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College Students Experiences Participating in International Alternative Break Trips

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College Students Experiences Participating in International

Alternative Break Trips

(TITLE)

BY

Dayton L. Ehrlich

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to explore undergraduate students' experiences participating in international alternative break trips. A qualitative approach was used to understand the motivating factors as well as the impact the trip had on them. Participants included three female undergraduate students who had participated in an international alternative break trip in Mexico were interviewed one-on-one. The results demonstrated there were multiple different motivating factors and impacts the students experienced. The motivating factors consisted of student involvement, they were all personally invited on the trip, practicing a new language, opportunity to leave the country, and service was not a motivator. The impacts the students had were they thought about their future plans, gained a better cultural awareness, had an impact through volunteer work, and had no negative experience.

Key Words: ASB, Alternative Spring Break, Volunteerism, International Service

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Recently, there has been an increasing trend in higher education in programming for community engagement (Strawhun, Perry, & Lloyd, 2014). Universities are looking to engage with their communities through helping students bring what they have learned in the classroom into the practical world (Fisher, Sharp, & Bradley, 2017). By doing this, the institutions are inspiring students to enhance their civic, emotional, and cognitive development skills (Hoey & Feld-Gore, 2014). Research has found that community engagement can improve a student's communication skills as well as increasing cognitive growth (Sass & Coll, 2015). There have been numerous studies that have found positive changes in students that create a sense of purpose and individual meaning (Jones, 2017). Though some research has found the opposite, the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics has noticed a volunteer decline in the last five years from 2011 to 2015 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). However, when looking at the demographics, they found 16 to 19-year-olds had a higher volunteer rate compared to the other demographics, at 26.4%, whereas they found 20 to 24-year-olds had some of the lowest rates they have seen in years at 18.4% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). This trend in higher education demands administrators and staff at these institutions look at better ways to engage students on college campuses to help foster their education inside and outside the classroom.

Some universities have started exploring alternative break trips as one way of filling a need in community service. In this study, alternative breaks are defined as service-learning trips for students in higher education to explore needs in a community through volunteerism during breaks throughout the academic year when classes are not in

session. These trips run in alignment to breaks students have throughout the academic year, such as winter and spring breaks. Little research has been conducted on alternative break trips; although some studies have been conducted at a few institutions related to the topic. A study conducted at the University of Nebraska found that students who participated in an alternative break integrated what they learned from the service trip to their classroom (Niehaus, Holder, Rivera, Garcia, Woodman, & Dierberger, 2017). Savannah College of Art and Design found that as a result of the trips, their students used skills they learned in their classroom as well as found an appreciation for the importance of community service after participation (Hoey & Feld-Gore, 2014). A drawback from participating in alternative breaks is finance. A study found that students who receive more scholarships are much more likely to participate in community service activities (Boatman & Long, 2016). Alternative break trips may be unreachable for some students to participate in due to financial reasons.

Although research has shown positive outcomes, as a result of implementing alternative break trips, little research has been done in this area. To further the knowledge this proposed study will utilize data from interviews of students who attend a midsized rural university and who would have participated in an alternative break trip at the institution.

Purpose

I have always had a passion for helping people. Growing up, I daydreamed of being a hero of some sort, such as a fireman or police officer. I quickly learned that anybody can be a hero by simply leaving positive marks on the world that have the potential to impact people's everyday lives. This dream led to my attendance at a mid-

sized, Midwestern university for my undergraduate degree which, at the time, was ranked number one nationally in public service by the Washington Monthly. As you can imagine, community service was a big deal to the campus and, more specifically, to me.

During my junior year at the university, I was approached by some close friends to participate in an alternative spring break trip. That year the school was taking students to the Dominican Republic to participate in numerous forms of community service. Before this trip I had never been outside the United States, so I saw this as a great opportunity to get a glimpse of a different culture and way of life. This was a main motivation for going on the trip, second to making a difference in others' lives. The largest difficulty I faced when planning for the trip was gaining the appropriate funds. In order to participate, I ended up having to take out government loans. Once I gained all of the funding I needed, I was good to go.

As we arrived in the town that we were to be staying in, I was faced with a large culture shock. The 'hotel' we were staying at in the Dominican Republic had tall walls with guards walking around with firearms, which made me feel worrisome of what things may have happened here in the past. Outside of the facility where we were staying, there were half naked children walking around with machetes. The streets were also filled with stray animals that were made up of dogs, cats, horses, and cows. After that first day, I felt more comfortable and was excited to go explore the island. During our week there, we participated in multiple service activities. One of the first things we visited was a rural farming village. At the small village we handed out toys and food for everyone there. Also, on the trip we had the opportunity to volunteer some of our time at local orphanages. Spending time with the children turned out to be extremely fun. However,

the second to last day is when I was most impacted by the trip. On that day, we went to a small and very poor village to hand out food. The streets were filled with mud and garbage. The houses were constructed of spare tin and plywood and looked like they could fall over at any moment. Most of the children found within the village were completely naked. We spent our time there going from house to house handing out the food that we brought. The entire time this was happening, a child of approximately four or five years of age was following us with the largest smile. At one point in time, he climbed up a small fallen tree and reached inside. He then pulled out a broken, green toy soldier just like the ones I had growing up. Thinking back, I had hundreds of them, but he only had the one. He followed us around with it giggling and laughing the whole time. It was at this exact moment when I realized how blessed I was for having the opportunities, relationships, and support that I had. Before going on the trip, I would often complain of school and finances. However, seeing this small child who had so little yet appeared so happy made me realize how fortunate I am to have the life I do and to not take it for granted. At night my fellow peers and I would break into small groups and discuss what we did and saw that day. During this process we discovered the problems and issues that were causing the poverty cycles for the people that live in the Dominican Republic.

Returning back to the United States I started having a different perspective of the world around me. I started feeling less stressed about school and money. I realized that I am rich by gaining an education and having a roof over my head with running water. During the trip I also gained close connections with people that I would have not gotten to know on campus. As well as gaining connections with faculty and staff that I would have never even bumped shoulders with at the institution. Going on the trip to the

Dominican Republic changed my whole perspective on life, and I would recommend a similar trip to anyone. This trip is my main motivation for this thesis. I want this research to shine a larger light on the ways alternative trips have an impact on those students participating in them.

The purpose of this research study is to explore motivating factors and how participation in international alternative break trips impacts college students lives. This study will explore how students identify that they have been changed by participating in an alternative break trip, which will offer insight for institutions who want to implement alternative break trips into their environment. Studying students' alternative break experiences will provide insight in to how students are creating transformative experiences throughout their college career.

Research Questions

1. What are the motivating factors for students to participate in international alternative break trips?
2. In what ways do students identify being impacted by the international alternative break trip?
3. What do students identify as the greatest learning experience from their international alternative break experience?

Significance of the Study

Universities across United States have started implementing service learning into their introductory communication classes (Sass & Coll, 2015). Some like the University of Nebraska-Lincoln have started implementing alternative break trips (Niehaus et al., 2017). However, the research that has been conducted has only been concerned with the

knowledge and skills students have learned from domestic alternative break trips. (Hoey & Feld-Gore, 2014). What has not been investigated yet is if participation in international alternative break trips have impacted college students lives, by their participation on these trips. There has been sufficient evidence that alternative break trips may have a transformative effect on students. Abroad alternative break trips have been investigated, but not thoroughly. This study set out to gain further knowledge on the experiences that these students have.

Limitations of the Study

There are multiple limitations that could have impacted this study. First there was the potential limitation in finding participants. Only a relatively small number of students participate on alternative break trips; however, the purpose of this study was not to generalize the experiences but provide an authentic view of how the student experienced the trip and how it has impacted their life. Additionally, the study took place at a midsize university (approximately 6,000 students) located in the Midwest. The students interviewed all have gone on the same trip. However, this was not an issue, it is important to understand as the investigation was not about the trip itself but how the international alternative trip impacted the student. Each student interviewed from the same trip took back with them different experiences, even though they went on the same trip. Another limitation to this study is the scarcity of research on the topic of alternative break trips, thus finding resources that support this study was difficult. However, the topic was addressed from several different angles to gain as much insight as possible. The last limitation to this study is my personal bias. I have personally been on an alternative break trip and it has had a positive impact on my day to day life. To combat this my professor

and committee reviewed interview questions as well as looked over my interview transcriptions to make sure my bias was not present in the interviews with the students.

Definition of Terms

Alternative Break Trip. A trip students participate on during their breaks at Colleges to contribute volunteer hours to communities in need through an asset-based approach, and to positively influence the life of the alternative breaker (Piacitelli, Barwick, Doerr, Porter, & Sumka, 2013).

Civic Engagement. Civic activities can have significant political relevance and contribute to the development of well-rounded citizens who are able to contribute to the health of our democracy (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002).

Free Will. Service completed by students with the ability to make a choice without coercion.

Mandated Service. Service hours that are demanded to be completed for school or jurisdictions.

Service Learning. Teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (<https://www.ees.org/clearinghouse/01/02/87/10287.pdf>).

