

6.4.1 Extended Participant Feedback

The respondents for this study varied from one year post-graduation to five years post-graduation. While this range of years may seem like a significant amount of time to have passed from a service experience that occurred during one's undergraduate career, the respondents still had vivid memories of the ASB experience in regard to: fellow participants, community agency partners, social justice focus, project work specifics, and personal mindset during the trip. While these memories were certainly helpful in providing a rich description of the trip, the experience is still within the respondents' recent pasts, thus making it not only easier to recall, but also leaving a smaller amount of time between the ASB trip and the current moment. This shorter gap between experience and interview makes it difficult for this study to gauge the long-term effects of participation in regard to one's propensity to serve, one's cultural sensitivity, and one's civic responsibility.

Consequently, to advance research on the meaning students make of their ASB experience, as well as the salience of the experience and its given learning outcomes, future research should focus on the narratives of participants at a minimum of six years post-ASB trip. This longitudinal data would allow for researchers to identify the lasting effects of participation, and whether the data from the years immediately following the ASB experience are as significant as during the years almost one decade after the experience. This research would enable the contextualization of the service experience, gaining an understanding of the long-term participant benefits and takeaways from the participant perspective.

Further, as the narratives included in this study exemplify, great meaning and knowledge can be made, which benefits both students and the field, through the narrative process. Narratives should be conducted regularly with ASB participants, as the responses from five

interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the meaning-making process for students. At the same time, the three narratives which were not included in this study highlight the importance of participant feedback in order for practitioners to understand where opportunities lie for improvements. These narratives, while not represented in the study, hold significance, as they represent a research quandary. As these narratives represent three alternative experiences to the general sentiment shared in the five included narratives, they lead me to question whether a larger sample would position these alternative experience as a normative experience in a larger service-learning context—opening up a space for literature surrounding problematic service-learning outcomes. By engaging with participants who have had negative or less meaningful experiences, practitioners and researchers alike may understand the rarely researched, less impactful side of service-learning, therefore developing a more comprehensive understanding the variation in student experience. In this sense, the collection of individuals’ stories of their ASB trips into a narrative of the overall experience provides a “consolidated wealth of ideas and emotions” (Dewey, 1929, p. 291), while also acknowledging the potential for the experience to offer little to no impact on other participants.

6.4.2 Acknowledging Varying Degrees of Engaged Citizenship

As explained earlier in the study, the respondents for this particular research study were involved in a minimum of two alternative spring break trips. Therefore, participants in this study were involved in a minimum of two trips in which they were required to participate in seven straight days of hands-on direct service while living in fellowship with community members. This level of immersion is substantial, as it results in the accumulation more than 300 immersion hours in a single community.

As described in the previous chapter, the results of participants' in-depth service-learning experiences was an increase in their engaged learning characteristics, essentially leading to the development of their overall status as a civically engaged individual. While the respondents in this study shared stories of significance to themselves in terms of the personal developmental impact from their ASB experience, in comparison to their peers they are highly civically engaged individuals. Not only did the respondents participate in a substantial amount of service during their undergraduate career, many continue to serve in their current communities and have even chosen career paths that afford them the opportunity to continue to serve, such as non-profit agencies and the medical field. That being said, future research should be conducted with individuals with less service-learning experience to determine whether or not the effects of participation in ASB programs transcend into less extreme service engagements, namely the realm of individuals who participate in one ASB experience, or those with regular participation in short-term service projects, rather than immersion trips. Additionally, such research should delve into the discrepancy between effects on participants from service-learning experiences varying by engagement and immersion levels. Accordingly, this research would afford a deeper, more holistic understanding of service-learning experiences on a varied demographic of participants. In this sense, this future research could answer the concerns of the deficit of literature surrounding the specific contexts of service-learning that lead to reported outcomes (Kiely, 2005) as data would then exist to navigate the variance between participant experience based on depth and type of engagement.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

Through discussions with the respondents, as well as analysis of the data, a few suggestions for practice were revealed. This section will focus on discussing the implications for practice revealed through this research, as well as on recommendations for implementation.

6.5.1 Extended Participant Reflection

As discussed in the literature review, there is a lack of understanding of the long-term participant effects of participating in an ASB trip. This is connected to the fact that there is little opportunity for practitioners to engage with participants months, or even years, out of the service experience to gauge the long-term effects of their participation. This lack of longitudinal data also signifies a lack of opportunities for participants to formally unpack their experience and reflect on their meaning-making process after having participated, as most ASB experiences call for reflection and debriefing sessions during the trip itself, as well as immediately after the experience. Niehaus and Rivera (2016) explain that the most noted component of a “quality service-learning” program is reflection, as written and oral group and individual debriefing often facilitate the development of outcomes for participants (p. 346).

