix.

In the survey, there are two sections of questions. In the first section, with questions 1-3, the purpose was to determine whether the person being interviewed had a reorientation process at their school. It was important not to make any assumptions and data about why someone would not include reorientation is just as valuable as data about why they would. Questions 4-6 were then asked to start a conversation about

reorientation in service break trips. They were specifically designed to have the researcher ask as few questions as possible in order to allow the interviewees to do the majority of the talking. #4 and #5 were intentionally very open-ended and because #6 was close-ended, the follow-up question was included to get more information. The questions themselves were generated directly from the initial thesis question: Is reorientation important to making a student's experience more meaningful, and what specific parts of a reorientation are important?

The purpose of the second section, questions 1-6, was to gather demographic information about the survey participants and the schools with which they were associated. There were obviously a lot of variables involved and these questions were used to try to control as many of those variables as possible. It was important to be aware of whether there were any anomalies or variations in the results due to number of years of experience in service breaks and/or the program and school the participants came from.

Results

12 interviews were conducted of 12 facilitators, leaders, and/or planners in 9 different schools' programs. The respondents were selected by contacting the leaders or facilitators from schools that were known to have a Service Break program. These schools were selected randomly from an established list of such schools. The results have been organized by question number.

Questions 1-3: Every person interviewed answered 'yes' for question #1, indicating that every program intentionally included reorientation as a part of their alternative break trip process

Question 4: When asked to describe their reorientation process, the interviewee usually found it necessary to describe their whole alternative break process to show how reorientation fit into the larger picture. Indeed, it was often difficult to determine (for both the researcher and for the interviewee) whether a certain activity was just for the trip or was specifically for the reorientation part. Many of the parts described below fit into both categories. The descriptions of the reorientation processes tended to involve the practical and/or logistical parts of the process:

- Before the trip:
 - Pre-trip activities learning about culture, and travel (specifically aimed at international service trips)
 - Team-building activities in smaller groups

- One of the planning committees formed (led by facilitator, run by students) was a “Post-trip Activity” committee
- During the trip:
 - Team-building and reflection in smaller groups
 - Team-building and reflection in larger group
 - Reflections every night designed to bring the participants closer, make them more comfortable with each other and share their daily experiences
 - Facilitators led reflections specifically asking “How will this (what is happening on the trip) affect you in your lives when we get home?”
- After the trip:
 - Met and discussed experiences in smaller groups
 - Social meetings (potlucks, birthday parties)
 - Presented a slideshow to the university community (invited president of the university, board of directors, etc). Answered questions about their trip.
 - (in a school that sent multiple trips) Shared their trip experiences and photos with all the other trips
 - Had students fill out an evaluation/assessment of the trip and program – used to plan the next year’s trip

- Planned a required “Alternative Break Banquet” to share experiences with the community. Invited university president, mayor, governor, community members.
- Set up a blog for students to use – also able to pass it on to the next year’s group
- Made a scrapbook to share with each other and community
- Made a film to show to university community
- Put together a service activity on campus. Combined doing service with teaching other students about what they did on the trip
- Advisors/facilitators continued to send students resources via email (articles about their social issue, opportunities to do service in the community, etc.)
- (in a school that had a curricular component to the trip) Wrote final papers about their experiences

Question 5: in contrast to question #6, question #5 looked at the less logistical aspects of a reorientation. There were some practical suggestions for good reorientation activities, but the interviewees mainly discussed abstract concepts that were important parts of a successful reorientation.

- Trusting relationships established amongst the group members.

- Structure and expectations regarding the process. The students need to be aware from the beginning that they will later be sharing their experiences with others.
- Something visual is important for any presentation (visual rather than just verbal stories).
- Everyone needs to be involved in reorientation, not just a dedicated few.
- Show the connection as much as possible between the trip and their lives.
- Individuals should be telling their stories face to face (to each other and members of the community).
- Individuals should continue to do service with the population or issue they worked with on the trip.
- During the reflections (before, during or after the trip):
 - Talk openly and honestly about the harder things they did/saw.
 - Talk about what the students are going to do with what they've learned.
 - Talk about and work through any guilt issues that may have arisen during the trip.
 - Discuss the “now what?” question – this generally should translate to action.

Question #6: this question was also answered “yes” unanimously. The follow up to it had a lot of varied responses based on what sort of process the particular program followed for the alternative break itself and the reorientation:

- Reorientation is important for stepping back and looking at the big picture.
- It helps the student to process what they went through rather than just doing something for a week.
- It's good for dealing with feelings of guilt or shame.
- Without it, the student may easily forget the importance of what they were doing and why they were on the trip.
- Reorientation helps keep up the momentum that is formed on the trip.
- Reorientation helps translate the mindset of service developed on the trip into a lifestyle back at home.
- It helps continue a student's education about social issues.
- It inspires students to continue doing service after the week is over.

