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Vacationing for a Cause: Volunteer Ecotourism on Alternative Spring Break

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Vacationing for a Cause
Volunteer Ecotourism on Alternative Spring Break

Amelia Fontein

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science

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ABSTRACT

Volunteer ecotourism and Alternative Spring Break (ASB) are relatively new concepts in the travel and tourism sector, and are rapidly gaining popularity. These programs intend to provide meaningful travel and service experiences to volunteers while providing benefits to communities in the form of environmental or social justice work. However, many lack adequate evaluative measures that take multiple stakeholders’ viewpoints into consideration. This study examines two of UVM’s environmentally focused ASB trips as cases of volunteer ecotourism: one to a wildlife rehabilitation sanctuary and another to a National Seashore. Data collection included interviewing ASB members (directors, leaders, and participants) and host organization staff as well as analyzing post-trip surveys. Qualitative hand coding was the primary data analysis method. The results exhibit that ASB students shared similar expectations for rigorous service work, while host organizations cited more intangible expectations of education and awareness. At the wildlife sanctuary, budget constraints, low capacity to host volunteers and broader organizational challenges impacted meaningfulness and goal fulfillment. The lack of interaction between hosts and students also led to problematic outcomes. At the National Seashore, higher capacity for volunteers, project-based service, and constant interaction between volunteers and hosts provided for more meaningful experiences, and students reported higher incidence of reflection and satisfaction. This research demonstrates that volunteer and host organization expectations along with interaction between volunteers and hosts are important factors in creating meaningful, successful volunteer ecotourism experiences. The research provides action items for improving environmental ASB trips, including adapted preparation processes; improved communication of expectations and goals; inclusion of hosts in post-trip evaluation; and improved documentation and long-term management of UVM ASB. Furthermore, these findings suggest the ASB model provides a unique form of short-term volunteer labor, which might be suited for organizations with greater capacities to absorb and integrate volunteers on a short-term basis.

KEYWORDS: Volunteer tourism, Ecotourism, Volunteer-based Tourism, Service Learning, Alternative Spring Break, University of Vermont, Conservation, Wildlife Rehabilitation, Volunteer Management
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INTRODUCTION

In 2011, I set off to Ecuador as an eager, enthusiastic high school graduate. I had decided to delay my higher education for the purpose of “giving back” and “saving the world.” An intermediary company, Global Routes, facilitated my trip to Ecuador, placed me in a remote township, and provided me with a homestay and a volunteer teaching position at a local elementary school. My goal was to teach English to a class of 30 third graders for three months, and to better the community through exercise classes, mural painting, and art workshops. My time in Ecuador was an amazing, formative period for me; I learned how to speak Spanish, I formed connections with a foreign community, I engaged in cultural exchange, and I reinforced my own confidence and self-esteem. However, a few months later, I began to reflect upon my experience. It turns out that “giving back” and “saving the world” was more complex than I originally presumed. It seemed that my experience had benefitted me much more than it had benefitted the community. In fact, this community probably saw me as another Westerner who would come in September and be gone by December. While I knew that my connections with my host family and the community had been genuine, I was beginning to feel more and more unsettled about my impact in the Ecuadorian community, and what my trip had meant.

As I began my career in higher education at the University of Vermont, I continued to ask these questions about volunteer tourism, but from a different perspective. As an Environmental Studies major, I became intrigued by ecotourism, and the similar controversies around impacts and cultural sensitivity that exist within this sector. By the time I was a senior and choosing a topic for this undergraduate thesis, I knew what I wanted to study. The intersection between volunteer tourism and ecotourism continues to intrigue me, and the newness of this sector (volunteer ecotourism) means that many essential questions have yet to be investigated or answered. I initially struggled with pinning down a method of inquiry and a specific topic for my research; I was so curious and had so many questions. However, I soon realized that the perfect research opportunity existed on my own campus: Alternative Spring Break. This weeklong, immersive, service-oriented experience frequently addresses environmental topics and provides a local case study upon which to base my research.

Volunteer tourism, ecotourism, and Alternative Spring Break all became popularized in the 1980s and 1990s, as tourists began to reject mainstream forms of consumptive, exploitative
travel and search for more sustainable, socially-sensitive solutions (Wearing, 2001). This movement coincided with an initiative to institutionalize volunteerism and community service on college campuses (Campus Compact, 2015). This process led many students to forego the normal sand, sun, and surf spring break and opt for a more socially conscious, community-service-filled week. By the mid-1990s, thousands of students were abandoning the traditional spring break to travel around the U.S. and the world and participate in community service. Thus, the volunteer ecotourism sector and Alternative Spring Break (ASB) were born. Many ASB trips are, in fact, examples of volunteer ecotourism in action. Therefore, the review of the literature will shed light on some of the recent trends and topics in volunteer ecotourism, while also honing in on and exploring the specific entity of ASB.

