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PEAC 325-01

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Experiential Learning, Experiential Leading: A Trip into Alternative Service Breaks

What do I plan to accomplish?

**History of ASB**—The title of my project, “Experiential Learning, Experiential Leading: A Trip into Alternative Service Breaks” is prescriptive in what the mission of my efforts is and descriptive in the accomplishments I plan to realize. For this assignment, I am implementing an alternative service break (also known as an ASB trip) to Washington D.C. over the winter break. The Alternative Service Break program (known informally as ASB) at the University of Louisville has been around since the late 1990s, providing the opportunity for students to engage with different social justice topics in an immersive environment. Currently, I serve as the Co-Director of the program, engaging students in participating and leading these immersion trips. In May, I decided that I wanted to bring my passion for bringing about positive change surrounding the topic of homelessness and the intersection with mental illness to fruition, electing to take on the voluntary responsibility of organizing and implementing my own ASB as a trip leader with the ASB program serving as my organization sponsor.

**The goal of ASB**—The goal of this ASB is rooted in the mission statement, “By engaging students in hands-on direct service, ASB's allow individuals to reflect on the impact they can have on communities. The idea of ASB places a heavy emphasis on critical thinking and reflection, turning a passion for volunteering and "doing" into a lifelong commitment to civic engagement.” (ASB Board Manual, UofL) This trip will be an immersion into the city’s

culture while serving the social justice topic of homelessness and the intersection with mental health and illnesses, an issue that I have a deeply personal connection with. In line with alternative service break values, we will make it a mission to accommodate the community instead of them accommodating us, living as simply as possible and asking the organizations we serve what they want from us. This trip will encourage the participants to use the experiences and education they have gained while on the trip and in the pre-trip process and bring it back to their own communities, especially the Louisville community, to exact positive change. This project will serve to influence change in our participants by engaging them in social justice work and becoming active citizens through educational and experiential opportunities. Through this project, I hope to make a difference in the lives of the students that participate, the communities that we serve, and in myself. Through service and living in solidarity with the population we will be serving, I hope to set an example of practicing positive peace.

**Why this particular trip**—When questioning why this particular trip, I am brought back to the phrase “think global, act local”. ASB is unique in that we think global and act local through bringing the local to the global stage, providing our participants with a direct experience with global initiatives in order to prompt local action. I chose this particular trip because I believed Washington D.C. would provide the best atmosphere to accomplish the immersive component of the ASB, especially given the social justice topic.

### Who

**Am I working with?** —There are many partners that I am grateful to have that have made a complicated project such as this feasible. Acting within the organization of Alternative Service Breaks (ASB), my fellow Co-Director and the ASB leadership board provide support with ideas and resources. ASB operates as a program within the larger organization of Engage

Lead Serve Board (ELSB), which is a branch of the Student Government Association (SGA). ELSB provides the platforms through which I posted applications for the trip and recruited participants. The Office of Student Involvement (OFSI) was also an essential partner for my project because that where ASB is advised. Pam Curtis is the director of the OFSI and also serves as my advisor for this project. She is the advisor for ASB and is specifically helping me coordinate this trip. There are certain university policies that I cannot meet on my own, so Pam helps ensure that this project meets university requirements and is the best possible experience for the participants I have screened for this immersion trip.

**Allies**—Wellspring, A Wider Circle, Martha's Table, THRIVE DC—Along with my partners, there are several allies whom I could have not made this project a reality without the help from. These allies are comprised of the non-profit organizations in Louisville and Washington D.C. that are essential to the education and service components of this project. Wellspring is a non-profit in Louisville that aids in treatment and housing of individuals suffering from severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia. Wellspring opened their doors and allowed my team to provide several hours of service on a Saturday morning, performing tasks such as cleaning and heavy lifting. When we are in Washington D.C., the allies that we will be serving will be essential to the mission of ASB and of my project's intentions. A Wider Circle, Martha's Table, and THRIVE DC are all non-profits in Washington D.C. that focus on the social justice topic of homelessness and the intersection with mental illness. Utilizing the network of ASB programs across the country advised by a non-profit organization called BreakAway, I discovered these organizations and their commitment to facilitating alternative service break experiences such as this one. When I reached out to all of the organizations above, I was very open with the capacities of my participants, what I want them to learn, and our availabilities.

These organizations provided me with the direction I needed to best prepare our participants for service, providing me with lists of tasks that they urgently needed help with during the holiday season.