Volunteerism. An ongoing, planned, helping behavior that increases the well-being of strangers, offers no monetary compensation, and typically occurs within an organizational context (Clary et al., 1998)

Summary

Chapter one contains an outline of the study to explore motivating factors and how participation in international alternative break trips impacts college students lives. Chapter two will focus on the review of literature. In that chapter I will further explain the language that will be used throughout the study.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

This chapter delivers a review of the literature. This review will explain the terminology further as well as examine how college students are engaging with service learning. The review of literature will also examine alternative break trip opportunities and the studies that have conducted research on alternative breaks. This literature review will also look at how students are impacted by engagement and involvement within community service. Finally, the literature review will look at how finance impacts participation in civic engagement.

Understanding the Language

As we begin looking at what alternative breaks are it is important to understand all the terminology that surrounds it. There are multiple definitions and vocabulary that surround the area of service and volunteerism. This portion of the literature review will be focusing on the meaning and terminology for service learning, volunteerism, civil engagement, civil service, and alternative breaks. As well as how these are all interchangeable in a university setting.

Defining Service Learning. Currently there are multiple definitions given for what service learning is and what it looks like. Dewey (1938) was the first to define service learning. Dewey believed that learning could be taught outside the classroom describing how students could actively participate within their environment with the goal of gaining valuable knowledge and information. An example of this could be students who are studying marine biology, go out and help the local sea turtle sanctuary. From this they could gain knowledge and information to further help the sea turtles survival. In this

study I will be using the definition given by the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, they state that service learning is a “teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (<https://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/02/87/10287.pdf>). An undergraduate student conducting student teaching at a nearby elementary school can be an example of this. Even though this definition was created in the 21st century service learning has been an idea for a while.

There may be some confusion looking at the difference between service learning and volunteering, considering that both activities include individuals donating time, energy, and money into a non-for-profit organization. Waterman (1997), identified that volunteering provides no educational objective compared to service learning, while in service learning there is structure, direction, and evaluation. Volunteer work does not usually incorporate these into the service that is being done. An example of this could be brought back to the turtles. Students may be told to clean up a beach of garbage, but are not told why. The reason they are cleaning the beach is to protect the local wildlife from harmful plastics. If they are never told this, there was no educational knowledge gained from conducting the volunteer work. Therefore, it is important to integrate learning into volunteer work, so participants can gain key information and knowledge.

Service learning is about more than just completing the service, and more than just understanding the issue present, but understanding their role in making the situation better. Students’ ability to integrate learning has also been empirically connected to students’ overall cognitive development, problem-solving skills, self-awareness, and

civic responsibility (Nelson Laird, Seifert, Pascarella, Mayhew, & Blaich, 2014; Wang, Pascarella, Nelson Laird, & Ribera, 2015). These benefits could be valuable for Universities, by integrating learning opportunities to connect what students are learning in the classroom. To further understand how this integration of learning was happening Barber (2012), created a theory of integrative learning.

Barber's (2012) theory does not focus on the content of the activity, rather it focuses on the process of integration with learning. Barber used a quantitative study with 194 undergraduate students at liberal arts colleges to further understand how students are bringing knowledge and experiences together. From this educator can implement and promote the integration of learning at their institutions. What Barber discovered at the conclusion of his study was three types of integration of learning. The first was connection, which is the finding of similar ideas, but each remain unique and different. A student in a sociology course learns the root cause of systemic poverty, specifically looking at educational support in k-12 for low income students. The same student volunteers in an inner city after school program as a volunteer and observes inequality in educational foundations/resources, but never connects the two. The second type was application, which is using knowledge from one situation to another. Using the same example for connection, the application, would be the student finding a connection that the inequality of educational foundations/resources, can be creating systemic poverty. The final type was synthesis, which was the creation of new ideas by combining different understandings. If the student can reach this stage, they may start creating new ideas to possibly help fight systemic poverty, by looking into ways to help create equality in

foundations/resources for k-12 schools. From these they grow in complexity, connection being the simplest and synthesis being the most complex. According to Barber,

Integration of learning is the demonstrated ability to connect, apply, and/or synthesize information coherently from disparate contexts and perspectives, and make use of these new insights in multiple contexts. This includes the ability to connect the domain of ideas and philosophies to everyday experiences, from one field of study or discipline to another, from the past to the present, between campus and community life, from one part to the whole, from the abstract to the concrete, among multiple identity roles—and vice versa. (p. 593)

Barber is similar to Kolb (1984), created a four-stage learning cycle that incorporates the use of experience within the learning process. The first stage of the learning cycle is called the concrete stage. In this stage the student achieves the endeavor. This could be a student volunteering at a local soup kitchen. The second stage of the cycle is called the reflective observation. During this stage the student provides reflection on their endeavor. After the student volunteers at the soup kitchen they start reflecting back on their experience. The third stage is called abstract conceptualization (Kolb, 1984). During this stage the student starts to theorize what they have just experienced. The student may start thinking of new ideas to help the people visiting the soup kitchen. The last stage is called the active experimentation. During this stage of the cycle the student actively checks their own theory. From these new ideas the student may try to start implementing them to further help the people visiting the soup kitchen. From this four-stage learning cycle you can observe how students are moving through service learning.

Volunteerism. Volunteerism has multiple ways in which it can be defined. A simple way to define volunteerism describes those who help others with no expectation of receiving compensation or being paid; as well as an activity that is planned to progress the welfare of others (Mowen & Sujan, 2005). A more complex way to define volunteerism is as an ongoing, planned, helping behavior that increases the well-being of strangers, offers no monetary compensation, and typically occurs within an organizational context (Clary et al., 1998). For the purposes of this study I will also be using Penner's (2004) definition which is volunteerism is normally nonobligatory. As cited in Fajardo, Lott, & Contreras, (2014),

American higher education institutions play an important role in shaping attitudes, values, beliefs, and civic dispositions of college students. Student volunteerism is a core value of higher education and increased participation among students is a goal of many colleges and universities (p.140).

O'Leary (2014) found that volunteerism uses skills, knowledge, and attitudes that jumpstart students toward becoming productive members of society. Herbert and Hauf, (2015) revealed that volunteerism has been linked to higher academic performance through their study on the topic. The results from this study were found by using a test-retest methodology to measure academic development in three ways: course grades, an assignment that directly tested course-specific comprehension, and self-reported improvement. Participants in this study also self-identified improvements in civic responsibility, interpersonal skills, and practical skills. Additionally, Case, Henck, Schreiner, & Herrmann, (2011) found that students who participated in clubs and organizations on a college campus experience cognitive gains in their development.

Required/Mandated vs Free Will. When we think of volunteerism, we often think this implies free choice. However, in some situations people are compelled to participate with the volunteering that they are doing. Earlier the definition of volunteerism was discussed. Penner's (2004) definition of volunteerism is normally nonobligatory. However, this is not always the case, especially on the college campus. In some situations, people may be compelled to participate in volunteer work as a requirement within an organization they are a member of or as a sanction through the conduct system. Another example of this could be a college course requiring students to complete a certain number of volunteer hours to receive full credit in their course.

Beehr, LeGro, Porter, Bowling, and Swader (2010), sought to identify if there are different service learning outcomes for students who choose to volunteer versus those that are mandated or required to volunteer. They also looked at participants internal and external motivation for volunteerism; as well as exploring the attitudes of student volunteers toward their university. The researchers took a sample of 273 college student nonvolunteers, required volunteers, and nonrequired volunteers. From this data they found that nonrequired volunteers reported stronger commitment to and satisfaction with their university as well as stronger internal and weaker external motivation to volunteer than did required volunteers (Beehr, et al., 2010). They also found that nonrequired volunteers experienced greater time demands than nonvolunteers did (Beehr, et al., 2010). Universities may want to take this new found information and promote a students' experience by allowing for freedom of choice in their volunteer work.

Civic Engagement. Today there are multiple ways in which people are defining civic engagement. Civic engagement also takes on multiple forms which could prove

difficult to define. To help making everything easier to understand Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, and Jenkins (2002), split up civic engagement into 19 core indicators of engagement, that are all within three areas. These areas are civic indicators, electoral indicators, and indicators of political voice. These are further broken down below.

Civic indicators. A study was conducted by Jenkins, Zukin, and Andolina (2003), to determine if the three core indicators were accurate ways to measure involvement within civic engagement. The researchers used data derived from a study of civic and political engagement in the U.S. with a special emphasis on youth, this paper documents 15-19-year-olds' involvement in civic life. Keeter and Associates (2002) found that civic activities can have significant political relevance and contribute to the development of well-rounded citizens who are able to contribute to the health of our democracy. The first indicator under the civic category is community problem solving; this could be a group of students working together to solve a problem they are seeing in the community (Keeter et al., 2002). The next indicator is regular volunteering for a non-electoral organization, which could be students volunteering their time at a local animal shelter or not-for-profit (Keeter et al., 2002). According to Keeter and Associates (2002), active membership in a group or association is another indicator. This could just be students donating money to certain organizations that have no political alignment, like students raising money on campus for a children's hospital. Participation in fund-raising run/walk/ride is the next indicator, which could be students walking a 5k for breast cancer awareness (Keeter et al., 2002). Keeter and associates final indicator is other fund raising for charity, including raising money for a charitable cause.