My intent in researching Alternative Spring Break was to gain an understanding of how both participants and host organizations process and value these experiences. What are the initial goals of the two parties? How is success measured? Are these goals achieved? What are the processes that occur on an ASB trip that generate either successes or failures? My hope was to identify the various factors or interactions that either enhance or degrade a group’s impact on a community, and to then develop a set of recommendations based on these discoveries. My research will used case studies (of two past ASB trips) to characterize and explore environmental ASB experiences. These case studies allowed for in-depth exploration of a trip to a national seashore and second trip to a wildlife rehabilitation center. Through interviews with host organizations, student directors, student trip leaders, and student participants, I gained a deeper understanding of the dynamics and impacts of these types of experiences. I also analyzed post-trip evaluative surveys to triangulate my data. All of my data was analyzed using qualitative hand coding procedures. I worked with UVM’s ASB chapter throughout the research process, and delivered my recommendations to the Director Team at the end of my study.

Much of the literature on volunteer ecotourism remains positive; many authors discuss the personal and developmental benefits that volunteer ecotourism delivers to its volunteers, as well as some of the positive financial, ecological, and personal outcomes for members of host communities. However, in recent years, the literature on volunteer ecotourism has become increasingly critical, pointing out a variety of negative impacts that this type of travel can force upon host communities and destinations. A number of recent studies have put a critical lens to the popular new sector and have identified several degrading economic, sociocultural, and
environmental impacts that volunteer tourism can entail. While some of these concerns do not apply to the ASB experience, many are relevant in analyzing this weeklong service trip experience. The literature on ASB is more limited, and has yet to explore some of the potential negative impacts of the program. Many studies have focused on outcomes and impacts on the volunteers, while few have taken stock of the impacts on hosts. Furthermore, almost no research has been conducted on the specific topic of the environment as it relates to ASB trips. Thus, this study examined ASB in the context of volunteer ecotourism, applying the critical, theoretical framework from volunteer ecotourism on specific examples of ASB trips. The research filled existing gaps in the literature by exploring the challenges and successes faced by environmentally focused ASB programs, as well as the perspectives and goal achievement of hosts. It is my hope that the conclusions and recommendations that came out of this study will allow both ASB chapters and host organizations to more completely fulfill their long-term objectives in the future.

This study identified some interesting and ironic findings about volunteer ecotourism through ASB. By discussing volunteer management and organizational capacity with host organizations, the study concluded that ASB service presents a challenge to many hosts in its weeklong, intense burst of labor. Ironically, it seems that the organizations that can absorb and retain this type of volunteer labor are not always the ones who need extra hands, whereas the hosts who do not have the infrastructure to successfully manage volunteers are the organizations that truly need assistance. Furthermore, the necessity of volunteer-host communication was made clear throughout the research process. The sections that follow will outline the process through which I drew these conclusions. First, I review the relevant literature in the field by defining and exploring the many contexts, praises, and criticisms of volunteer ecotourism. The Methods section then summarizes my research design and implementation. The Results and Discussion sections review my findings and use relevant literature to clarify and explain the data. Finally, the Conclusion section provides a summary of the major findings and offers a detailed list of recommendations to UVM’s ASB Chapter for future trips.
LITERATURE REVIEW

In the 1980s, the tourism industry experienced an enormous shift. As mass tourism exploded in popularity throughout the 20th century, alternative, radical forms of tourism sprang up to counteract this extremely commodified and exploitative industry (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Wearing, 2001). The term mass tourism refers to the most mainstream form of tourism, in which tourists pay for experiences that generally occur outside a local community and their traditional lifestyles (Wearing, 2001). The new, radical tourism categories that opposed mass tourism included: alternative tourism, responsible tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, and volunteer tourism (Callanan & Thomas, 2005).

At the same time, colleges and universities were working to increase volunteer opportunities on their campuses, and the phenomenon of Alternative Spring Break (ASB) emerged as an option for many U.S. college students (Break Away, 2015). This service-oriented trip shared many aspects with the new forms of radical tourism in its opposition of mainstream models and its emphasis on social and environmental issues (Break Away, 2015; Sonmez et al., 2006).