Demographic questions: Similar to above, there was a lot of variation in the answers to these questions. Questions #1 and #2 were about the experience of the person being interviewed. The participant had been on anywhere from 1-30 alternative break trips, with an average of about 7.5 trips. Of those trips, they had been a part of planning them for anywhere from 2-29 trips, or 9 on average. For question #3, exactly half of the schools whose program leaders were interviewed were on a semester system and half were on a quarter system. Questions 4-6 were about the school's program itself. The programs asked about had been in existence for 1-23 years with an average of 8 years. The greatest range was found in the number of students who participated in the program each year. Anywhere from 12-144 students took part in a trip, depending on the school, with an average of about 60 students. Finally, an average of 5 trips were sent out each

year from each school, with a range of 2-11 trips each. Included below are the same statistics in list format.

#1: Range: 1-30. Average: 7.5 years

#2: Range: 2-29. Average: 9 trips

#3: 50% semester system, 50% quarter system

#4: Range: 1-23. Average: 8 years

#5: Range: 12-144. Average: 60 students

#6: Range: 2-11. Average: 5 trips per year

Analysis of Results

In some ways it was difficult to analyze the type of results that came up. Everyone had their own story to tell and seemed to have their own unique circumstances. However, with each interview conducted, more and more people seemed to have similar ideas and some major themes began to emerge.

First of all, a very important finding: each person surveyed stated that their program does indeed intentionally include a reorientation process. Every participant also stated that they do in fact believe that reorientation is important to making a student's experience more meaningful. Although none of them cited the "Active Citizen Continuum", almost all the participants said something about the final transition from a conscientious citizen to an active citizen. Something needs to happen after the trip is over so that the students can connect what they've learned and experienced on the trip back to their normal everyday lives.

Similar reoccurring elements were also found in the answers to questions #4 and #5. Although many of the programs had very different organizational styles and planning processes, the following four key elements to a reorientation came in some form out of every interview:

1. **Planned Reflections:** Having planned reflections before and during the trip. Even if there was not going to be a reorientation later, this is still a very important aspect of a service break trip. A reflection can come in the form of journaling, small group discussions, large group presentation/discussions, or teambuilding activities. The point of a

reflection is to help students become more comfortable with each other and able to talk about what their goals are (before the trip) and what they're experiencing (during the trip). When considering reorientation, the importance of planned reflections is even greater. Students need to feel comfortable with each other so that they can continue to talk and reflect on their experiences after the trip is over. Additionally, reflections during the trip can be aimed at getting students to specifically think about how the service they're doing will affect their lives after the trip is over. The transition to "conscientious citizen" can start even while the trip is in progress.

2. **Planned Service Activity:** Planning and implementing a service activity after the trip that all participants are involved in. Ideally, the service would have some connection to what they learned about on the trip. This aspect of practical application is key to helping students connect their experiences to their normal lives. It's easy to separate yourself from your normal life for a week and help the homeless in some big city. However, the lesson will have an infinitely greater impact if you then go home and help the homeless that live down the street from your own house. Any form of service is good, however, and can help students, as one interviewee put it "translate the service mindset developed during the trip to a sustainable lifestyle".
3. **Community Education:** Showing/telling the campus or larger community about what was accomplished during the trip. Although this was

universally stated as being important, there were a lot of different reasons why it is. For practical purposes, any service break program needs to be well-known and accepted on campus. Often, funding from the college or university is necessary and the more students that know about the program, the easier recruitment will be. Concerning the reorientation process, educating others is very important. Students will gain a greater understanding about the social issues they learned about and worked with and what their role in everything was if they have to explain it all to others. Students also have the potential to inspire others to be involved with service the more they talk about what they have done. Finally, when a student has the chance to talk about their experiences and show pictures or videos highlighting what they've accomplished, they're able to take a real ownership over what they've done. This feeling of ownership is likely to lead to excitement and enthusiasm about doing service long after the trip is over.

4. **Team Regroup**: Providing an opportunity for students to meet again after the trip in a more casual setting. I was somewhat surprised that this element of a reorientation was considered as important as the other three. Meeting in a more casual setting can serve many different purposes. If the students are comfortable with each other, a meeting like this can serve as another reflection time. Students can further discuss their experiences and how those experiences have affected their everyday lives. They can also use this time to help adjust back to their normal lives. Culture-shock and

feelings of guilt are common reactions to a service break trip and it helps to step back and look at the big picture after the trip is over when dealing with these feelings. Finally, the relationships that are built on a service break trip are uniquely close. Maintaining those friendships and getting together to recall the fun times that were had on the trip are very important to inspiring students to go on a similar trip again and making the experience they've had that much more memorable and meaningful.