Electoral indicators. An area most may not think about when looking at civic engagement is the electoral section. The Electoral section has five indicators, similar to civic indicators. The first indicator for electoral is regular voting; and an example of this is students voting in the political election (Keeter et al., 2002). According to Keeter and Associates (2002), persuading others is another indicator in the electoral section. This could be students, such as the young democrats or young republicans, having tables in the union trying to persuade others to vote a certain way. Displaying buttons/signs/stickers is another indicator (Keeter et al., 2002). This can include students putting 'vote for whoever' bumper stickers on their cars or wearing shirts or buttons to represent their choice. Keeter and associates 2002, identified that the next indicator within the electoral section is campaign contributions. This is where students are seen donating funds to political candidates. Lastly is the volunteering for candidate or political organizations indicator (Keeter et al., 2002). For example, a student volunteering their time for political candidates while also attending college full time. Similar to the electoral section is the political voice section.

Political voice. The political voice section has nine different indicators within it. These indicators have more of an active voice within the political scope. According to Keeter and Associates (2002), the first indicator is contacting officials. This could be students calling their local governor's office requesting a change in certain regulations or calling to voice concerns about certain bills or issues being addressed. Keeter and associates 2002, stated that the next two indicators are contacting the print media and contacting the broadcast media. Specifically, students contacting them to express their opinions, or write an article for the college paper. Protesting is another indicator where

students are actively participating in some kind of protest; for example, students protesting a decision made by the institution that they feel limits their rights (Keeter et al., 2002). According to Keeter and Associates, E-mail and written petitions are two more indicators. In this indicator one would see students who are passionate about a cause and are looking to get others involved through signing a petition to get action. Boycotting is another indicator described by Keeter and associates (2002). This could be students not shopping at certain places based off of their political views. One example would be students not shopping in the campus bookstore because they don't agree with the company practices or products. The opposite indicator of this is buycotting (Keeter et al., 2002). Which is students spending their money at places they support politically. Keeter and Associates articulated that the last indicator within the political voice is canvassing. This is students taking a very active role by going door to door for a social group or political candidate.

Alternative Spring Break Opportunities.

Little research has been conducted discussing alternative breaks that U.S. students participate in outside of the country. The Alternative breaks movement began in the late 1980s and early 1990s as part of an overall surge of interest in institutionalizing community service on college campuses (McHugh, 2001). Piacitelli, Barwick, Doerr, Porter, and Sumka (2013), provide insight in to the purpose of alternative breaks,

The aim of alternative breaks is to contribute volunteer hours to communities in need through an asset-based approach, and to positively influence the life of the alternative breaker. Through these activities, alternative breakers gain the knowledge and experience to become "active citizens," a term used throughout

alternative break programs to describe those who take educated steps toward valuing and prioritizing their own communities through their life choices. (p. 89)

These experiences were mostly domestic when they were started. However, in 2010 a large earthquake devastated the country of Haiti and United State universities started seeking opportunities to offer “hands on” aid, and the need for best practices to avoid potential pitfalls of international volunteerism became plainly apparent (Piacitelli, Barwick, Doerr, Porter, & Sumka, 2013). From this endeavor a group of university professionals involved with alternative breaks created Break Away (<http://alternativebreaks.org/>) which is the national alternative breaks nonprofit organization. The main purpose of this organization is to develop well-developed and coordinated experiences for international alternative breaks, allowing staff and students to overcome potential harm done to communities while contributing to student learning and engagement. According to the Break Away website (<http://alternativebreaks.org/>) during the 2016-2017 year there were 2,001 trips, with an estimated 3,471,344 hours of direct service, and 167 institutions that worked this organization. There has been some research done looking at alternative break trips.

One study conducted by Niehaus and colleagues (2017) investigated ways college students may integrate learning from a service learning-based alternative break. The researchers found that college students who participated in alternative breaks were connecting, applying, and synthesizing learning while on the trip (Niehaus et al., 2017). This study identified that when students engage in alternative breaks they were integrating learning into their experience. This information gives educators support for integration in higher education. Similarly, a study was conducted on alternative breaks at

the Savannah College of Art and Design (Hoey, & Feld-Gore, 2014). In this study, Hoey and Feld-Gore (2014) examined the impact of an alternative spring break program on college students as well as its benefit for service learning, and the results from this study gave rise to multiple insights. First, the findings indicated that students could identify a correlation between the alternate spring break trip and what they were studying in their college courses. Hoey and Feld-Gore discovered that when the students were participating in these alternative spring break trips they were using skills and knowledge they gained in their course work. They also learned that the students articulated the importance of community service and giving back to the community (Hoey, & Feld-Gore, 2014). The authors concluded that this study should be utilized to build a cogent, research-based proposal to key college stakeholders to expand the program beyond its one-event-per-year status. Based off the results, alternative break trips have a positive impact on the students and community. These outcomes help influence the students' beliefs as well as allow them to apply what they learned in their classes in functional ways. The students also gained an appreciation for helping communities through participation. It would be beneficial for colleges to incorporate guidelines into their programs.

Involvement and Engagement

Many believe a student's involvement on campus can lead to developmental growth. One theorist who looked at this was Alexander Astin (1984) by creating the theory of involvement which focused on factors facilitating development. In this theory he fashioned five basic postulates about involvement. The first of the five is that student involvement requires an investment of psychosocial and physical energy. This could be a

student picking up garbage in a public park. This activity requires physical energy to complete. The second assumption is that involvement is continuous. This can be a student who is invested in volunteering and becomes involved in an after-school program where they volunteer twice a week for an entire semester and/or year. Aspects of involvement may be qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative is how serious the student is about the organization they are a part of. Using the same example, a student may only be volunteering, because the service is mandatory for class. Therefore, this student has low commitment to the cause. Quantitative is the amount of time they give to that organization. This same student may only have to volunteer ten hours for their class, after that they will not be volunteering for the rest of the year. The fourth postulate is what a student gains from being involved is directly proportional the extent to which were involved. If a student puts a lot of time and energy into their involvement they will get a lot out of it. Such as the student who volunteers at the local elementary school every week because they are gaining insight in to the need within the community and when they are serving they get a great sense of satisfaction and leave feeling better about themselves and their community. If they do not they will not get anything in return, such as the student who is forced to do community service and puts no effort in to other than showing up and chooses to never get involved again. The last one is that the students' academic performance is correlated with the student involvement (Astin, 1884). Thus, meaning if a student is involved on campus they are more likely to achieve higher academically. Flynn (2014), conducted a study in which he wanted to find if academic and social student engagement impacted degree attainment at a four-year institution. The researcher conducted the study by using the 2004/09 Beginning Postsecondary Students

Longitudinal Study and logistical regression. He found that academic and social student engagement had a substantial effect on degree attainment at the college level. Thus, many institutions will stress the significance of becoming involved on a college campus.

Finance

Within the past five years, there have been concerns about affordability and resources when it comes to college and student experiences. Universities have begun wondering how financial aid can impact outcomes for students, specifically students who come from low-income families (Boatman & Long, 2016). Boatman and Long (2016), investigated how financial aid can have an impact on academic and community engagement. Participants included 5,500 students, who have either received the award or who have not. The study used a Regression Discontinuity research design to provide estimates of the effects of the Gates Millennium Scholars. Results from this study found that college students who received a grant were more likely to work with peers outside of class, as well as participate in more community service activities, compared to other college students who did not receive the grant (Boatman & Long, 2016). This provides evidence about how important financing is in a student's life, especially in supporting experiences outside of the classroom.

Without financial aid, grants, and scholarships it is harder for students to participate in community service opportunities. Thus, universities should be providing financial support for such programs. Wells and Lynch (2014) explored how President Obama provided an opportunity to low income students for participating in community service. He did this by providing a \$4,000 tax credit for students who completed 100 hours of volunteer work. Without this opportunity, these students may have never

participated in community service (Wells & Lynch, 2014). International alternative breaks usually cost a student more money than what it would take to participate in a domestic experience. Students participating in an international alternative break also have to pay for a passport and may have to cover other fees involved in going abroad. Therefore, students who do not have adequate financial support often miss out on service learning activities.

There is also evidence regarding how public schools produce more community outcomes for their students compared to private universities. Lee (2017) conducted a study which used the theory of organization publicness and examined how these institutions' ownership status and resource publicness explain their outcome publicness, focusing on the expenditure for teaching, research and public service activities. Results showed that universities' reliance on federal funding is positively associated with the percentages of the expenditure on all three activities and their reliance on state funding is positively associated with the percentages of teaching and public service expenses, such as community service. Conversely, Lee (2017) found that the proportion of tuition and fees revenue is negatively associated with the percentages of public outcomes. Understanding these outcomes shows that declining state and federal funding and increasing the fees and tuition costs on students can negatively impact public outcomes such as community service. Thus, paying for programs like international alternative break trips will be difficult to achieve for some students and 4-year institutions.

Meaning Making with Volunteerism/Civic Engagement

An important fragment of students participating in abroad alternative spring break trips is their meaning making and reflection. Stevens and Cooper (2009), defined

reflection as a complex and intentional intellectual activity that generates learning from experience. Without reflection in these trips it is theorized that students would not learn anything from their trip. There are two leading theorists that use reflection on explorations of human learning, they are John Dewey and David Kolb.