The subsequent decades have seen all of these unique travel sectors grow in popularity and scope. The literature has followed suit, with many studies examining the defining characteristics, impacts, and trends of these various travel experiences. The following literature review will outline the definitions of these sectors, the current trends in the literature, the positive impacts of volunteer ecotourism, various criticisms of this form of travel, and the socio-cultural context that surrounds this sector.

ESSENTIAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Differentiating volunteer tourism, ecotourism, volunteer-based ecotourism, and ASB can be complex. This section will discuss the definitions and origins of the ecotourism, volunteer tourism, volunteer-based ecotourism, and ASB sectors, and how these types of experiences overlap in this study.
Ecotourism Definitions

The ecotourism sector is perpetually maturing, being refined, and experiencing re-conceptualizations (Weaver, 2001). The concept of ecotourism emerged in the early 1980s, and its definition and principles have gradually morphed since then (Weaver, 2001; Weaver & Lawton, 2007). The current definition of ecotourism will vary depending on the source; however, several authors have reached a consensus on some guiding principles of this sector. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as: “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015).

Several authors have echoed TIES in describing the essential concepts of ecotourism as the promotion of nature, sustainable management, and environmental and cultural education (Blamey, 2001; Weaver, 2001). Furthermore, almost all types of ecotourism involve travel from one place to another (Wearing, 2001). Ecotourism is commonly categorized as “alternative” tourism, which opposes and proposes solutions to the frequently destructive tendencies of mass tourism (Orams, 2001). Other authors have proposed spectrums and scales upon which to judge and typify various kinds of ecotourism experiences (Laarman & Durst, 1987; Orams, 2001).

Ecotourism experiences are enormously diverse; these activities could range from visiting a nature museum to helping conduct research on invasive species. Regardless of their differences, most ecotourism experiences share the same benchmarks for excellence: discovery (personal and natural), encounters with the unexpected, and the “opportunity to appreciate the diversity of the natural world and human cultures” (Wearing, 2001. p. 49).

Volunteer Tourism Definitions

Volunteer tourism emerged early in the 20th century and has its roots in the missionary activities of this period (Callanan & Thomas, 2005). As with ecotourism, volunteer tourism (also frequently referred to as “voluntourism”) is still in a stage of adolescence. However, many authors have adopted and utilized Stephen Wearing’s definition of this type of tourism experience:

The generic term ‘volunteer tourism’ applies to those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain
environments or research into aspects of society or environment (Wearing, 2001, p. 1).

Despite the relatively new and shifting nature of volunteer tourism research, the literature has coalesced around several essential concepts that describe the voluntourism movement as a whole. First, volunteer tourism revolves around the concept of altruism and goodwill activities and is highly focused on improving the social, economic, or environmental well being of a host destination (Callanan & Thomas, 2005). Second, this altruistically motivated travel almost always includes some aspect of self-development and self-improvement for the volunteers (Wearing, 2001; Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Third, almost all volunteer tourism experiences require payment on behalf of the volunteer and do not require that volunteers possess specific skill sets or qualifications (Wearing, 2001). These types of experiences can range in focus and specific activities, everything from scientific research to environmental restoration to medical assistance to education (Wearing, 2001).

**The Intersection: Volunteer Ecotourism**

At the intersection of volunteer tourism and ecotourism lies volunteer-based ecotourism. As the name suggests, this type of tourism combines volunteerism features with environmental stewardship features. Volunteer ecotourism is thought to be a growing segment within the ecotourism market (EBSCO Sustainability Watch, 2009). This category of tourism also falls outside the framework of mass tourism and is thought to be altruistically motivated (Wearing, 2001). In opposition to trends of exploitation and profiteering in ecotourism, volunteer-based ecotourism arose to create a decommodified niche in which tourists can feel that they are promoting genuine community improvement (EBSCO Sustainability Watch, 2009). This type of ecotourism includes experiences such as volunteering in nature reserves, helping to conduct environmental research, or working to develop sustainable agriculture. On the Laarman & Durst (1987) hard-soft scale of ecotourism, volunteer ecotourism would be considered an active, hard form of travel. The most popular
destinations for volunteer ecotourism are almost all located in the global South (EBSCO Sustainability Watch, 2009).