After dialoguing with respondents for this study, it became evident that they appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their undergraduate service experience and assess the impact that their participation had on them at the time of participation, as well as on their current life. After sharing their own stories, they asked questions about their trip mates, wondering aloud what they were up to and whether or not they shared the same sentiments as them in regard to the trip and its lasting effects on them. After conducting this narrative inquiry, it is evident that the answer is

both yes and no, as some respondents spoke of the trips fondly, attributing their civic development to their participation, while other respondents did not place as much, if any, significance on their ASB experience. Moreover, after I thanked them for having participated, after the interview had concluded, each respondent subsequently thanked me for the opportunity to share their story and reflect on their past life experience.

Based on the positive feedback from respondents, the enlightening experience I also had in reflecting upon my own experience with the program, as well as on the excitement and enthusiasm projected throughout the discussions, I am recommending that practitioners take the time to extend their reflection periods for ASB trips for both the participants and themselves. The traditional reflection process, either occurring during or immediately after service (Bringle & Hatcher, 2003), is still helpful for participants to unpack their experience while they are navigating the process of adjusting to life back on campus. However, this study's interpretations suggest that through long-term reflection opportunities a richer understanding of the meaning the ASB trips hold for participants, as well as recommendations and suggestions for change in addition to insights into highly beneficial trip components, are obtained. Therefore, regular reflections, even less-formal reconnection meetings and/or socials should occur throughout participants' undergraduate career to allow for additional dialogue and reflection in the long-term post-experience. By incorporating continued reflection, practitioners could provide participants continued development of knowledge, skills, and cognitive capabilities (Eyler, 2002), thus better enabling them to navigate complex social issues, further developing themselves as civically minded and culturally aware citizens.

6.5.2 Interactive Community Agency Partner

As mentioned in the analysis chapter, respondents appreciated their time spent alongside community members. Not only did they find working alongside community members on a project to be rewarding, as they were able to discuss the specifics of the project, as well as come to learn the impact it would have on the community and the individual, but they also enjoyed the relational aspect of their service-learning experience. All of the included narratives noted the substantial amount of meaning they placed on being afforded the opportunity to get to know someone from a culture different than their own. Respondents spoke of the power inherent in the conversations with individuals from the community in which they discussed the social issues present within their town. Respondents felt that reading about and discussing the social issues present within the community were not as eye-opening as having a personal conversation with someone who has seen and personally experienced those concerns.

Moreover, the learning that occurred due to interactions with community members was not limited to social and economic issues, it also allowed students to push past their comfort zones to get to know someone, and a culture, which they were unfamiliar with. This act of engaging in regular dialogue with community members afforded participants the opportunity to border-cross, rather than to simply observe. By working alongside these community members, eating with them in their homes, listening to them as they shared their stories of challenges and struggles, students were able to have a first-hand experience in a community outside of their own, while being forced to confront social issues, as well as any pre-conceived notions they may have held in regard to individuals or communities.

Due to the richness these interactions afford, I am recommending that practitioners work to create partnerships with community agencies that not only work for, but *with* community

members, engaging them in direct service alongside student participants so that students are afforded the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the community. By carefully vetting partner service programs, staff structures, available resources, and service areas, practitioners can determine whether their ASB goals align with the agency's service-learning program and structure. As agency partners mobilize community members in service and allow homeowners to help manage their housing rehabilitation projects, agencies are not only fostering a cooperative structure, but they are also fostering the mutually beneficial environment, which is important to service-learning initiatives. (Howard, 2001). Therefore, by purposefully selecting a community agency partner practitioners are able to better position their ASB trips as meaningful and engaging, as they work to incorporate increased amounts of community member interactions, thereby providing students with ample opportunities to engage with others and challenge their previous understandings of social issues and different communities.

6.5.3 Alumni Accessibility

As described in the analysis chapter, the respondents in this study were highly engaged as undergraduate students. They participated in a minimum of two alternative spring break trips, as well as various other service-learning opportunities through their various courses and club affiliations. However, in describing their current levels of engagement with direct service, several respondents spoke of a lack of access to service opportunities post-graduation.