**Participants**—Simply, this includes 12 students, 1 staff member, and myself. Perhaps the most essential aspect of “who” are the participants themselves. The main objective of this project is to provide an experience for motivated students at the University of Louisville to be exposed to a social justice topic, avenues through which conflict and areas of violence are mitigated and treated through acts of negative peace, and ways that positive peace is created through active citizenship. A recognition of this project is that in some ways my participants are treating the symptoms instead of the cause. However, I believe exposure to the symptoms is an important step in becoming motivated to treat the cause. Through the first-hand experience with these issues combined with educational components and reflection, the mission of ASB is to engage participants with the symptoms and educate them about the causes so that they can better prepare themselves to become more involved in their own communities and create proactive means of bettering their communities—exactng positive peace.

**Other groups involved that can help me succeed**—Other groups that are aiding in the success of this project include the housing where we will be staying, a local hostel in Washington D.C. who utilizes the funds garnered from their hostel fees in order to provide programming for battling homelessness and other problems that face the Washington D.C. community. This hostel is called First Trinity Hostel, operating as an extension of First Trinity Lutheran Church. Not only will this organization be providing my team with housing, but they will also allow us to live within our means and leave as little of a footprint as possible on

Washington D.C. to maximize the impact our time there has on the community and on our participants.

**Am I working for?** —The ages or groups focused on for this project are people experiencing homelessness and housing security and the organizations connected to it which also deal with food insecurity, food deserts. These individuals are located in Louisville and in Washington D.C. The focuses range from younger individuals to the elderly, mostly centered on those individuals who face housing complications as a result of their mental illness or in strong connection with mental illness. A unique component of this project is that I am also working for the participants that will be going on the ASB trip. By creating this experience, I hope to engage them in thoughtful conversations and reflection that will allow them to grow personally and practice efforts of positive and negative peace.

Where is this symbolically and socially important?

**Why go to Washington, D.C.?** — As I was researching locations for this upcoming ASB trip, I stumbled upon an article titled “D.C. Homelessness Doubles National Average as Living Costs Soar.” Although D.C. doesn’t have the highest homeless population overall of major cities in the United States, D.C. has a unique position of extreme living costs and high rates of individuals experiencing homelessness. A study titled “The U.S. Conference of Mayor’s Report on Hunger and Homelessness” finds that Washington D.C. has the highest rate of homelessness per capita, with 124 homeless people for every 10,000 residents, more than twice the national average (Weiland 2017). Positioned with D.C.’s unique political atmosphere, I believed that this city would provide my participants with the best opportunity to serve and learn from non-profit organizations that are working to combat the effects of the rising cost of livings and this high rate of homelessness.

**Important**—I believe that this project is socially important everywhere, especially in the communities of the participants. By providing opportunities for creating a positive impact on another community, I believe that this project is important to provide these students the tools to internalize the lessons learned while in the ASB trip and bring it back to their own communities.

How will I implement this?

**How will I involve or inform partners?** — My main method of communication for involving partners is through email. I have an official email account through the SGA where I conduct my ASB official business. After acquiring the contact information for the various non-profits, I emailed their respective volunteer coordinators to speak to a representative and set up a time for my group to do service. Through all of this, I kept constant communication with my advisor Pam Curtis and sought updates from these non-profits as the time for the trip progressed.

**Resources on campus?** — Almost all of the resources that I have tapped into have been on campus. Almost all are housed in the Office of Student Involvement, including my advisor Pam Curtis and the Engage Lead Serve Board. Resources also come in the form of my participants, all of whom are students at the university. Finally, the campus provides the resources of recognition and advertising that I utilized to broadcast the application for this ASB trip and recruit participants.

**Timeline for initiating it**—During the month of March I committed as the trip leader and selected the social justice topic of homelessness and mental health. This is where the gears of planning began for the entire ASB trip experience. By April, I confirmed the city of Washington D.C. and booked housing, simultaneously selecting the dates for the trip (December 12<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>). As May approached, I confirmed flight and accommodations for the ABCs, which is a conference that is specialized to train site leaders for alternative service break programs

throughout the country, with this specific conference focusing on housing insecurity. In July I attended the conference, where I gained contacts, notes, and strategies for the non-profit organizations that I wanted to work with while in Washington D.C. As the end of August approached, I began to contact my top choices for service sites, confirming organizations such as A Wider Circle and THRIVE DC. September was a busy point in the timeline for initiating my project, confirming details such as dates for the orientation meetings, booked spaces for meetings, compiled pre-trip materials and created promotional material to the student body, and created the application for going on the trip. September also brought about my decision to further commit myself to this passion by organizing it through the lens of Peace, Justice, and Conflict Transformation for my final project.