**Alternative Spring Break: Volunteer-Based Ecotourism in Action**

Alternative Spring Break (ASB) began to emerge in the same era as ecotourism. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, college campuses around the U.S. sought to emphasize and institutionalize volunteerism on their campuses, and so ASB gained momentum as universities and students worked to design and implement successful volunteer opportunities (Break Away, 2015; Campus Compact, 2015). In 1991, a U.S.-based non-profit organization was founded and worked to facilitate ASB on different college campuses (Break Away, 2015). Since then, the ASB movement has grown enormously in popularity, with an estimated 21,221 students participating in 2014 (Break Away, 2015).

ASB is an increasingly popular phenomenon among North American college-aged students, and typically consists of a weeklong, service-oriented trip focused on a specific topic (Break Away, 2015). This range of topics includes: children, natural disaster, education, health, women’s advocacy, environment, indigenous peoples, and animals (University of Missouri, 2005; University of Vermont, 2015). According to Break Away (2015), an Alternative Spring Break is:

A trip where a group of college students engage in direct service, typically for a week. Each trip has a focus on a particular social issue with exploration and immersion in that issue beginning long before the trip itself (Break Away, 2015).

This type of volunteerism stands in opposition to the typical spring break pursued by many college students. This archetypal spring break frequently includes travel to seaside resorts, high levels of binge drinking, illicit drug use, unsafe sexual practices, and occasionally criminal violations (Sonmez et al., 2006). ASB aims to reject this model for spring break by working with host sites and organizations

![Figure 2](image-url)

*Figure 2. The relationships between ecotourism, volunteer tourism, volunteer-based ecotourism, and ASB*
to address significant social and environmental issues.

ASB overlaps with ecotourism and volunteer tourism in a number of interesting ways. Some ASB trips are purely volunteer-oriented, and the student participants spend almost all of their time working on specific projects with hosting organizations (see section A in Figure 2). Other trips consist of a combination of service aspects with touristic components (see section B in Figure 2). For example, a University of Missouri article reports that one of their ASB trips enjoyed hiking, canoeing, and visiting major attractions in the nearby cities while working at a national park (University Wire, 2014), while another article describes ASB as being a combination of both work and play (Dohack, 2010). Finally, there is an overlap between all sectors: volunteer-based ecotourism that occurs on ASB trips (see star in Figure 2). These experiences include all ASB trips that focus on environmentally related projects and issues including animal rehabilitation, sustainable and urban agriculture, pollution and waste control, and habitat and ecosystem conservation, among others.

VOLUNTEER TOURISTS AND ASB-ERS

Demographics

According to Tomazos & Butler’s (2009) estimates, approximately 600,000 people choose to participate in volunteer tourism projects each year. Several studies have attempted to identify the general demographics of today’s volunteer tourists. In general, almost all of these studies conclude that the majority of volunteer tourists are female (Alexander, 2012; Lee, 2011; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; TRAM, 2008; Wearing, 2001), and most are between approximately 20 and 29-years-old (Alexander, 2012; Otoo, 2013). The vast majority of volunteers originate from the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia (Alexander, 2012). Furthermore, 90% of these volunteers choose to travel to Asia, Africa, or Latin America, and almost all have at least a college education (Otoo, 2013; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; TRAM, 2008). According to Alexander (2012), the largest professional grouping among volunteer tourists is students, followed by professionals, managers, and administrators.

The demographics of ASB volunteers are much less diverse. In 2011, the National Survey of Alternative Breaks was able to collect information from over 2,000 participants from
more than 450 trips at 97 college and universities throughout the United States (Niehaus, 2012). The results of this survey revealed that 20.1% of the students were first-year students, 29.8% sophomore, 27.1% juniors, 19.7% seniors, and 2.6% graduate students (Niehaus, 2012). The survey also showed that the majority of ASB participants were female (78.8%) and white (71.8%) (Niehaus, 2012). Finally, many respondents from the study had never before participated in ASB or experienced any type of study abroad trip (Niehaus, 2012).

Motivations and Reciprocal Altruism

Until recently, travel for the purpose of volunteering was considered “altruistic travel,” in which the volunteer possesses a philanthropic desire to volunteer and contribute to society (Coghlan & Fennell, 2009). As volunteer tourism, ecotourism, and ASB became popularized in the 1980s and 1990s, the alternative nature of these sectors was praised for challenging traditional models and remaining sensitive to sustaining resources (Coghlan & Fennell, 2009). Similarly, volunteers received praise for challenging the consumptive, exploitative nature of mass tourism and attempting to restore and improve ecosystems and communities. The tourists who traveled to far off places and devoted their effort, time, and finances to volunteer projects were thought to be motivated purely by the ambition to help those in need. In Wearing’s (2001) post-trip interviews with volunteers, he identifies several recurring, altruistic motives: “saving the world,” “doing good,” and “giving something back.” These phrases emerged repeatedly in Wearing’s conversations with volunteer tourists, and they are representative of many volunteers’ worldviews and motivations.