All of the respondents reported a current level of civic engagement, typically through philanthropic and advocacy initiatives. Four respondents who are currently employed also spoke to their chosen careers, in both the non-profit and medical fields, as their outlet for community service post-graduation. However, while these individuals felt that they were civically engaged,

some also acknowledged a lack of formalized service opportunities available to them as a graduate, and spoke of a desire to serve in the capacity in which they once did as an undergraduate student. Chuckie explained this struggle to find service opportunities after graduating, stating, “I don’t belong to a lot of groups outside of college that readily welcome people to come and do those things, you know organize those things, to go see and serve other people.”

Knowing that the graduates who were once civically engaged students are still seeking out service opportunities, I recommend that practitioners establish ways for alumni to engage in service opportunities. Based on the commentary from this study’s participants, initiatives that afford opportunities for former ASB participants to serve with one another post-graduation would be well received. In addition, I believe the dynamic between alumni and current students would afford an opportunity for rich reflection and dialogue during a service experience, as alumni engagement aids in the development of more engaged and supportive students (Daniel, Bellani, & Marshall, n.d.), and, therefore, I suggest that service initiatives for current and past students to engage in service with one another be implemented into institutional service initiatives.

6.6 CONCLUSION

Service-learning has been argued to increase participants’ inclination to serve and academic achievement (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989). Often, institutions of higher learning implement service-learning initiatives to increase students’ sense levels of civic responsibility, as well as to satisfy institutional initiatives surrounding civic mission and goals. One common program type

that institutions implement to satisfy these goals are alternative spring breaks. However, these short-term immersion service trips for college students are understudied as far as service-learning initiatives go (Ivory, 1997; Jones, Robbins, & LePeau, 2011; Rhoads & Neururer, 1998), and, therefore, there is little indication of the larger context of the service experience and its subsequent participant outcomes (Jones, Robbins, & LePeau, 2011).

This research study addressed this gap in both researcher and practitioner understanding of ASBs, shedding light onto the participant meaning-making experience. Through the use of a conceptual framework grounded in John Dewey's theory of experiential education, in which experience and social situations inform one's understanding of the world in which they live, and Henry Giroux's theory of border-crossing, wherein individuals are challenged and ultimately developed by their movement between both literal and figurative borders, this study was able to examine the ways in which participants in an ASB trip develop a sense of cultural sensitivity, and a level of civic mindedness to reveal an ultimate status of a civically responsible citizen.

Giroux (1992) argued that border-crossing decenters students as they "remap," "shifting the parameters of place, identity, and power" (p.72). While Giroux (1991) speaks of this occurrence with a sense of immediacy, calling for spaces for students to dialogue during the border-crossing process in order to engaged with their personal narratives and the border-crossing experience to assess "consistencies and contradictions" in their perceptions of others (p.75), this study challenges Giroux's understanding of time by highlighting the individual intricacies of understanding oneself within a larger cultural narrative. As this study's narratives show, sometimes this process of meaning-making is immediate, following Giroux's process. However, sometimes the individuals' reflection and subsequent understanding of one's place, power, and privilege comes years after the experience, or perhaps in some instances as the

dropped narratives show, the connection, or understanding, is never made. In this sense, this study provided an opportunity for individuals to share their stories as Giroux called for, reflecting on their personal development in terms of civic and cultural mindedness while on the trip, as well as confirming and critically engaging their experience as an adult post-trip. This study, therefore, shows the long-term effects of border-pedagogy, encouraging ongoing dialogue and reflection surrounding the experience and one's meaning-making process surrounding their participation.

In assessing the individual narratives, as well as the overall themes which carried on from participant to participant, this study utilized the Wheel of Civic Responsibility (Figure 4) to assess individual respondents' attainment of the components of an engaged citizenship, while also determining the ways in which the institutional ASB program fostered said components to generate the development of civically responsible citizens out of program participants. In doing so, the data showed ASB trips to be not only successful in challenging students in their perspectives and pre-conceived notions during the trip, but also in maintaining sense of civic mindedness post-graduation. The respondents spoke of continued reflection and assessment of social issues, as well as of individual social capital in regard to power and privilege. Respondents attributed their participation in the trip to the development of their levels of civic knowledge, civic skills, civic identity, and cultural sensitivity post-graduation.