One theorist who has had a large impact on reflective learning was John Dewey. His work is helpful in defining and describing the relationships among experience, reflection, and learning (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). Dewey (1933), defined an experience as an interaction between the individual and the environment. This could be a student volunteering at an orphanage and interacting with the children there. Next, an experience contains continuity. Meaning that there is a nonstop stream of knowledge from past experiences. Using the same example, the student could have had a part-time job babysitting and has brought in those experiences to work with children at the orphanage. Thus, it is important to understand that learning is continuous and it all accumulates overtime.

David Kolb and his theory of experiential learning has an important view on service learning. His theory mainly examines the process by which adults learn from their experiences (as cited in Stevens & Cooper, 2009). Kolb created a four-stage model for learning from experiences. The four stages are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation all of which I discussed earlier when looking at service learning (Kolb, 1984). It is important to understand that reflection is critical for students who go on these trips to progress and build upon their learning. If students follow Kolb's theory they would do just that. Stevens and Cooper (2009) stated. "reflection is the engine that moves the learning cycle

along its path to further learning, action, and more reflection. Without it, the learner is “stuck” in the experience without gaining any new understanding” (p.24). While students are participating in abroad alternative break trips it is important for them to be using reflective thinking. If doing it correctly the student can achieve a broader more lasting experience while on these trips.

Summary

The literature further addressed the language used throughout the data. Additionally, the literature identifies the impacts community service can have on college students and the community, as well as how finances can limit students’ involvement in community service. The research that has been conducted has only been concerned with the knowledge and skills students have learned from alternative break trips, it is important to explore how these trips can have an impact on students as well. The knowledge gained from other researchers as well as administrators can aid in developing programs that can incorporate alternative breaks to further students’ education outside of the classroom in functional ways.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodology used to explore motivating factors and how participation in international alternative break trips impacts college students' lives.

This study utilized a qualitative approach, while looking at the research questions:

1. What are the motivating factors for students to participate in international alternative break trips?
2. In what ways do students identify being impacted by the international alternative break trip?
3. What do students identify as the greatest learning experience from their international alternative break experience?

Design of the Study

This proposed study utilized a qualitative approach to gather all the data. Krefting (1991), described qualitative research as a study from the viewpoint of the person under the study. She also discussed how qualitative research consists of various approaches, including, phenomenology, semiotics, ethnography, life history, and historical research. This qualitative approach will help to more fully understand the impact international alternative break programs have on students, from their individual perspectives.

Participants

To understand the motivating factors and how an ASB trip abroad impacted individuals it was important to identify students who had completed a trip within the last year. At the institution selected there was only one opportunity provided for students and it was through the College's Catholic Center. The international alternative break

program trip was to Mexico and took place in the Spring of 2018 and consisted of eight women and two faculty advisors. Of the eight women, three completed their degree May 2018 and are no longer students at the institution. The remaining five students were invited with the goal of having three participants. The contact information for these individuals was provided to the researcher from the College Catholic Center in which they all participated on the trip. It is important to note that none of the participants identified themselves as Catholic. Three students were contacted initially with only one response. Then the remaining two were contacted and two more students agreed to participate. Below are brief descriptions of the participants.

Participant 1: Mckenzie. To keep the participants identity a secret I given them a different name. Mckenzie identifies herself as a white female. She is a senior currently majoring in Spanish and Psychology at a midsized Midwestern university, and at the time of the trip she was a junior. Once she graduates she plans on attending Graduate School to pursue a career Counseling. While attending this institution she has had the opportunity to study abroad twice and plans to go one more time before she graduates. The first time she was out of the country was her sophomore year in Spain, and the second time was the summer following her ASB trip. Mckenzie has a job on campus working in the Study Abroad Office. She also finds time to volunteer the college's Catholic Center with a language program. This program is an English as a second language program to help local Spanish speakers with their English-speaking skills. Mckenzie did not start volunteering until she got to college.

Participant 2: Annika. Participant 2 will now be referred to as Annika. Annika identifies herself as a white female. She is a junior currently majoring in foreign

languages with a concentration in Spanish at a midsized Midwestern university. At the time of the ASB trip she was a sophomore. She also has two minors in creative writing and Latin American Studies. She hopes to have a future career where she gets to travel the world. Annika is also involved with multiple organizations. She is in an organization called Earth Wise, which is an environmental club. Annika is also in an organization called Sigma Delta Phi, which is a community service organization. She is in Hispanic honor society and German club. Lastly, she is in Amigos and friends the program provided by the colleges Catholic center. Annika also volunteered in high school, by being a part of an environment club. She has been out of the country one time before the alternative spring break trip. This trip was a faculty led trip to Guatemala over a spring break her freshman year at the current institution she is attending.

Participant 3: Sarah. Participant 3 will now be referred to as Sarah. Sarah identifies as an African American female. As a sophomore she participated in this ASB trip. She is a junior currently majoring Family and Consumer Sciences at a midsized Midwestern university. The reason Sarah choose this major is because she stated that she is into non-profits and enjoys doing volunteer work. As far as volunteer work she helps run a local food pantry near the campus she attends. She is also a hall council president for the residential building she lives in on campus. In high school Sarah was in a club that did volunteer work. The alternative spring break trip was her first opportunity to leave the United States.

Research Site

The institution was a midsized Midwestern university with over 7,000 students. Only one international ASB trip is offered at this institution through the college's

Catholic Center. This same center along with other religious center's on campus also provide domestic ASB trips for students. The trip was to a major metropolitan city in Mexico where the participants served in a free daycare facility for low-income mothers serving children from birth to school age.

When participants were asked to participate in the study they were also given the opportunity to determine where the interview would take place. All of the interviews took place in a quiet, private space on the campus. This was done so that the participants would feel comfortable sharing their stories.

Instrument

An interview protocol (Appendix A) was developed in an effort to guide the interview and assist in answering the research questions. These questions were designed to be broad and general allowing the participant to share their perspectives and insights in a free space. There are follow up questions that have been considered to help get more insight from the participants. Participants were also asked to complete a consent to participate form. As the researcher, I was the main instrument for conducting the interviews with the participants. Each interview took approximately an hour to conduct. They were audio recorded to ensure all data was collected. The data was then transcribed and coded.

Data Collection

The interviews were audio recorded during the session and then transcribed. The participants were assigned a number and a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity. Only the researcher had access to the participants' true identity. Interviews were transcribed

with only the participant number and pseudonym identified. The transcriptions were then coded to identify common themes.

Data Analysis

Each interview was transcribed and coded for themes by the researcher and thesis advisor. During the coding process, the researcher divided up interviews in categories to find themes that can be compared to other interviews, but not losing value of the uniqueness of each interview (Hill, Thompson, & Nutt Williams, 2015). Microsoft Word and Excel was utilized to provide organization of transcription and common themes indicated in the interviews as a part of the proposed study on exploring motivating factors and how participation in international alternative break trips impacts college students lives.

Treatment of Data

All data were kept confidential through a personal database located on the researcher's computer that was protected. Data will also be kept for three years per the Institutional Review Board's protocol before it gets destroyed.

Summary

A qualitative study was conducted to explore the impacts alternative break programs have on students. Participants in this study were college students who have participated in an alternative break program trip. The audio-recorded interview will be transcribed and coded.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis

This chapter will outline the results found from the interviews conducted with the three participants. The three research questions that the results will be connected to are the following :

1. What are the motivating factors for students to participate in international alternative break trips?
2. In what ways do students identify being impacted by the international alternative break trip?
3. What do students identify as the greatest learning experience from their international alternative break experience?

Motivating Factors

In order to understand what motivated students to participate in a service abroad experience outside of the United States, students were asked several questions regarding their interest. The questions were geared to understand their motivation to serve or volunteer as well as getting an experience outside of the United States. Their responses included access to information, campus involvement, community service experience, prevention, connection to classroom, opportunity to leave the country, and a spring break; these are further discussed below.

Access to Information. All three of the participants identified similar ways they were introduced to the trip. McKenzie's involvement with the campus Catholic center peaked her interest:

Because I was involved at the campus Catholic center and the [Language Program] program. I was actually approached by the trip coordinator whose title is campus minister there and she asked the community to. She asked me if I'd be interested in leading one of the ASB trips. At first, I was like, no, I don't really want to be the leader for one, but I was like, maybe I'll go on one. When I found out that they may do one in Mexico, I kind of just decided, I was like, "okay, if I can help make this happen, I'm willing to be the student leader if this can happen." And I told the trip coordinator that and I met with her a few times to see kind of what the work involved with be and if it would be possible and it probably took; it took a few weeks for me to decide that I wanted to do it, to go on the trip. But then I was interested in traveling more and again, use my Spanish was also, a motivating factor there.

Annika had a similar experience when asked how she heard about going on the ASB trip.

Oh, I heard about it from the trip coordinator, at this one other event. She was holding in the union. Yeah. And I thought "sounds really cool." And McKenzie, who she works in the lab with me was telling me a lot about it because she was the team leader, and I knew that I wanted to travel more.

Sarah heard about it from working at the college's Catholic center.