Through the month of October beginning on October 1<sup>st</sup>, I released the application, confirmed all service sites, and formed agendas for the orientation meetings. As November approached, the application for the immersion trip closed and I reviewed the applications, selecting a group of students that would be participants in the ASB trip. November 6<sup>th</sup> was our first pre-trip orientation meeting, where the participants all met together for the first time, turned in their deposits for the trip, participated in educational materials such as a brief outline of the topic of homelessness and the concept of active citizenship, and brief training for the pre-trip service at Wellspring. November 17<sup>th</sup> was the pre-trip service at Wellspring, where we had a brief discussion with a representative of Wellspring and learned more about the topic at hand, performing service for the organization as well.

As the rest of the timeline approaches, there will be a final pre-trip orientation on November 29<sup>th</sup> to detail final educational materials and final information about the experience. December 1<sup>st</sup> will be the time where I confirm all bookings and schedules, completing a final



Expected Income				
Source	Amount	6,065 - Amount	Comments	
Participant fees	\$ 2,010.00	\$ 4,055.00	(11x175+85)	
ELSB General Funding	\$ 400.00	\$ 3,655.00	care packages	
Donations/Fundraising	\$ 100.00	\$ 3,555.00	Boograms, etc	
Pam's Budget	\$ 175.00	\$ 3,380.00	1 participant fee	
ASB Gift Account	\$ 3,380.00	\$ -		
	Total:	\$ 6,065.00	\$ -	Deficit

Why is this worth doing?

**The rationale for the goals of the proposed project**—My rationale for this project and the proposed goals is rooted in my involvement with the Alternative Service Break program. I attended my first ASB trip in winter 2017 to Atlanta, Georgia concerning LGBTQ+ rights. I originally attended the trip because I wanted to visit a new city and needed service hours for an organization I was a part of. I was not extremely passionate in civic engagement because I believed that it was solely politics. However, the trip itself completely changed my perspective on civic engagement. It also made me realize that civic engagement takes many forms, including peacebuilding. This experience connected me with the resources and education that I needed to become more active in my local community and to make intentional efforts in creating proactive, positive impacts. Because I had an experience that achieved my proposed goals for my project, my rationale is rooted in the lessons I learned from a similar experience.

**List of expected outcomes and the means to measure them**— The expected outcomes are what I expect the participants to accomplish by the end of the trip, which include: build a network with their community and contribute time to non-profits, develop leadership and teamwork skills, educate themselves on real-world problems and be exposed to different methods of community-based solutions, accommodate the community instead of them accommodating us, and develop a greater sense of active citizenship that will prompt positive peacebuilding. My measurement tools for these expected outcomes are sourced from the training

I received at the BreakAway conference titled the ABCs. The main tool is the exercise of reflection. Each night in Washington D.C., I will lead a guided reflection period to prompt critical thinking about the experiences the participants have had each day and gear the conversations we have towards the active citizen continuum published by BreakAway. This reflection also utilizes the critical thinking framework (“Elements of Thought”) that is used by the University of Louisville. At the end of the immersion trip, participants will be asked to complete an anonymous reflection that will ask about the expected outcomes outlined above and how strongly they felt that those outcomes were met. I will also send a feedback form to each non-profit in order to gauge the level of satisfaction they had with our involvement and if they would like to be a continued partner to the University of Louisville ASB program. This data is utilized after each ASB trip to further strengthen our efforts to create experiential education opportunities and prompt a progression into peacebuilding in the participants’ own communities.

**Explanation of the project’s relationship to Peace Studies**—When considering my project’s relationship to Peace Studies, a quote from anthropologist Margaret Mead comes to mind: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” (Mead) I believe the power in an Alternative Service Break is the cultivation of such a group of committed citizens. Although we do not use terms such as structural and cultural violence in our educational orientation sessions, when I challenge our participants to think about the ingrained systems of inequality in our society and how they affect the lives of those that we serve, they have and continue to gain a greater sense of the bigger system of peace and justice. Through our education, service, and reflection model, I am creating an atmosphere for the participants to move through the stages of the active citizen continuum. In this, they have the opportunity to practice negative peace through the reactive

service that we complete for the non-profits in both cities and positive peace through the lessons that we will learn on this trip to develop conscious practices to be proactive and help our own communities once we leave Washington D.C.