While these altruistic tendencies certainly account for a portion of volunteer motivation, new research in the field is beginning to reveal alternative motives as well.

In their study of 401 domestic volunteers from conservation and natural resource projects across the United States, Bruyere & Rappe (2006) identified that the main motivations for volunteering were as follows:

1) Helping the environment (i.e. conserving natural resources and protecting sensitive ecosystems)

2) Furthering their ecological knowledge of flora and fauna

3) Enhancing their values and esteem (i.e. finding a sense of belonging, expressing their values)
As this study clearly demonstrates, environmental volunteers tend to demonstrate a mix of both altruistic and self-interested motives (Brown, 2005; Bruyere & Rappe, 2006; Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Coghlan & Fennell, 2009; Grimm & Needham, 2012; Söderman & Snead, 2008). Söderman & Snead (2008) attach a term to this concept: “reciprocal altruism”. In a situation of reciprocal altruism, the desire to help others and contribute to the greater good is paired with the expectation of personal benefits and the reception of some kind of return payment or favor (Coghlan & Fennell, 2009; Söderman & Snead, 2008). One interviewee from Wearing’s (2001) work describes the reciprocal nature of volunteer altruism:

I think most people would by lying if they didn’t say there was some selfishness in why they were going. Because it was really to benefit themselves, not just the environment and community in Santa Elena, even though it is really important (Ken, quoted by Wearing, 2001, p. 70).

Research into volunteer motivations has uncovered several categories of non-altruistic, personal-benefit-seeking volunteer ambitions, namely personal growth, learning, and professional development (Wearing, 2001). According to Brown (2005), volunteer tourism promotes enormous personal growth for volunteers, often driving them to achieve profound personal fulfillment, a sense of belonging, enhanced social interaction, improved self-image, and self-actualization. In speaking about this variety of motivations, volunteers express their desire to test their personal boundaries, push outside their comfort zone, and become more independent (Wearing, 2001, p. 67). Another big motivator is the opportunity for education and cultural learning. The allure of the cultural exchange of language and customs, as well as gaining an understanding for local environments and ecosystems pushes people to travel and volunteer (Brown, 2005; Bruyere & Rappe, 2006). Finally, the value of volunteer tourism experiences in the job market is another factor that motivates volunteer tourists. Many tour companies advertise opportunities to build professional skills and develop contacts through volunteer tourism (Biehn, 2014; Lyons et al., 2012). In turn, many participants cite this desire for professional development as a motivator in choosing to become a volunteer (Brown, 2005; Wearing, 2001).

**VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

In researching the volunteer ecotourism sector, it is crucial to have an understanding of volunteer management and the best practices that exist within this field. Volunteer management
is an important component of any governmental agency, charity, non-profit, or other organization that welcomes volunteers. The practices of volunteer management aim to ensure that the following goals are met:

1) Both parties (volunteers and the host organization) benefit from the volunteer program (Brudney, 2005)

2) Volunteers have enjoyable experiences and continue to help (increased volunteer retention)(McCurley & Lynch, 1996; Skoglund, 2006)

Managing a volunteer program involves a variety of factors, including the establishment of an organizational rationale, the integration of the volunteer program into the organization, and the management and retention of volunteering individuals.

**Establishing a Rationale for Volunteer Involvement**

The literature contends that the first step in developing any kind of volunteer program is for the organization to build a rationale and philosophy around volunteer involvement. Many researchers caution against volunteer programs that are ungrounded and detached from an organization’s mission or actual needs. As Brudney (2005, p. 755) describes:

> Unfortunately, well-intentioned but premature calls for (undifferentiated) ‘help’ can breed apprehension among paid staff and frustration among volunteers, and exacerbate the very problems volunteerism was intended to solve.