I was there. I work at [Catholic Center] in student volunteer center. I'm one of the trip coordinators student workers as part of my work study. So, I am over kind of like the alternative spring breaks, so like I'd taken all the applications and everything. It's like in my first year I did New Orleans and that's how I found out about it. I thought it was a good opportunity and obviously that's still in the

country and so for this one I was really nervous. It took a lot of thinking. It also was a lot more expensive than, of course, all the other ones that are in the country, but I think like I took it because I knew it would be a great opportunity and I'd have a lot of good experiences and it will be my first time out of the country.

Mckenzie, Annika, and Sarah all had connections with the college Catholic center. When asked how they heard about the trip it was because they had some sort of involvement connection to the college Catholic center and knew the trip coordinator and were asked specifically by her and others involved in going.

Campus Involvement. All three of the participants are involved on their college campus. This involvement put them in touch with those coordinating the trip. Sarah said, "in [Resident Hall], I am the hall council president. Additionally, I do the food pantry with the campus Catholic center. I'm an ambassador for my major." Mckenzie is also involved with multiple organizations when asked, Mckenzie said:

I was involved with [Language Program] over at the Catholic center. It's an ESL program for people in town that don't speak English. Last year I was the student coordinator for that, so that was a, one of my big kind of campus involvement. I don't do it anymore, due to the time commitment, but I really loved it. I'm also in, there's this Hispanic honor society that I am the president of somehow, and I'm involved in that. We do like cultural events on campus and we meet up and speak Spanish a lot. And I work in the foreign language department as well, so I tutor Spanish there.

When asked what she was involved with Annika stated that, "I'm in earth wise, our environmental club. I'm in Sigma Delta Phi, a national collegiate, Hispanic honor society. I'm in German club and maybe like, Oh, I'm apart of [Language Program]."

Each of these women were involved in different organizations across campus that allowed them to meet other people and get engaged in the community. They are also involved in language and cultural organizations that led them to having an interest in the Spanish language and culture, which further led them to become interested in an ASB trip in Mexico.

Community Service Experience. On top of their campus involvement they also participate in community service. Mckenzie, Annika, and Sarah all have had previous experiences with community service. When asked about community service involvement, Mckenzie identified all the community service she does as well as feeling too busy with all that she does:

I was involved in the campus Catholic center with [Language Program]. That was a big involvement for me the last few years. This year I'm in, I go to the Lutheran church in town and I'm in the campus ministry there and we do some volunteer events on campus, but also just hang out so that's a little bit different. I also volunteer at a crisis pregnancy center in town as a peer counselor, but I just started doing that, so I can't really talk about it. I'm too busy.

However, Mckenzie did not volunteer when she was in high school, she started once she got to college. Sarah did volunteer during her high school career. When asked Sarah said,

I never was into sports or anything, but like I said I did a lot of volunteering so I would work. I was a part of a club where it was called senior service and I'd worked in a school and I go to a second-grade classroom for like one whole semester for a couple hours. I've done the Ronald McDonald House and night ministries which you serve food to people in need and it's at night.

Currently in college Mckenzie stated that, she helps run a local food pantry. Annika also is involved with volunteer work while at college. She said,

Well I'm with [Language Program] as an English tutor. I've been doing that ever since I came to college. It's where I tutor someone who's normally from Guatemala and Mexico, El Salvador, one's even from Spain in English. Right now, I'm working with this lady who wants to improve her grasp of the past tense. It's kind of hard because English has a lot of irregular verbs. But other than that, as I mentioned, I'm in [Environment Club] and every month we clean up the campus, the litter and stuff and we also do things like the initiative butterfly project where we, it's an international thing that one of the biology professors set up; but we also have like a local project here where we plant these pollinator friendly flowers in public places which encourages butterflies and other pollinators to come and make it look more beautiful. Interesting.

Annika was also involved with service during her high school career. When asked Annika said,

I was in environmental club in high school. So, we also do with the cleanups and things like that. I also did little stuff like I would volunteer to work a stand at the chocolate festival we had once a year. I once also ran this little theater lesson with

this group of girl scouts who visited my high school, so they could get their theater badge. That was fun.

Each of the participants was involved in service before even thinking about going on the trip. Because of this and their involvement on campus they were connected to these opportunities to become further engaged in service.

Roadblocks to participation. Annika said, “Nothing I can think of.” When asked if there was anything that may have prevented her from going on the ASB trip. Sarah stated that, “Um, maybe funds.” However, when asked how she was able to fund the trip she said, “I was really grateful enough to like, scrape, scrape up enough money and I also ended up getting a scholarship from someone at the campus Catholic center to cover the rest.” Finance was not a roadblock for Mckenzie. She said, “Yes, that wasn't, that was a factor. Um, it was, so, it was like six or seven months away, so I knew I'd have time to save up the money, but it did cost maybe four or \$500. So that was. Yeah, that was a factor for some people.” However, what was a factor for Mckenzie was this something that she truly wanted to do. When asked if there was anything preventing her from going on the trip she said, “Yeah. Just deciding if that was how I wanted to spend my spring break or if I wanted to go somewhere with friends. That was the factor.”

Connection to Classroom. The three participants did not have to go on the trip for class. However, Mckenzie and Annika both found it beneficial to what they were learning. During the trip Mckenzie had many opportunities to practice her Spanish; she said,

It helps me talk with the teacher I had expected because there was one baby room and all the other ones were older, I was expecting to use my Spanish more but that

didn't happen. However, I did talk a lot with the teacher. That was cool. And a lot of the people were majors or minors in Spanish. So that's why they were interested, but there was a few that, there were two that didn't speak any Spanish at all, but they wanted to; they were studying family services I think, so they wanted to get some experience in another country.

Annika also found a way to integrate what she wanted in a career with the ASB trip. She stated that, "Well, I loved taking Spanish in high school and I knew I wanted to travel once I graduated. So, I thought learning foreign languages would be a good way to do that."

Opportunity to Leave the Country. Out of the three participants Sarah was the only one that had never been outside of the United States. When asked why she wanted to go on the trip she said, "I knew it would be a great opportunity and I'd have like a lot of good experiences and it would be my first time out of the country." Since she nor her family members have been out of the country they were very apprehensive about her participating in the ASB trip. She said,

My mom was very nervous. Mom, she's a single parent so it's just been her and my brother and so she was like, oh, I don't know, but like she's always encouraging me to like step outside the box and do things. So, she trusted me, you know in making the decision.

When asked why she thought she was so nervous, Sarah said "Because I've never been out of the country and that's really far. It's like a whole week away and like here's different, like I'm three hours from home, but being in a whole country, different countries a lot different."

Many college students have not had the opportunity to leave the country prior to attending school and opportunities like this can be sought out by those wishing to have the experience. Because the students have not had the experience they can be challenged by parents who worry about them leaving on their own, especially for the first time.

Spring Break. Some students looked at this trip more as a spring break trip than a service trip. None of the participants in this study engaged in the following activities, but the women spoke about some of the other members of the group taking advantage of the opportunities. Sarah said,

Okay you know, we're not allowed to have like any alcoholic beverages, but we did have a friend who went off with other friends. I didn't go. They went to like the hot springs which are there, which is almost like a sauna type thing. I don't know. It's like water and it's hot. I don't know, it's weird. But she would go off, and we went to like this lookout point and they went to there and she did disclose this to us that she did have a couple of drinks while she was there.

However, when asked if she thought other students were abusing the opportunity to go on the trip she said,

No, I don't think anyone did. Um, I did get the vibe that, that one person did maybe do this because it looked good, you know, um, but it wasn't like too strong of a feeling, but you can still kind of tell like, you know, yes, she likes service, but also I'm going to Mexico, you know?

Impact

In order to understand the impact this alternative break trip outside of the United States had on students, participants were asked several questions regarding this area. The

questions were geared to discover impacts they may have experienced during the trip. Their responses included culture exchange, expectation, change within themselves, problems they faced, favorite and least favorite parts, emotions, impact on service, what they learned, time wasted, alternative break again, and recommendation to others.

Culture Exchange. Part of the experience for the participants was the cultural experience they had in being in a new city and country. Describing the city Sarah said,

Everyone was very friendly. It was very warm. The streets were stone. There were a lot of dogs walking around. It wasn't really safe to go out past 8:00 just because a lot of men and things like that. Everything was very vibrant. The music, the colors, all the buildings are like different colors.

Annika gave a different perspective stating that, "It was a Colonial City. So, there were cobblestone roads there, cobblestone, and like continental buildings because the Mexican government didn't want anything to change because that's what drew tourists in." Annika also found an interesting dynamic with locals as well as other residents her understanding of the impact on the city they were in for the service trip. She said,

There are a lot of a US and Canadian retirees living there. So, they helped the income. However, they also kind of ruined it because of them, a lot of people like raise the store prices, which meant a lot of local Mexicans cannot afford the prices and had to move out of the city and then come back in and commute to work there because they couldn't afford the prices anymore.

Sarah also described how she viewed the disparity in the area stating,

It was pretty poor, um, where we stayed. We worked at a daycare and so the volunteer house was connected to the daycare. As far as I could see around us, a lot of people were very poor. They didn't really have a lot of resources.”