The demographics questions were used to try to explain the variations that were found in the answers from the different participants.

Variations due to type of school:

Half of the participants in the study were from schools with semesters and half were from schools with quarters. The majority of service break trips take place during Spring Break and this poses a particular challenge for semester schools regarding reorientation. After Spring Break is over, preparations for final exams begin and it becomes very difficult to schedule anything, such as a casual get-together or a service project that everyone can attend. In contrast, the new quarter is just beginning after Spring Break for schools on the quarter system. Classes, activities, and jobs are still somewhat flexible and there is a window of time where facilitators and planners can schedule time for everyone to meet.

The main result of this difference came in the form of what was mandatory and what was just strongly encouraged for the students. Many quarter schools have a

reorientation meeting or activity on the schedule very early on because they can almost guarantee that most students will be able to make it. However, many semester schools will set up a service project or team meeting and make it optional, or set up several different projects or times to meet in order to accommodate as many schedules as possible.

Variations due to program size

Questions #5 and #6 had to do with the size of the program at the particular school. Depending on the school, anywhere from 12-144 students participated in anywhere from 2-11 trips each year. These numbers did not necessarily correlate with how long the school's service break program had been in existence. There are advantages and disadvantages to having a larger program when considering reorientation.

Facilitators and leaders from larger programs talked about the importance of having a very solid plan in place for the reorientation right from the start of the planning process. It's difficult to put together as many service projects back at home as there are trips that go out over the break. Additionally, meeting as a group is difficult to coordinate especially if you want to meet in smaller specific trip groups and in one larger program group to share experiences. All of these logistical aspects are relatively easier with a smaller program or with fewer trips. However, presenting to the public about what was accomplished tends to be a bigger part of the reorientation for the larger programs. It tends to have a much more impressive impact when you go to a presentation where dozens of students in matching shirts can tell you all about their individual experiences.

With a smaller group, there are fewer people excited about educating others and fewer students to draw on to help plan a project or presentation.

It is neither better nor worse to have a larger program rather than a smaller program. As described, there are advantages and disadvantages to both. The size of the program can originate from several different factors such as the size of the school, the size of the town the school is in, how old the school is, how old the program is, or a combination of these. The size of the program can also change from one year to the next due to funding, interest, and changing school atmosphere. It was apparent from the study that the size of the program at any particular school did not dictate the success of that program.

Variations due to experience level

In this case, experience refers to both how long the service break program has existed and how much experience the person being interviewed had with service breaks (as a participant and a planner). Interestingly, there was not much variation in the answers to question #6 based on this factor. No matter how long they had been involved with a service break program or how old the school's program was, everyone had the same basic ideas about why reorientation is important. This is very understandable: one can see the impact a trip and a reorientation can have on a student's life after helping with just one break trip. Similarly, there were few variations in the answers to question #5.

Conceptually, people know what the important parts of a reorientation are. Everyone discussed the important of reflecting with fellow students, educating their peers in some

way, doing a service project at home, and meeting outside of school/work with their group.

The real differences came in the answers to question #4. It was rather surprising to see that there are both advantages and disadvantages to being in a program that has been in existence for many years instead of being fairly new. The older programs are very well organized. They have a schedule that works every year, a plan to always fall back on, and even specific organizations around town that they can always count on to use for a service project. However, in some ways, this organization becomes rigid. The smaller programs that are perhaps somewhat disorganized, also seem more fluid and flexible. If someone has a new idea about hosting an Alternative Spring Break Banquet or setting up a blog for the participants, it was much easier to implement. Additionally, the older programs have more advisors and facilitators who do most of the leading. The younger programs have more students planning and leading the reorientation activities for the group.

Conclusion

The reorientation process of alternative or service break trips is important for not only making the trip itself more meaningful, but also for helping a person gain a sense of community. The communities that are created and developed include the group of students working together, the local organization they're working with during the break, and their original community back home after the break is over. In order to help students make their community a priority, and help make the transition from conscientious citizen to active citizen reorientation is vital. This study found that the four most important and implementable parts of a reorientation process are planned reflections, a planned service project after the trip is over, some kind of community education by the students, and a casual team regroup. These factors stayed fairly constant despite differences in school size, program size, and program experience.

Limitations of the Study

Any study like this will have limitations. One of the most obvious is the size of the participant group. Although there was a lot of variety in school size, program size, and experience level, the final study included interviews from only 12 people and they were all from colleges or universities in the Pacific Northwest. To get a truly accurate answer to the thesis question, it would be preferable to interview many more trip leaders from different parts of the country.

