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## Q&A

### *How did you become involved in doing research?*

I became involved with research through volunteering for Alternative Breaks. I truly enjoyed my break experiences and when the opportunity came up to become an intern with the organization I applied for it. I was appointed as the research intern and worked on this project during the spring 2012 semester.

### *How is the research process different from what you expected?*

I did not expect to do so much web research initially. It was time consuming and attention to details was crucial.

### *What is your favorite part of doing research?*

Obtaining the results and being able to learn about other programs, the way they function, and the trips they organize. The sense of fulfillment and achievement when the research was completed, as well as the knowledge that the work done will be able to benefit the program is also my favorite part of doing research.

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# Alternative Breaks: A Study on Risk Management and Safety Policies

*Alyssa Ong*

Safety and liability issues have always been a concern of the Alternative Breaks program at the University of Kansas. To promote participant safety and to protect the program from litigation, this research was done to gain a deeper understanding of what other University's Alternative Breaks programs have been doing. This research was done specifically to find out if there were other additional protections and steps implemented

by other programs that could serve as a good reference with regards to participant safety and litigation for the Alternative Breaks program at the University of Kansas.

All 32 of the Alternative Breaks programs at the public Association of American Universities (AAU) were chosen as the subjects for this research. A web search was done on the 32 Alternative Breaks programs and the results were analyzed. Six Alternative Breaks programs were

selected for more in-depth research. The six programs were chosen based on their similarities to the program at the University of Kansas, the location of the universities, the size of the universities and the types of trips that the programs run. The size of the university had to be similar to the University of Kansas, the structure of the program had to be somewhat similar, and trips were organized over winter, spring, or summer breaks.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The six Alternative Breaks programs chosen for in-depth interviews were from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the University of Indiana-Bloomington, the University of California-Berkeley, the University of Missouri, the University of Maryland, and Michigan State University. An email was sent to the Alternative Breaks director or staff advisor of these programs with the option of doing an email interview or a phone interview. Interviews were conducted after receiving the consent from all the programs. The results from the interviews have been recorded in Table 1.

## **RESULTS**

### **Transportation Safety**

There are indeed additional steps that can be taken to promote participant safety during the trips to the sites. Some programs have a policy regarding the number of drivers required for the trips depending on the length of the journey. For trips over 15 hours, each van has to have three drivers. In addition, halfway housing would be provided for trips that are longer than 24 hours. To encourage eligible participants to drive, all drivers receive a \$50 discount on their trip fees. In the event that there are insufficient drivers for a trip, the trip will be cancelled as participant safety is of high concern. The programs also require drivers to submit their driver's license information to the University Risk Management office. Some of the programs run background checks on the drivers and participants to ensure that all of them have good records and the participant's student identification and information are kept on file. Driver training is a requirement for all drivers and one of the programs

has a policy that does not allow any driver to drive for more than four hours at a time. The groups are not allowed to travel from 12am-6am, ensuring adequate rest for the drivers.

### **Housing Safety**

In the context of housing for participants, all the programs take the post-trip evaluations on the housing locations seriously. Participants will not be sent back to housing locations with bad reviews. In addition, participants would not be sent to housing locations in areas with high crime rates.

### **RISK MANAGEMENT**

With regard to risk management, drivers insurance is purchased and some of the programs purchase insurance for participants as well. For programs that run international trips, all participants are required to have insurance. The programs have detailed policies and bylaws. Participants are introduced to those policies during meetings, classes, and also through the participant agreements. Besides, participants are required to provide detailed medical, dietary, and emergency contact information before they are allowed to go on the trips. Some programs also require participants to sign media release forms and an Assumption of Risk and Release from Liability form which includes the University's obligations to participants and the participants' obligations on the trips. To allow the programs to anticipate any problems that might arise on the trips, Site Leaders have to prepare trip proposals that include risk management plans. The participant agreements, waivers, and liability forms of each program are available upon request.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Alternative Breaks program at the University of Kansas has been growing in size over the last few years and more could be done to promote participant safety and the program from litigation. The suggested steps are:

- A detailed policy has to be drafted so the Break Coordinators have a good reference while planning trips.
- Current policies have to be standardized and updated. For example, the length of the trips for it to qualify for halfway housing, and the hours that groups are not allowed on the road.
- Detailed participant agreements should be drafted. The participant agreement has to be specific and include the University and the program's expectation of the participant's conduct, and the behaviors that will result in dismissal from the trips. The participant agreement should also include the participant's acknowledgement of the policies of the program to have proof that the participants are clear about the policies and agree to abide by them.
- Waiver forms should be revised. The liability waiver should contain more clauses.
- A media release form should be drafted so that the program can legally use and publish photographs, videos, blogs of participants for editorial trade, advertising, and any other purpose.
- Program policies should be introduced to participants during the first class.
- Attendance for the first class should be mandatory for all participants to be informed about the Alternative Breaks policies.
- A copy of the policies, the participant agreement, and the

waiver forms should be in the Site Leader Packets so that it can serve as a resource to participants during the trips.