### Reflection—problems, strengths, and weaknesses

**Needs analysis of the issues and of current strategies being used to address—** One of the main issues centering this project is the implications of whether my good intentions will make things worse. As I strategize my approach to this issue, I reference Mary B. Anderson's "Can My Good Intentions Make Things Worse?" essay. This includes being alert for unintended consequences and the potential consequences of well-intentioned outsiders (Anderson). This group of good intentions may involuntarily make the lives of those we are serving worse, for example by asking invasive questions or not performing our service tasks correctly. To address this issue, I am making intentional efforts to incorporate several trainings and discussions centered around respect for those experiencing homelessness and training on the types of service the different non-profits in Washington D.C. have asked us to do. Many of the non-profits have sent me orientation materials that I have gone over with the participants as well. I have also created intention efforts to address the consequences of our presence and include the participants in an active discussion on how to mitigate our reinforcement of the conflict (Anderson 227). Although I cannot guarantee the success of these strategies until after the trip, so far I believe the participants have responded positively and have made efforts to also take this mindfulness into account.

The fine line that will be towed in regards to "voluntourism" is also a major issue concerning this project, where voluntourism is defined as "a portmanteau of 'volunteer tourism' in which travelers do volunteer work in the community where they're vacationing." (Cruz-

Sanchez) Although voluntourism isn't inherently a bad thing and can be beneficial, there are dangers in this without appropriate preparation and supervision (Cruz-Sanchez). I have been working to strategize this experience for my participants, making sure we are not draining the local resources of our hosts in D.C. and adequately compensating/serving them, ensuring adequate supervision when we are performing the service, and making sure there is a clear line of communication between myself and the community, making sure that what labor we are performing is of the needs of the community instead of what we think the community needs.

**Analysis of connectors and dividers—** Our campus community has provided the environment for a shared passion for self-improvement and bettering oneself. This community is the biggest connector in that it has prompted the kind of conversations that I will have with the participants of the ASB trip that will help propel the objectives of my project and encourage active citizenship. Another connector for my project is the importance of helping others. This intrinsic value and motivation is one that many people share, and being given an opportunity to exercise this motivation in a safe and positive environment will connect all of us on this ASB trip to gain as much from this experience as possible.

A major divider would be the negative connotations surrounding the mission of Alternative Service Breaks. Although potential issues of negative voluntourism are present, there is still a negative connotation with the way that ASB carries out its mission (including the “living in solidarity” piece that may not be the level of comfort many are used to—including packing our own meals and staying in hostel-styling housing). Many people are not familiar with the ASB model or even know what an ASB trip is, which also poses as a similar divider creating confusion and disagreement (even despite my efforts to make the ASB program more well-known). A final divider is the amount of time and resources needed to carry out this project. This

project has taken up a large portion of the recent months of my life and will continue to take time until I see it to completion. Although I have been conscious of making this trip as economical as possible, I still have to recognize that this is a significant portion of my time and of the university's resources to put it into action. This may cause contentions around the justification of these resources, and even the strain of my own time commitment to ensuring the success of this project.

**Explanation of potential obstacles and strategies to overcome them**—Although the list of potential obstacles surrounding this project could go on for pages, there are a few notable possibilities that I will need to consider to make this ASB trip a success. One is the contingency of plans made in D.C. I have to be conscious of the strain on the non-profits that have invited my participants and myself into their organizations to serve and that these plans could change last minute. To overcome this obstacle, I have remained in constant communication with my contacts for each organization, being given a personal phone number and address for each organization to use in a time crunch. Another potential obstacle is always the possibility of accidents or weather complications. Although there can never be a foolproof strategy for such situations, having a strong support system at the university in case of an emergency and being mindful of information such as the weather forecast can help overcome them nonetheless.

**Predecessors**—I am proud to stand in an exhaustive history of Alternative Service Breaks here at the University of Louisville and across the country. The Louisville ASB program has existed since the early 1990s, successfully executing winter break, spring break, and summer break trips over the years. There are also ASB programs at universities across the country that I have learned from and connected with through the non-profit BreakAway. These predecessors have allowed me to learn from past mistakes, successes, and areas for improvement. Through

these predecessors, I have become more prepared to successfully execute my passion for homelessness and the intersection with mental health in a city that will provide my participants with the best resources in order to become more active citizens and practice examples of positive and negative peace in their own communities as a result of this project.