The participants also spoke about the overall experience and what it was like to be in a new and unfamiliar environment. When asked about the trip Annika said,

It was amazing! It was good! However, it was very tiring because we would wake up at 8 I believe, and we didn't get home from the daycare until three and then most of us would go out and party, uh not like party, but explore. So yeah, I didn't really have much time for sleep, especially because they were like roosters and dogs all throughout the night there clucking and barking. But it was amazing! At the daycare I was placed in a room with a one and a half year olds. There was about 11 of them on a good day anyway. And I was there with the lady who worked there full time as a teacher and another volunteer who knew no Spanish or I'd have to like translate between them. And it was a really difficult but amazing experience for me because I've never worked with kids that young before and they'd be like, misbehave sometimes, like this one little girl would hit this other little boy with a shoe and I'd be like "No!" and I'd take the shoe away and then she'd start screaming at me and I'm like, "What do I do?" You know, but I soon figured it out, kind of.

Sarah worked at the same daycare, but with a different age group. Sarah said, “I worked in a daycare. Oh my God, it was the best experience ever. All the children were adorable. I worked in the four to five-year-old classroom. Everyone spoke Spanish. No one really spoke English.” When asked about her main responsibility she stated,

The people or the children that we were serving came from families where they couldn't afford to send their children to daycare, so it was free. So, a lot of the time these children didn't have toothbrushes and all that. So, we would help them brush their teeth and comb the hair in the morning. If they had to change clothes, we'd help them do that. We were there to support the teachers. I noticed the teachers were giving lessons with the resources they had and playing games with the children's ministry.

The participants talked about experiencing a new culture through their experiences in a new, but temporary living experience, work environment, and the community they were in.

Expectation. All three of the participants had similar expectations of what the volunteer work would look like. McKenzie said, "I expected it to look almost like it did. I didn't know exactly what kind of activities they would have us doing, but I knew we were going to be teacher's aides." Annika stated that, "I did expect that because that's what they told us we were doing before we signed up." Sarah added that, "I knew what we were doing when we were going. So, it was what I expected." Each of the participants went understanding what would be expected of them in the area of their volunteer work.

Change from this trip. Sarah, Annika, and McKenzie discussed how this trip changed them. Annika, who plans to study abroad next semester said,

I think it has changed me. I mean I was always the kind of person, putting myself out there, exploring, trying new things. But after that trip, I've become more

confident in myself. I know I could do this. Before it was just like a theory, but now like I got this, now I'm more prepared to go on my Spain trip because of that.

When Sarah was first asked if she thinks she changed, she stated, "I guess I am kind of the same. I'm just a lot more open to traveling, and new experiences." However, later on she added that, "Um, I think I've changed. I'm a lot more open to traveling now and I want to do it again and again and again." For Sarah this was the first time she had left the country and after the trip she shared how she wants to have more opportunities like this. Mckenzie shared,

I think that I did a little bit. It definitely helped my leadership skills. It definitely made me think a lot about, about poverty and just how things are very different around the world, made me consider how I could be helping out more here when I came back to the United States. So, I think I changed a little.

Each of the participants identified ways they were changed by this trip, and it was unique to the person and the experience they had.

The Unexpected. The trip did not always go as planned. A few of the students experienced some hurdles. Mckenzie said, "There were not problems within the group. However, we had some problems logistically with the organization we were with." When asked to explain she shared the challenges of communication with the onsite representative. She stated

I really didn't have a lot of communication from the volunteer coordinator that kind of made some scheduling things confusing. It was awkward for me as the leader because of how we misinterpreted some of the things that she said. Like

she said, I'm going to take you out to lunch, but then it was like we had to pay for it and some of our people didn't have money with them.

Logistics were not the only problems the group faced, they also faced some health concerns. Annika said, "We bought some street food and got food poisoning. That sucked!" As the participants spoke about their experiences they also spoke about how they just dealt with things as they came up.

Favorite and Least Favorite. With every experience there are things that people really like and things they do not. During the trip students had favorite parts and least favorite parts that they spoke about in the interview. When asked what their least favorite part of the trip Sarah said,

Since we had such a large group, the house also houses other people there. So, they take groups of people at a time in the house and there were other people there before we got there. There were two other people and then another lady and her two girls. The way the rooms are arranged, it's four to three people to a room and I just so happened to be placed in a room with the two people that were already there [not with the group]. So, I felt a little disconnected from the group that I came with, but I got to know those women very well, but I still had a hard time and some of the nights I did sleep in the other room with the other girls [from our group].

Annika, in sharing her disappointment said,

I was a bit disappointed that we couldn't check out Mexico City and now I heard that they actually get to go to Mexico City, but I will not be able to go because I will be in Spain though. It'd be so cool!

Mckenzie talked more about the stress she dealt with during the trip because she was the student leader. She stated, "We didn't, face any huge issues. It was really kind of stressful for me doing a lot of the planning."

Similarly, they all had different favorite parts of the trip. When asked what their favorite part was Annika shared,

Oh Gosh, that's hard. I'd say the daycare because the other stuff I could just do whenever I wanted to. I could go back to Mexico. I could do that. But with the daycare, you want to be able to have that experience. I mean, I guess I could go do that alone, but that was the first time ever doing something like that. It was really impactful. The kids were adorable. Even when they are misbehaving, I don't know, it was much better for me to spend my time there helping out instead of just being at home doing homework or whatever.

Sarah's favorite part of the trip had nothing to do with the volunteer work. When asked she said,

My favorite part? This might sound bad. But at night we would go to the center and one night we went to a bar, it was almost like a bar and we went upstairs to the roof and people were salsa dancing and we were just sitting there, and we got a chance to dance and eat food and drink different kinds of drinks, not alcoholic drinks. It was a really good time. That's probably my favorite.

When asked Mckenzie could not just pick one favorite thing. She stated,

I really enjoyed being with my group. The community that we had there. And I don't know if I can name just one. Getting to see a different culture was big for me and just the different area of the world and seeing how they lived. I'm sure

you'll ask questions on this, but like it was very impactful on me to see the poverty that we were around, and kind of learning how things are really different in some areas. They are in the US too, but Mexico especially, there's a lot of poverty.

Each of the participants were able to easily identify experiences that were both positive and negative. They also provided context to their reason for sharing what happened from the positive and negative perspective.

Emotions. Going on a trip like this will spark emotions of all sorts. All three participants had different feelings they described having while in Mexico. Sarah, who had never left the country before, talked about the emotions she was going through at the time leading up to the trip and while on the trip, sharing,

Before I left I was actually struggling with a lot of friendship issues, like roommate issues and things like that and so I needed this break, I needed this time, so I had a lot of time to reflect and getting back to myself because I wasn't really myself last semester. I was not having a good time during that period in my life. So, going on this trip helped me a lot.

When asked to elaborate on this she expressed that,

I feel like I literally came back a new person and I told my family and my friends that. And like you could tell and even I could tell that I was a lot different. I just needed that time away.

Sarah experienced other emotions on the trip as well. She said,

I was very, very happy and like I told you, I had all those issues. So, by the time when I got there that was probably the happiest I had been in months. Very

emotional because just the people and realizing their stories and seeing how people are living and knowing that it's not right.

As the leader of the trip, when asked what emotions they felt Mckenzie said, "A lot of excitement before we went and a little bit of nervousness to go to another country. Having some level of responsibility made me nervous. But while I was happy to be there, and I liked, learning about the area; I got kind of frustrated, tired, really tired." When asked to expand on these emotions she said,

We had a lot of, where are we going to go? Because we did touristy stuff and essentially, there was some light arguing there. So just trying to figure out what the majority of people wanted to do that was a little frustrating.

When Annika, who had travelled abroad previously, was asked the emotions she felt she said, "Excitement! Because I love traveling. I love going on planes. Yeah, a bit of nervousness and anxiety when the kids were misbehaving. A bit of foreboding when I was trying these, new dishes. A lot of emotions honestly." For her it was the excitement of traveling abroad and all of the new experiences she was able to participate in.

Each of the participants had different feelings based on their past experiences and current situation. The role they played on the trip also impacted their emotional reactions.

Impact of the Service. When asked if the students feel they made an impact on the trip they all shared their individual reactions. Annika spoke about how she saw the group making an impact sharing,

I do feel like we made it easier for the teachers for that one week and it definitely made an impact on us. I know that someone from our group did go back the

following summer to visit them again, but overall I don't think it made a huge impact because the kids are very used to people coming and going and there was these two people from my group ended up with the babies, really cute, but they were told not to hold them because like sometimes there will be like months in between volunteers coming and if that teacher in the baby's room didn't have like help and like she couldn't hold all the babies, you know, so that she had to get them used to it.

When Sarah was asked that same question she said, "I believe so. A lot of children clung to me, which I really loved." McKenzie had mixed reactions, as the leader she was exposed to more of the behind the scenes pieces of the service experience, and when she was asked this question she explained,

The organization was really good. I think that we did... it wasn't a very, um... no... I don't know. The place was run on volunteers, so they always have volunteers doing this job. So, we fit in really well there. They had a very good system for that. Not that I had like any, like huge personal connection to any anyone I met, but I knew I was tangibly helping.

Even though some of the participants felt they made and did not make in impact, the participants did share some things that they learned.

