Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break Trip

The national Alternative Break movement has created eight components for a quality Alternative Break experience and Naropa adopted these best practices in creating our Alternative Break Course.

Strong Direct Service
Programs provide an opportunity for participants to engage in direct or "hands-on" projects and activities that address critical but unmet social needs, as determined by the community. Community interaction during service projects and throughout the week is highly encouraged during breaks.

Orientation
Prior to departure, participants should be oriented to the mission and vision of the community partner or organization(s) with which they are working. Participants are encouraged to look at the context of the work of the organization within the broader community and to become allies to their mission and vision through direct service.

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

Training
Participants are provided with adequate training in skills necessary to carry out tasks and projects during the trip. Ideally this training should take place prior to departure, although in some instances it may occur once participants have reached their site. Examples of training include teaching basic construction, learning how to read with children, or gaining first aid skills.

Reflection
During the trip, participants reflect upon the experiences they are having, synthesizing the direct service, education, and community interaction components. Applying classroom learning and integrating many academic disciplines can occur. The site leaders should set aside time for reflection to take place, both individually and in a group setting.

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

Diversity
Strong alternative break programs include participants representing the range of students present in the campus community. Coordinators should recruit, design, implement and evaluate their program with this end in mind. Break programs should also plan to intentionally address the issue of diversity and social justice, or in other words privilege and oppression, and how it relates to service work.

Alcohol and Other Drug Free
Programs must be aware that issues of legality, liability, personal safety and group cohesion are of concern when alcohol and other drugs are consumed on an alternative break. Programs provide education and training on alcohol and other drug related issues as well as develop a policy on how these issues will be dealt with on an alternative break.