When a volunteer program fails to take these first steps in establishing a philosophy and mission, contentious situations can develop and prevent the program from benefitting the organization or the volunteers. In their handbook on volunteer management, the Maine Commission of Community Service (MCCC)(2008) recommends several protocols for establishing this foundation for a volunteer program. Firstly, the host organization must develop mission and vision statements for volunteer involvement. These statements will express the links between the volunteer program and the mission of the organization as well as providing a future vision for how the volunteer program will function. Furthermore, a needs assessment should address the specific niches and tasks that volunteers will fulfill within the organization (MCCC, 2008). Finally, a description of the goals and objectives of the volunteer program should discuss the projected impacts and results of volunteer involvement in the organization (MCCC, 2008). This organizational groundwork that connects the overall mission with volunteers is essential in the development of a successful volunteer program (Brudney, 2005).
Organizational Integration of Volunteer Program

After establishing the organizational rationale for a volunteer program, measures must be taken to fully integrate the program into the organization’s structure and function. These measures include proper roles for volunteers, written policies and procedures for volunteers, training for paid staff, and budgeting for the volunteer program. One of the most important aspects of this integration is the development of effective roles and jobs for volunteers. Several researchers conclude that volunteers’ roles should provide benefits to not only the organization, but also to the volunteer (Brudney, 2005; MCCC, 2008; Murk & Stephan, 1991). Brudney (2005) suggests that volunteers are more suited to episodic, periodic work that can be completed on an inflexible basis (rather than day-to-day, inflexible tasks). After defining roles for the volunteers, these positions should be recorded in writing and shared with new volunteers. Clearly defined, written position descriptions that include task, duration, duties, location, etc. and differentiate volunteer work from employee work are an important aspect of effective volunteer programs (Brudney, 2000; Hager & Brudney, 2004; MCCC, 2008). Furthermore, written policies and procedures for volunteer involvement help to integrate volunteers into the organizational structure (Brudney, 2000; MCCC, 2008).

Another important element in incorporating volunteers into a host organization is providing training for paid staff and a budget for the volunteer program (Brudney, 2000; MCCC, 2008). As Brudney (2000, p. 240) notes in his article on volunteer management in the public sector: “Training for employees may be more crucial because formal education in volunteer involvement or administration is not a standard part of the education of most organization members, including mid-level managers.” This type of training and orientation for paid staff must also be accompanied by a budget for the volunteer program that accounts for employee training, orientation, materials, reimbursements, and press releases (Brudney, 2000; Ellis, 1996).

Management and Retention of Volunteers

Once the volunteer program is solidly integrated into the organization, recruitment and retention processes can begin. The literature agrees on the imperative for training and orientations for new volunteers at an organization. Orientations consist of short, generalized programs that provide volunteers with the mission of the organization and “expose the volunteers to the organization’s culture and methods of operation” (Brudney, 2000, p. 238). Bath-Rosenfeld
(2014) posits that a physical tour of the service site and surrounding community can also help to orient and motivate volunteers within their roles. After orientation, detailed training specific tasks should prepare volunteers and provide them with the knowledge, skills, and procedures to fulfill their role at the organization (Brudney, 2000; Hager & Brudney, 2004).

Beyond orientation and training, volunteers should maintain consistent communication with members of the host organization, as well as receiving supervision from paid staff (MCCC, 2008). Many studies assert that a designated manager or volunteer coordinator is an invaluable resource for carrying out supervision and communication with volunteers (Ellis, 1996; Brudney, 2000; MCCC, 2008). The MCCC argues that host organizations should provide designated supervisors for all volunteer roles. This supervision and communication not only ensures satisfactory completion of tasks, but also allows for a more meaningful integration of volunteers within an organization. Skogland (2006) concludes that volunteer-host communication is an important element in development of “role identity” for volunteers. Other studies demonstrate that volunteers feel more satisfied and successful when they understand their role in the context of a broader organizational mission (Murk & Stephan, 1991). Adequate, positive communication allows for these outcomes.

Finally, recognition and assessment are crucial components of volunteer management. The MCCC (2008) asserts that periodic needs assessments should be conducted to evaluate the role of volunteers within an organization. Furthermore, assessments and evaluations of volunteer performance can be helpful in developing and expanding volunteer programs (MCCC, 2008; Brudney, 2000). Recognition activities for volunteers are also widely regarded as essential to any successful volunteer program (Brudney, 2000). Volunteers should receive positive feedback and appreciation for their contributions to an organization. These activities can include newsletters and press about volunteer achievements, letters of appreciation, and recognition nights, among others (Brudney, 2000; Murk & Stephan, 1991).

ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK

Definition and Guiding Principles

An Alternative Break is defined as a weeklong trip for college-aged students and involves community service and service learning (Break Away, 2015). The trips are usually student-led
and student-organized, however a new brand of ASB trips operated and organized by private tour companies has emerged in recent years (I-to-I, n.d.; Projects Abroad, 2015; United Way, n.d.). Most ASB trips focus on a particular social or environmental issue and partner with a community-based organization to complete volunteer work related to that issue (Break Away, 2015; University of Vermont, 2015). Popular issues include: the environment, refugee resettlement, education, natural disaster aid, and poverty alleviation (University of Missouri, 2015).

Alternative Break trips range in duration and destination locations. Many schools run Alternative Breaks throughout the school year on various weekends, Thanksgiving Break, Winter Break, and Spring Break (University of Missouri, 2015). Alternative Break trips travel to a variety of destinations around the world, and the international sector has been growing, with a 10% increase in 2010 (Straus, 2011). This study will be limited in its scope by focusing exclusively on student-organized, student-led Alternative Spring Breaks that travel within the United States.

The leading organization in ASB, Break Away, was (and continues to be) responsible for formalizing and popularizing the concept of ASB in the 1990s. This organization outlines eight components that must be present in a quality ASB trip, and most colleges and intermediary organizations use these principles as guidelines in designing their own trips. The eight components are as follows:

1. **Strong Direct Service:** This principle dictates that students must be actively engaged and interacting with a community or organization to fulfill some unmet need that the community had identified.
2. **Alcohol and Drug-Free:** All trips must be totally alcohol and drug free, and written policies should be in place to enforce this rule. Alcohol and drug issues will be topics in participant trainings.
3. **Diversity and Social Justice:** Student participants should represent the diversity of students within the college population. Pre-trip trainings and discussions should include conversations around systems of power, privilege, and oppression and how they relate to the focus issue of the trip.
4. **Orientation:** All student participants should be introduced to the community partner and their mission before leaving on the ASB trip.
5. **Education:** Participants should be educated throughout the process on the various stakeholders and issues involved in their project.
6. **Training:** Participants should be trained in all of the skills necessary to excel in their volunteer position. This training may occur pre-trip or on-site.
7. **Reflection:** Both individual and group reflection should occur after the participants return from their trip.

8. **Reorientation:** After returning from their site, participants will work to remain engaged in their community by raising awareness of issues and working with community partners. (Break Away, 2015).

These eight components demonstrate the issue-based, service-oriented nature of this type of travel experience. In many instances, the student directors of ASB chapters are responsible for designing and operating trips that meet these requirements.

**The Roles and Organizational Structures of ASB**

ASB involves a number of diverse players with variety of different roles and responsibilities. Figure 3 demonstrates these players and their interconnections. At the top of the model, Break Away serves as the organizational foundation for ASB trips. Founded in 1991, Break Away was intended to be a resource center for college campuses looking to create meaningful volunteer opportunities for their students (Break Away, 2015; Straus, 2011). Since then, Break Away has grown to be the most prominent organizer of ASB in the country, and receives funding from the Kellogg and Ford foundations, the Corporation for National Community Service, and the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (Straus, 2011). Below Break Away are the ASB chapter schools. Colleges around the U.S. can pay a $350 fee to become a chapter of Break Away (Break Away, 2015). In exchange for this fee, chapter schools receive access to trip-planning resources, consultation with Break Away staff, and training materials (Break Away, 2015). Chapter schools are also granted access to the online Site Bank, a database of community partners compiled by
Break Away, as well as template documents and trainings from other member schools (Break Away, 2015). Within each chapter school, an executive board orchestrates the ASB process for that particular college. This board is responsible for selecting, contacting, and organizing volunteer placements with all of the hosting organizations and community partners (Break Away, 2015). The executive board is also responsible for selecting site leaders and student participants. The site leaders take control of one particular ASB site (two per site). They organize and run the pre-trip meetings, individual group trainings, transportation to and from the site, food and lodging, and the supervision of students at the volunteer site (Break Away, 2015). Finally, the student participants are those students who apply for and are accepted to an ASB trip. They do not have a leadership role on the trip, but they directly participate in community service at their assigned location (Break Away, 2015).