What was Learned. Annika had a lot to say as far as what she learned from the trip. After all this was her first time out of the country. She first stated, "Impactful. For my cultural, understanding my language, learning my ability to be able to take care of little kids, to deal with others, to translate Spanish and just adapt to all situations." She later expanded on the culture stating,

Well, it made me more culturally aware. I don't know if you know, but in Mexico catcalling is way more chill and in the culture. So, there's this group of guys down the street from where we were living would always call out and whistle to us whenever we left the building so that was something to get used to. I know it also forced me to try new foods and try new things. We had a tango lesson, which is so much fun. But all this stuff I wouldn't maybe do on my own.

Later in the interview, in talking about something else, Annika said,

On the trip I learned some new words. All in Spanish. I learned new, kind of cultural dishes that I didn't know were popular in Mexico. As I was talking about it before I learned about cultural differences between the US and Mexico, but beyond that I just learned that... I don't know I knew this already but like was nice to see it in action, how one person's actions can really affect and benefit the community. And it wasn't just like one person at this daycare, it was a bunch of people like the lady who started off in the first place, all the full time teachers, the volunteers all working together to make sure that these kids were fed because we gave them breakfast and lunch at the daycare and they were doing okay at home and they're having a good positive experience getting a bit of education even because we had books and stuff.

When Sarah was asked what she learned from the trip she said,

So, for my major I never really knew what I wanted to do and going on this trip I really learned a lot about how I like to travel and how I like to go places and help others. And so that kind of helped me, realize what I really want to do with my

degree. So that's what I think I learned the most is about like me and what I want to do in the future.

Considering that all the participants had something to take away from the trip, they were asked if they felt time was wasted on the trip.

Time Wasted. Even though some feel they may not have had a huge impact they were all in agreeance that time was not wasted for going on this trip. When Annika was asked if they felt you wasted time from going on this trip. She said, “No, I think everything I did on the trip had a purpose either even if it was napping, like I saw that as recharging.” Sarah laughed off the question stating, “Oh no! Not at all.” Additionally, Sarah just plainly said, “No.”

Alternative break again. Each of the participants was asked if they could do it all over again would they go on the trip, and they each responded in a personal way. Mckenzie said,

I don't think I'm going to this year. I think I might just go somewhere with my friends. Not like crazy screaming or like that [Referring to traditional college spring break trips], like, you know, friends and family. It was, super draining for me when I came back to the end of my semester after traveling for a week. So, I don't think I would do it right in that time frame. but I love the trip overall.

When asked this same question Mckenzie had a very different response. She said, “Yeah! I doubt we'll be able to go next year because I have other plans, but if I could I would.” Each participant was able to identify if they would do another alternative break trip again. Participants were also asked if they would recommend the trips to others.

Recommend the Trip to Others. The participants were asked if they would recommend this trip to others during the interviews. Mckenzie said,

Yes, I would. I liked the service that we did, at least it was impactful on me and I think it did help out there [the daycare]. It was also just fun to get to travel to another country and get to know the group that we were with. Yeah, I definitely would. I know the [College Catholic center] has a lot of good trips that people would love.

Sarah also would recommend this to others. She said, “Yes. It's a really great experience. If you're open and you allow the experience to open you, then you will have the best experience.”

Annika had this reaction to the question,

Yes and no. If you're like me and you love traveling and pushing your boundaries, you maybe like Spanish and Mexican culture then definitely go for it. But if you're a person who gets really anxious and is unable to enjoy new stuff that well. Additionally, if you're a person who isn't like just like go right in there, then maybe do shorter trips. Do it by yourself or test your own boundaries.

The participants were able to identify reasons they would recommend if others should go on an alternative break trip or not.

Greatest Learning Experience

In order to understand the learning experiences from an alternative break trip outside of the United States had on students, participants were asked what the greatest learning experience was. The questions were geared to discover what the students took

back with them when they got home. McKenzie who has been out of the country before said,

Seeing the families and the children that we serve. I did get to meet, some of the mothers, when they came and dropped off their kids or came at the end of the day. It was impactful. It was impactful for me to see what that organization was doing, and we did. We read, we had to study over there with our nightly Bible study kind of thing. Reading stories about families from the daycare. So, we got to kind of know more about them, but we didn't really integrate with the families of the kids.

When asked the same question Annika did not have much to say about what her greatest learning experience was. She said, "Taking care of the kids. Learning about the backgrounds to." Sarah had a little more to say considering it was her first time out of the country. She said,

Oh, the culture. I think the culture for sure because you could tell how grateful everyone is even though they didn't have much you can tell and I'm just listening to everyone speak the language and the food. The food's so good, especially the desserts and just like how much time they put into things like music and food and you know, lifestyle, things like that I think is.

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

This study was performed to explore college students' experiences participating in an international alternative break trip. The guiding research questions include: What are the motivating factors for students to participate in international alternative break trips? In what ways do students identify being impacted by the international alternative break trip? and What do students identify as the greatest learning experience from their international alternative break experience? This chapter will discuss the important findings of this study, present conclusions, and offer suggestions for future research on this topic. Recommendations for students, faculty and staff, and university civic engagement and volunteerism offices.

Discussion

There were multiple important findings related to motivating factors, impact, and the participants greatest learning experience. Findings from motivating factors included student involvement, invitation to trip, language, opportunity to leave the country, and service was not a motivator. The participants from this study also experienced multiple impacts. These impacts are future plans thought about, cultural awareness, impact of volunteer work, and no negative experiences. Lastly, all the students shared what had the greatest learning experience on them from the trip.

Motivating Factors. Students are looking for ways to spend their spring break and colleges around the United States provide safe service-based opportunities (Hoey & Feld-Gore, 2014).). Understanding student motivation to participate in these trips is important in recruiting. Based on results from this study, there have been multiple

motivating factors for students to sign-up and go on an international alternative break trip. The findings are discussed below and include: involvement, invitation, language, and leave country. It's also worth noting that the participants did not identify service as a motivator, which will also be discussed below.

Involvement. All three of the participants were involved on their college campus before they went on the trip to Mexico. Based on Astin's (1984) theory, an example of a highly involved student is one who, spends much time on campus, and participates actively in student organizations. The three students were not just involved with one organization, they were involved in many including community service. An example is Mckenzie, who works with the language program at an off campus Catholic center. It's an ESL program for people in town that are learning English. Others were involved in several ways across campus, such as Annika who is in an environmental club and serves in a German language club. As well as Sarah who served as the hall council president for her residential hall. Without being involved in these different ways the students would not have learned about the opportunity to go on this service trip. It is important to note that even though these students are heavily involved on and off campus they were still open to more opportunities outside of the classroom. Another takeaway from these participants was that all are involved. It may be more difficult for those not involved to look at these trips as overwhelming. The students also would not have been exposed to the coordinator of the alternative break program who reached out to each of the participants and specifically asked them to join the trip. Once invited and continually asked to participate they became more motivated to attend the trip.

Invited. All three of the participants, as stated above were personally invited to go on the trip. Sarah and Mckenzie both had a personal connection with the trip coordinator, due to organizations they were involved with on campus. However, Annika met the trip coordinator at a study abroad fair. It was at this event Annika was asked if she wanted to participate in an international alternative break trip. It's important to note that they were not just asked once, that they were asked a couple of times before fully committing. When recruiting for these trips, organizers have to be diligent in choosing students. It is important to note that none of these students saw a flier and just decided to go on the trip. Perhaps these students would have never gone on this trip if they were not personally asked.

Language. This was a trip to Mexico, where the language spoken is Spanish. Two of the participants are studying Spanish while in college. Mckenzie and Annika looked at the trip as a way to advance their skills with Spanish. As they talked about this they shared that they knew going on a trip like this would give them an opportunity to speak and strengthen their Spanish. Niehaus and colleagues (2017) found that college students who participated in alternative breaks were connecting, applying, and synthesizing learning while on the trip. During the trip both participants were able to practice what they learn in the classroom and apply it to real world experiences. A large motivator for these students to go on this trip was to be able to practice their language. They were also encouraged by their language instructors as it would be a good educational experience for them. The two participants probably would have not gone on the trip if the program was focused on going to a non-speaking Spanish country.

Leave Country. Most institutions are looking for ways to broaden students' perspectives of the world, "in their goals and mission statements, most colleges and universities include some version of knowledge of other cultures' as a component of a liberal education" (Hopkins, 1999, p. 36). All three of the students looked at this trip as another way to visit a country other than the United States. McKenzie and Annika have both been out of the country before. However, a large draw for them to go on the trip was to experience a new culture and a place outside of the United States. Sarah was the only participant who had never left the country before. A large motivating factor for her to go on this trip was to visit another country. During Sarah's interview she expressed how this trip was her first opportunity to leave the country. On top of this she felt comfortable with the group she was going with. She had a good relationship with the trip leader, which calmed any of the nerves that she had. The participants clearly identified that they went on the trip because it was international.