Another limitation was time. It was important to be respectful of the interviewee's other time commitments and the researcher always was careful to only ask the questions on the survey and not get off topic. However, with every interview, there were more questions that arose. Something the participant would say about their school's program or the history of it would introduce potential questions about the different experiences they had had. The surveys or interviews could possibly be made a lot longer in order to accommodate this limitation.

Practical Applications

Most of this thesis was done while I was in the middle of helping to plan the Student Service Break here at OSU. I was in charge of organizing the reorientation aspect of the trip and I used much of what I learned to adjust our former plan to try to create a more meaningful experience for the participants. Our program had two trips go this year and we planned a potluck for each of the individual trips as well as an opportunity for the different groups to meet together. There were reflections everyday during the trip and one night was set aside to talk specifically about what we all would do with what we had learned once we were back in Corvallis. Both trips were invited to present to the mayor and members of the community about our experiences at a community service forum event in town. Finally, we set up a service project that tied in to what one of the trips had done during Spring Break.

Like many alternative break programs, the OSU program is still growing and evolving. Its leaders are constantly looking for ways to make the program better and reach students in a more meaningful way. In addition to helping the program this year, the information gained from this research is being integrated into an overall plan for the program to be used in the future. Because the four key elements are fairly non-specific and adaptable, they could potentially be used in the plans for any school's service break reorientation process. The adaptability is especially crucial: these four elements are important and possible for any school no matter the school population, program size, program age, or type of school.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “About Break Away” n.d. *About Break Away*. WEBSITE accessed May 30, 2008.
http://alternativebreaks.org/About_Break_Away.asp
- Berman, Sally. 2006. *Service Learning*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.
- Bingle, Robert, Mindy Phillips, and Michael Hudson. 2004. *The Measure of Service Learning*. Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Brooker, Peter. 1999. *Cultural Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Claus, Jeff, and Curtis Ogden. 1999. *Service Learning for Youth Empowerment and Social Change*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Chavis, D.M. *et al.* 1986. “Sense of community through Brunswick's lens: A first look.” *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14(1): 24-40.
- Dalton, James *et al.* 2007. *Community Psychology: Linking Individuals and Community*. Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Effrat, Marcia Pelly. 1974. *The Community: approaches and applications*. London: Collier Macmillan Publishers.
- Fowler, Floyd J. 2001. *Survey Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Gray, Maryann J. *et al.* 1999. *Combining Service and Learning in Higher Education*. Santa Monica: RAND.
- Jacoby, Barbara, and Associates. 1996. *Service Learning in Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Johnson, Rita M. 2005. “A Case Study in Service Learning” *Topics in Clinical Nutrition* 20(4): 351-356.
- Kinsley, Carol. 1995. *Enriching the Curriculum Through Service Learning*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Manheim, Henry L. 1977. *Sociological Research: philosophy and methods*. Homewood: The Dorsey Press.
- “Merriam-Webster Online”. 2008. WEBSITE accessed June 3, 2008.
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>
- Palmer, Arundhati. 2007. “The Positive Alternative”. *Marketing News* (Sept.): 14-16.

Sommerfeld, Meg. 2000. "Offering More Than a Degree" *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* 13(4):1, 4p, 4c.

Stanton, Timothy K. 1999. *Service Learning – A Movement's Pioneers Reflect on Its Origins, Practice, and Future*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Williams, Malcom. 2003. *Making Sense of Social Research*. London: Sage Publications.

"What is Student Service Break?". n.d. *Community Service Center*. WEBSITE. Accessed June 5, 2008.

APPENDIX

The Survey

1. By the definition given, does your program intentionally include reorientation as a part of your trip/project process?
 - a. *If no, proceed to question #2*
 - b. *If yes, proceed to question #4*
2. Does your program do something similar to a reorientation, but call it something different?
 - a. *If yes, proceed to question #4*
 - b. *If no, proceed to question #3*
3. Why don't you include reorientation or something similar to it in your program?
 - a. Follow up: Do you feel that the reorientation process, as defined in this study, is important to making a student's experience more meaningful?
 - b. *Go to Demographics questions.*
4. Please describe your program's reorientation process. Include any parts before, during, and after the actual break.
5. What do you think are some of the most important elements for a reorientation process to include?
6. Do you think the reorientation process is important to making a student's experience more meaningful?
 - a. Follow up: Why or why not?
 - b. *Go to Demographics questions.*

Demographics

1. How many AB trips have you been on?
2. Of those, how many were you involved in the planning process of?
3. What system does the school that your program is based out of function on (quarters, semesters, etc.)?
4. How long has the program been in existence at your school?
5. On average, how many students participate per year?
6. On average, how many trips go each year?