#### References

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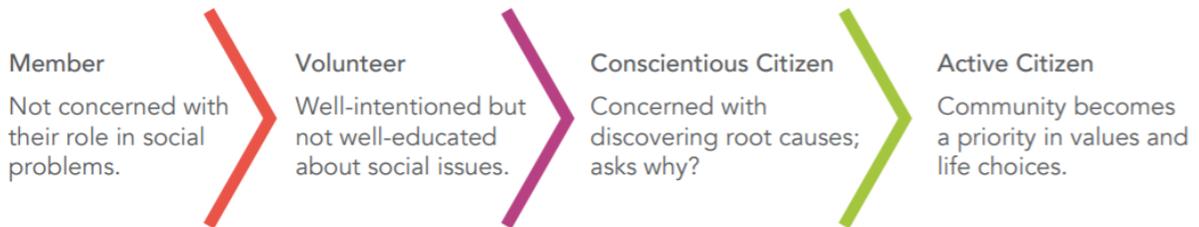
Additional Materials:

ASB Washington D.C. Schedule:

Alternative Service Breaks							
Winter 2018, Washington DC							
Schedule							
TIME	12-Dec	12/13 THURSDAY	12/14 FRIDAY	12/15 SATURDAY	12/16 SUNDAY	12/17 MONDAY	18-Dec
6:30 AM		Brekfast on the road	Breakfast on the road				
7:00 AM							
7:30 AM		Thrive DC	Thrive DC				
8:00 AM	Load vans				Breakfast	Breakfast	On the road
8:30 AM	On the road						
9:00 AM							
9:30 AM							
10:00 AM				A Wider Circle		Tour of the capitol	
10:30 AM							
11:00 AM	Lunch				Lunch		Lunch
11:30 AM							
12:00 PM		Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	A Wider Circle	Lunch	
12:30 PM							
1:00 PM		Martha's Table		A Wider Circle		Activities:	
1:30 PM						MLK Memorial	
2:00 PM	Break					Lincoln Memorial	Break
2:30 PM						African Am. Musuem	
3:00 PM						Congress	
3:30 PM						Smithsonian	
4:00 PM						US National Arboretum	
4:30 PM			College visit?			National Xmas Tree	
5:00 PM	Dinner	Dinner	Early Dinner			Art muesums?	
5:30 PM				Dinner	Dinner	Other?	Arrive in Louisville
6:00 PM						Dinner	
6:30 PM			Georgetown				
7:00 PM			GLOW				
7:30 PM		Reflection		Reflection	Reflection	Final Reflection	
8:00 PM			Reflection			and bonding activity	
8:30 PM							
9:00 PM	Arrive DC						
KEY:							
In the vans							
Reflection and activities							
Meals							
THRIVE DC Martha's Table A Wider Circle							
Excursion / alternatives to service							

BreakAway: Active Citizen Continuum and Community Service Triangle

## The Active Citizen Continuum



**Pre-Break Transformation**  
 Prepare students for on-site experience and provide initial education about site-specific social issues.

- ▶ Education, orientation, and training
- ▶ Pre-break direct service
- ▶ Preflection: goals and expectations
- ▶ Icebreakers and group building

**On-Break Transformation**  
 Encourage participants to look critically at the root causes of social issues and challenge them to evaluate the role they have in the community.

- ▶ Strong direct service
- ▶ Ongoing education
- ▶ Community involvement
- ▶ Daily reflection tied to direct service and social issue education

**Post-Break Transformation**  
 Help participants find avenues for continued community involvement and support their efforts to take action locally.

- ▶ Organize or join small groups of thoughtful, committed citizens
- ▶ Continued education
- ▶ Reflection about reorientation process
- ▶ Post-break direct service, advocacy, and philanthropy
- ▶ Life choices that benefit the community



[www.alternativebreaks.org](http://www.alternativebreaks.org)

Education	Reflection	Direct Service
Without reflection and direct service, learning... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is hollowly academic</li> <li>• Can become rote</li> <li>• Can lead to cynicism &amp; complacency with the status quo</li> </ul>	Without direct service and learning, reflection... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is shallow/empty</li> <li>• Feels overly touchy feely</li> <li>• Provides no context or paths for effective follow-up</li> </ul>	Without reflection and learning, direct service... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is frustrating or disillusioning</li> <li>• Can reinforce hurtful stereotypes</li> <li>• Can exploit the community</li> </ul>