- Break Coordinators and the Co-Directors should build a good rapport with all participants. This would give participants the confidence in confiding in the Break Coordinators and Co-Directors should problems arise during the trip. The earlier the Coordinators or Co-Directors learn about a problem, the faster it can be solved and participants would

not be left in an uncomfortable situation for too long.

There are other additional protections and steps implemented by other programs that could serve as a good reference with regards to participant safety and litigation for the Alternative Breaks program at the University of Kansas. The Alternative Breaks program at the University of Kansas can be more proactive to improve the safety of participants and risk management. The suggestions regarding risk management should be taken into serious consideration.

## **CONCLUSION**

A continuing relationship should be maintained with all the programs that were interviewed so that the Alternative Breaks program at the University of Kansas would be able to learn more from them on a yearly basis. All that being said, the program would not be able to function and expand to benefit more students without funding and more research could be done in that area.

**INTERVIEW COMPILATION, TABLE 1**

	<b>University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign</b>	<b>University of Indiana Bloomington</b>	<b>UC Berkeley</b>	<b>University of Missouri</b>	<b>University of Maryland, College Park</b>	<b>Michigan State University</b>
<b>Location</b>	Champaign and Urbana, Illinois	Bloomington, Indiana	Berkeley, California	Columbia, Missouri	College Park, Maryland	East Lansing, Michigan
<b>Size of Student Body</b>	46,759	40,000	36,142	33,000	38,000	47,131
<b>AB Website</b>	<a href="http://www.illinoisasb.org/">http://www.illinoisasb.org/</a>	<a href="http://kelley.iu.edu/civic/Involvement/AltBreak/page23459.html">http://kelley.iu.edu/civic/Involvement/AltBreak/page23459.html</a>	<a href="http://publicservice.berkeley.edu/alternativebreaks">http://publicservice.berkeley.edu/alternativebreaks</a>	<a href="http://asb.missouri.edu">http://asb.missouri.edu</a>	<a href="http://thestamp.umd.edu/lcsl/involvement/alternative_breaks/">http://thestamp.umd.edu/lcsl/involvement/alternative_breaks/</a>	<a href="http://asb.msu.edu">http://asb.msu.edu</a>
<b>Year Established</b>	1989	1988	2001	1991	2006	1991
<b>Seasons</b>	Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer, Weekend (2 days, 1 night)	Winter, Spring, Weekend	Spring	Winter, Spring	Winter, Spring, Summer, Graduate trips	Winter, Spring
<b>No. of Trips/Season</b>	26-30	16-20	10	26	27	20-25
<b>No. of Participants/year</b>	400-460	112-122	120	300	300-350	250-300
<b>Cost of trips</b>	\$225-\$275 (Drivers and Site Leaders pay \$50 less)	\$250-\$1500	\$200-\$450	\$200 (the rest of the money comes from fundraising)	\$225-\$2100	\$245-\$1200
<b>Pre/post-trips classes/meetings</b>	Orientation, fundraising, pre-break service project, Coffee talk, trip meetings, post-break service trip, completing surveys	Orientation, training, Info sessions	A course on service learning (2 credit hours). 1 specific class for each trip.	Meetings and participation in fundraising activities	Mini-break before the trip, social meeting, individual trip fundraising activities. Graduate trip has academic component, but the graduate students will not be given academic credit unless they get consent from their respective departments.	No class for credit. Meetings.
<b>University Organization</b>	YMCA (Independent of the University)	Kelley School of Business, Civic Leadership Development	Cal Corps Public Service Center	Center for Leadership Development and Community Involvement	Leadership and Community Service Learning	Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement (CSLCE)
<b>Affiliations</b>	None	Break Away and Outreach 360	None	Break Away	Break Away	Break Away and Outreach 360
<b>501I3 Status</b>	Yes (Not their own, the program uses the code of the YMCA status)	No	Yes (Using the federal code of Cal Corps)	No	No	Yes (Using the code from CSLCE)