Based on these interpretations, it has become evident that ASB trips have not only immediate effects on participants, but also have the ability to potentially foster long-term effects on individuals in both the personal and civic realms. Therefore, this study has implications for not only participants in ASB trips, but also for institutions of higher learning as to how they can best implement ASB programs, captivate ASB participants, and engage with and acknowledge

the development of participants once they finish their ASB experience and ultimately graduate. In this sense, this study opens the door to future research on the long-term effects of service-learning on participants, highlighting the rich data that can be retrieved through a narrative account given by the participants themselves.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT SOLICITATION EMAIL

Subject: Seeking Participants for a Study on Alternative Spring Breaks

Hello, my name is Jessica Mann. I am a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh in the Administration and Policy Studies Department of the School of Education. I am conducting research on alternative spring breaks, and I am inviting you to participate because you were a student participant in an alternative spring break program during your undergraduate college career.

Participation in this research includes a one-on-one interview with myself about your service experience as well as your perceptions related to its effects on you. Participation in the interview should take under two hours to complete. A consent document has been attached to this email to better describe the study, the collection of the information you will provide, and any associated benefits to your participation.

Upon reading the attachment, if you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at 724-816-7617 or jl318@pitt.edu.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I greatly appreciate it.

Best,

Jessica Mann

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTORY CONSENT SCRIPT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The purpose of the study is to learn more about the transformative experiences of students who participated in an Alternative Spring Break program. This one-on-one interview will last roughly 90 minutes. All participants must be 18 years of age or older. If you agree to participate, I will ask you questions about your experience of participating in the Alternative Spring Break as well as your perceptions of how that participation affected you.

There is no direct compensation or benefits to participating in this study. In addition, there are no foreseeable risks associated with this project.

This interview will be audio recorded. However, the records of this study will be kept private and confidential—your responses will be anonymous and therefore not identifiable in any way. All data will be kept under lock and key or in password protected files.

You are welcome to share as much or as little as you wish. If you experience significant discomfort, you may leave the interview at any time.

This study is being conducted by Jessica Mann, who can be reached at 724-816-7617 or jlm318@pitt.edu, if you have any questions.

If you wish to contact the University of Pittsburgh's Institutional Review Board (IRB) about questions or concerns related to this study, they can be reached at 412-383-1480 or irb@pitt.edu.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTION ROUTE

- 1) Tell me a little bit about your current self?
 - a. Age
 - b. Career/Education
 - c. Hobbies

- 2) Describe your undergraduate self for me?
 - a. Involvements: clubs, organizations, service, etc.
 - b. Major
 - c. Hobbies

- 3) Tell me about the Alternative Spring Break Program you participated in?
 - a. What was its purpose?
 - b. What was your reason for participating? What did you hope to gain?
 - c. Where did you travel? Site Partner? Work details?

- 4) Think back to your participant experience; is there any event(s) that stand out? Can you describe them for me?
 - a. What about experiences with community members?

- 5) How did you feel after you got back from your alternative break program trip?
 - a. About yourself
 - b. About your service
 - c. About the world/community you live in
 - d. About your institution

- 6) How do your views about yourself, service and the world now compare?

- 7) Looking back on your experience now, how do you feel about your participation in the ASB experience?
 - a. Positive? Negative? Why?
 - b. Personal outcomes/impact

- 8) How do you currently define diversity
 - a. How does this differ from your understanding of diversity when you participated in the alternative spring break program
- 9) How did this ASB experience affect your ability to work with individuals from different backgrounds?
- 10) How do you currently define service
 - a. How does this differ from your understanding of service when you participated in the alternative spring break program
 - b. How have your tendencies to serve changed since your ASB experience?
- 11) Can you describe your current level of civic engagement?
 - a. Can you tell me how this level has changed since your ASB experience?
- 12) Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in the alternative spring break program?

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT MEMBER CHECKING EMAIL

Subject: Thanks for the Interview—Please Review!

Hello xx,

I hope this email finds you well. Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me about your experience with the Alternative Spring Break program. I have attached a transcript of our conversation. If you feel that you have been quoted in error, have additional comments to add, or would like to discuss something in greater detail, please let me know. If I do not hear from you by xx,xx 2016 I will assume that you agree with the document and have found no errors in the transcription, and therefore, have no changes to make or comments to add.

If you have any other questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to email me. Thank you again for your time--I greatly appreciate your willingness to help me with my study.

Best,

Jess Mann

APPENDIX E

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTION ROUTE

1. Describe your initial thoughts about the interview transcript and my initial interpretation.
2. Can you explain if there is anything significant missing from the document?
3. Can you explain whether there is anything in the document that you disagree with? Or have concerns about?
4. Is there anything else, based on your overall experience with the study, that you wish to be added to the document or shared with me?

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