Service was not a motivator. Throughout the three interviews not one student said the reason they decided to go on the trip was to do service. However, all these students were engaged in community service. McKenzie worked with the campus Catholic center with their language program. Sarah also had volunteer experience with working with the Ronald McDonald House. Annika worked with a language program as well, working with people who are from Guatemala, Mexico, and El Salvador. Through the interviews the participants expressed the importance of service and their college involvement. A large part of this trip for McKenzie and Annika was to practice their Spanish speaking skills. The three students would have never gone on the trip if they had not personally been asked to attend multiple times. All three of them also looked at this trip as another

opportunity to see another culture. Even though this is a service trip the other motivating factors took precedence. The service part was second nature to them because they were already serving in various ways. They all knew it was a service trip, that was not a hidden thing for them to find out once in the location. Based off the interviews I can confidently say that the type of service could have been a number of different things, and all three participants would have still gone on the trip.

Impact. Based on results from this study, there have been multiple important findings regarding the impacts for students who go on an international alternative break trip. Niehaus and colleges (2017), found that college students who participated in alternative breaks were connecting, applying, and synthesizing learning while on the trip. What was discovered from this study was that future plans thought about, increased cultural awareness and global perspective, impact of volunteer work, and no negative experience.

Future Plans. During the alternative break trip one student experienced clarity for their future plans based off some of their experiences. Sarah never knew what she wanted to do as a career. However, because of this trip she discovered that she enjoys helping others as well as traveling. From this she discovered she wants to work in a place that allows her to help others as well as having the opportunity to travel. When it comes to experiencing something new she is less nervous and excited about the opportunity to do something different. Students who are unsure about their futures may have a transformative experience from these trips and have a realization what they want to do.

Cultural and Economic Awareness. Perhaps one of the greatest takeaways the students had on this trip was gaining a broader global perspective and cultural awareness.

Sarah and McKenzie both have been out of the country before. With this trip they both shared different experiences and had new insight to how people lived. They were also able to discover why the area was in need. Annika found that with all the US and Canadian retirees living there. They were helping the income of the town. They also identified how these retirees ruined it because these people caused the store prices to raise; which meant a lot of local Mexicans cannot afford the prices and had to move out of the city and then come back in and commute to work there because they couldn't afford the prices anymore. If Annika never went on this trip and did volunteer work, she would have never discovered the impact these retirees were having on the locals there. All three of the students were able to practice their Spanish speaking abilities as well as discovering what life was like living there, with the different foods, cultural norms, city life, and so on. If the students never went on this trip especially Sarah they would only be able to think and make decisions from their viewpoints from growing up in the United States.

Impact of Volunteer Work. All three of the students found that they made a positive impact with the volunteer work they were doing. Annika discovered that she definitely made the teachers life easier by being able to help with the extra hands. However, she saw that they had an impact, but not a large one. Students who helped with the babies were not allowed to hold the babies, because they did not want them getting attached to the volunteers, because they always come and go. So, some of the student's responsibility was just to be extra hands for the daycare worker. The other two students both had similar experiences, stating that they enjoyed being with the children and helping out. Even though the students may have not made a huge impact they understood

that they still made a difference. They also gained insight to the way of life of working families in this part of Mexico.

Only Positive. All three of the participants expressed having only positive experiences from the trip. Aside from the food poisoning, all three of the students were happy they went on the trip, having no regrets. Students who participate on an alternative break trip, will most likely walk away with a positive experience and not regret going on the trip.

Greatest Learning Experience. From the study all three students shared their greatest learning experience from the trip. Mckenzie, Annika, and Sarah participated in the same trip they all had similar and different takeaways. One of the greatest learning experiences for all three of the participants was being able to view another culture. The students did not just drive through Mexico, they lived there. They were able to interact with families on a daily basis. Mckenzie, Annika, and Sarah were all learning the backgrounds of these people and the reasons why they had to use the daycare. From this trip they all expressed how much more culturally aware they are. Language was a big takeaway for all three. Even though they all did not speak Spanish they still were able to practice it and pick up a few more. For Sarah it was her first time out of the country. After this trip she found a new passion for traveling and experience new cultures outside of the United States. During this trip Mckenzie grew as a leader. From the very start she was unsure of herself being the leader of this trip. During the trip she hurdled a few issues within the group and grew from it. Not many college students can say they were a student leader for students going abroad. If these three students never went on the trip they would have not gained these positive experiences.

Recommendations for Professionals

This study was performed to explore college students' experiences participating in an international alternative break trip. During this study there have been recommendations found for staff and faculty who are wanting to build an alternative break trip. An important key for professionals is to intentionally build the trip. Be transparent in recruiting about what the experience will be like, therefore students know exactly what they are getting into and do not have negative reactions. In this study it was evident that none of the students had a negative experience. They all had an idea of what they were doing. If professionals were not transparent for this trip there would have been more negative opinions from the participants.

It is also important for professionals to know the importance of a personal invitation to the trip. All three of the participants were personally invited to go on the trip multiple times from the same professional before committing. If the professional did not do this, these students would have never gone on the trip. Another recommendation is to recruit the right students from the beginning. An example of this could be going to the language department and presenting this trip to the class. All three of the students had experience when it came to campus involvement and volunteering. They all understood the importance of volunteering and had no complaints about the service they were doing in Mexico. Perhaps if students who went on this trip had no experience when it came to campus involvement and service, they may have complained more and have been less engaged on the trip. At night the students and chaperones would gather and reflect on the day. Through this reflection process students were able to increase their cultural awareness and understanding of the service. In Kolb's (1984). four-stage learning cycle,

we understand that the second stage of reflection is important in the students' service learning process. If professionals truly want students to learn from these trips it is important that they incorporate time for reflection.

Future Research

This study presents a large number of opportunities for continued research. One suggestion would be to expand and diversify the study location and population. This study was conducted at a mid-sized institution in the Midwestern United States. In order to diversify the results and make them more applicable to other institutions, this study should be replicated at various sized colleges and universities in different regions around the United States. Additionally, this study was conducted with a college religious affiliated group instead of just within a college. It would be interesting to see how colleges and universities run their alternative break programs. Another suggestion would be to bring in more participants. In this study I was only able to interview three participants due to a small pool of people who participated in this international alternative break experience. This research could be expanded upon by interviewing male students who participated in alternative break trip, considering only females were interviewed for this study. The study focused on a spring alternative break. It would be interesting to see if there were different interest levels based on the time of year. Another, item that could be looked at is learning outcomes and if students completed them or not. Lastly, this research can be expanded on by interviewing the student's multiple years after they participate to see the lasting impact. Along with this conduct pre-post perspectives of the experience.

Summary

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach to explore students experiences when participating on abroad alternative break trips. The presented research represents personal experiences from three participants. Results of this study demonstrated multiple motivating factors students who want to participate in an alternative break. This decision was influenced by a variety of factors: student involvement; opportunity to leave the country; opportunity to advance language skills; and being personally invited to go on the trip. During the trip in Mexico the students had multiple impacts from participating in an abroad alternative break trip. The impacts they had were they thought about their future plans and gained a wider cultural awareness. Additionally, the students believed they made an impact through the volunteer work they were doing. The students also had no negative experience during their trip. All three women had great learning experiences. For some of them it was having the ability to experience a new culture. For one student it was exploring a new country for the first time. All three shared that expanding their language was a large takeaway. One student was able to increase their leadership skills through the trip. For these women this international alternative break trip was a transformative experience. It is important that professionals intentionally build these trips, so that the students can benefit most from them.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
 - a. Where are you from?
 - b. What is your major?
 - c. What sorts of things did you do growing up?
 - d. How would you describe yourself? (Before the ASB trip.)
2. Tell me about your time in college thus far.
 - a. What are you involved in?
 - b. How would your friends describe you?
 - c. How do you spend your out of class time?
3. Tell me about your involvement with community service and volunteering? We will talk about the specific ASB stuff in a bit.
 - a. Did you volunteer in high school? If yes, what sorts of things did you do?
 - b. What volunteering opportunities have you explored or been involved in while in college?
4. Have you ever been out of the country before?
 - a. If yes...
 - i. Tell me about that experience.
 - ii. Where did you go?
 - iii. What sorts of things did you do on that trip?
 - b. If no...
 - i. Have you had other opportunities to go outside of the country?

5. Now I want to talk with you about the ASB trip you took last spring. Tell me about your decision making regarding going on the trip.
 - a. How did you hear about the ASB trip?
 - b. Did your friends want you going on the trip?
 - c. Did you have any friends that went with you on the trip?
 - d. Did you have to go the trip for class?
 - e. What did your family think about you going on the trip?
 - f. Was there anything that may have prevented you from going on the trip?
Tell me about that.
6. Tell me about your trip.
 - a. Where did you go? Tell me about the area you were in.
 - b. What did you do? Was it what you expected you would be doing?
 - c. Do you feel that you made an impact during the trip?
 - d. Did you feel like you wasted your time on the trip?
 - e. Tell me about the group you were with on this trip.
 - f. What did you learn while on this trip?
 - g. What was your favorite part of the trip?
 - h. Was there anything about the trip you didn't like? Tell me about that.
7. Tell me about some of the emotions you experienced on your trip?
 - a. What made you feel that way?
 - b. How did you get through that emotion?
8. How do you think you have changed since you went on the trip?
9. Would you recommend this trip to others? Tell me why you answered that way?

- a. What would you tell others about the trip?
10. What is one thing you have not told anything about your trip?
11. What had the greatest impact on you during the trip?
12. Would you do an ASB trip again?
13. How are you different now that you have had this experience?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that perhaps I didn't ask about?