	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	University of Indiana Bloomington	UC Berkeley	University of Missouri	University of Maryland, College Park	Michigan State University
<b>Student-run?</b>	Yes	Yes and No. Students seem to be running it but there is a staff member on board.	Yes and No. Students run the program but they work with a few staff members.	Yes	No	East Lansing, Michigan Yes
<b>Staff</b>	Has a full time staff member from the YMCA who oversees and coordinates all YMCA programs	A Director for CLD overseeing the program, and a Director for AB that works 20 hours a week. In the past, the AB Director worked full time.	A staff supervisor of Cal Corps, and other staff members work with the AB committee to ensure that they are fulfilling major checkpoints as a Cal Corps program.	A staff advisor helps organize paperwork, facilitate van rentals etc	5 Staff members: a full time coordinator, a graduate student coordinator (20 hours/week), 3 undergraduate student coordinators (10 hours /week).	A staff advisor from the CSLCE works to oversee the program and to coordinate all travel arrangements. Works 10 hours/week on ASB.
<b>Funding</b>	Fundraising, grants. Student Organization Resource fees (student optional fee, ASB submits an application every year but have been rejected a few times)	Funding from the IU Foundation, Student Senate, Kelley Business School Student Government, Kelley Impact for Social Impact. Funding for International trips increased this year.	Fundraisers, in-kind donations through the Cal Corps, Student Council, Grants.	Participant fees, donations, University Grant from a special endowment for service organizations from the Office of Student Affairs (\$20,000), and a Kaplan Sponsorship	Fundaisers, university grants, funding from the university (flat budget and separate budget). Scholarship from past participant: Berlage Alternative Spring Break Endowment <a href="http://www.celebratescholarships.umd.edu/celebration/showScholarship.php?main_id=1555">http://www.celebratescholarships.umd.edu/celebration/showScholarship.php?main_id=1555</a>	Participant fees, donations and fundraising
<b>Fundraising</b>	A lot of fundraising done per year (that is where they get their funds for the Maria Soma Scholarship, Maria Soma is the name of the ASB founder)	Student Organizations sell apparel and merchandise at the Kelley Bookstore	Many fundraisers throughout the year.	Each trip does its own fundraising. The 'adopt-a-breaker' letters, caroling at non-student neighborhoods are the most successful methods.	Individual trip fundraising	Adopt-A-Breaker, individual trip fundraisers.
<b>Insurance</b>	None	None	Travel and driver's insurance included	Yes	Insurance for international trips, driver's insurance	Travel insurance for international trips, driver's insurance

	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	University of Indiana Bloomington	UC Berkeley	University of Missouri	University of Maryland, College Park	Michigan State University
<b>Precautions</b>	2 drivers per van if the trip is less than 15 hours, 3 drivers per van for trips more than that. Driving schedule for drivers established before the trip.	Drivers are required to submit their license information with IU's Risk Management office.	Drivers have to go through a proper driver training, Break Leaders have to do a trip proposal with a risk management plan to ensure safety considerations.	Every driver goes through driver training with a certified instructor. No one person can drive for more than 4 hours at a time, no driving between 12am-6am	Background checks for Trip Leaders, And drivers have to go through Driver Training.	Background checks on ALL participants.
<b>Waivers</b>	Participants sign waivers and agree to a set of policies: <a href="http://illinoisasb.org/policies/allpolicies/">http://illinoisasb.org/policies/allpolicies/</a>	Participants sign waivers releasing them from liability. International trip participants have to pay for trips even if there is a last minute cancellation.	Participants fill out Media Release Waivers, Emergency/Medical/Dietary Forms, Liability Waivers, and Participant Agreements.	Participants sign waivers, copies of their Student ID and driver's license are on file, implementing a strict no drugs/alcohol policy.	Participants sign waiver forms and their information (Student ID and License) are on file.	Participants sign waivers and go through policy documents
<b>Other</b>	<p>1. They no longer do international trips because of the cost and there are other organizations within the YMCA that does that.</p> <p>2. They stopped being a part of Break Away because the fees were expensive and they did not use the database that was provided.</p> <p>3. Liability issue: one of the vans ran into a deer. Enterprise replaced the van immediately and the trip went on. Participants could not abstain from alcohol and went to bars/clubs on the trips.</p>	<p>1. They are currently facing problems with domestic trip participants cancelling since they do not have the non-refundable clause on their waiver.</p> <p>2. There is a minimum of 2 male and 2 female students per trip.</p> <p>3. The trips are open to all students, but the Committee members have to be Business School students.</p>	<p>1. Break Leaders have to fill out service reports and have mandatory check-ins throughout the trip.</p> <p>2. The participant fees are highly subsidized.</p> <p>3. Student leaders and break leaders get stipend and money from the Americorps award.</p>	<p>1. Campus police runs background checks on the drivers for free.</p> <p>2. Had two minor crashes last year but the insurance paid for the damage.</p> <p>3. Reason they are with Break Away: Site Leader Retreats and access to other AB programs.</p>	<p>1. One Trip Leader and one Staff Advisor (usually a graduate student) go on each trip to make sure that everything is going well and safety is not compromised.</p> <p>2. All five staff members attend a retreat with Break Away over the summer every year to improve the quality of the program.</p>	<p>1. Money from donations and fundraisers will be returned to participants as a refund.</p> <p>2. Break Away and Outreach 360 affiliations provided a network for the program.</p> <p>3. There have been some legal/liability issues around the alcohol policy and they have taken measures to tighten the policy to reduce risk.</p>
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