**Current Trends in the Literature**

Several studies have looked intensely at the student learning outcomes of various ASB trips. These types of short-term immersion trips emphasize deeper understanding of issues of privilege, stereotypes, and identity (Jones et al., 2012). The intense experiences also allow students to contextualize and question their own values (Jones et al., 2013; Niehaus, 2012; Rhoads & Neururer, 1998). In Rhoads & Neururer’s (1998) analysis of ASB, they categorized student learning outcomes into: understanding of self, understanding of others, and understanding of community. After participating in ASB trips, many students acknowledged the existence of “something larger than the self” (Rhoads & Neururer, 1998, p. 106). Additional outcomes included new abilities and skills development, enhancement of self-confidence, increased ability to accept repayment and kindness, a realization of values, and an enrichment of self-knowledge (Rhoads & Neururer, 1998). In relation to the understanding of others, the trips served to “humanize” poverty in several cases, connecting a complex and unfamiliar concept to a real life situation and human face. Many students were able to reassess their own stereotypes and values as a result of their interactions with hosting communities (Jones et al., 2013). Additionally, students were able to observe and participate in different cultural and spiritual practices throughout their ASB trips. These allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of community and human diversity (Rhoads & Neururer, 1998). In Niehaus & Crain’s (2013) work, they suggest that many international ASB trips have more tangible and longer-lasting learning
outcomes than domestic programs. Students on the ASB programs abroad reported higher levels of intensity, more frequent and comprehensive reflection, and more interaction and knowledge exchange with host communities (Niehaus & Crain, 2013).

In addition to these student learning outcomes, a large body of literature also focuses on the long-term, post-trip impacts that ASB has on student lives, decisions, and values. In Niehaus’s 2012 study, she utilizes data from the 2011 National Survey of Alternative Breaks, which represents over 2,000 student informants, 450 ASB trips, and 97 colleges from around the U.S. (Niehaus, 2012). Her findings indicate that ASB experiences significantly affect students’ major and degree plans, career aspirations, decisions to participate in advocacy work, intentions to volunteer in the future, plans to study abroad, and hopes to travel abroad (Niehaus, 2012). Overall, after returning from their trips, ASB volunteers expressed increased interest in volunteering, advocating, and traveling in the future (Niehaus, 2012). Another study by Raman (2002) indicates that ASB experiences produce students who are more likely to vote, volunteer in their community, and become an engaged citizen later in life.

**POSITIVE IMPACTS OF VOLUNTEER ECOTOURISM**

In general, volunteer ecotourism is promoted as a form of altruistic travel, in which the traveler is empowered to “give back” to a community (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011). The development of fair exchange, equal partnership, and cross-cultural understanding all constitute significant benefits seen by the volunteer ecotourism sector (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Raymond & Hall, 2008). The following sections will discuss the specific benefits that volunteer ecotourism can deliver to both tourists and local hosts.

**Volunteers: Personal Growth and Self-Development**

A large portion of the literature focuses on the positive impacts that volunteer ecotourism provides to the volunteers themselves. These are generally benefits relating to personal growth, self-discovery, development of social networks, and skills building. Wearing (2001) asserts that volunteer tourism, in contrast to mass tourism, forces the tourist to question and challenge her beliefs, values, and sense of self. These types of cultural experiences enhance a person’s personal awareness, confidence, and self-contentment, and often result in increased determination and independence, willingness to accept responsibility, decreased self-centeredness, and an enhanced
perception of self (Wearing, 2001). Zahra & McIntosh (2007) go even further in their study of cathartic experiences to conclude that volunteer tourism pushes participants to reorient their worldviews and rediscover their role in society and the universe. Through cultural immersion and observance of diverse lifestyles, volunteer experiences can bring lasting change in tourists’ conceptualizations of material possessions and the value of human life (Broad, 2003; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007). Many volunteers undergo a process of self-actualization during their volunteer experience, and they are later empowered to make positive changes in their lives and society (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011).

In addition to these aspects of personal growth, volunteer tourism enhances interpersonal growth and the development of social networks (Wearing, 2001). This “awareness of other people and… an appreciation of effective communication” allows volunteers to becomes more open-minded, thoughtful, and selfless (Wearing, 2001, p. 129). As volunteers are collectively thrust into challenging and uncomfortable situations, they must practice trust and reliance within their groups, thus learning about friendship, companionship, sociability, and interpersonal skills (Wearing, 2001). Furthermore, the social networks fostered by volunteer tourism increase the likelihood of post-trip social learning outcomes. In their study of social networks, McGehee & Santos (2005) conclude that participation in volunteer tourism and network ties from these experiences lead to volunteers’ demonstration of raised consciousness of social issues, increased participation in activism projects, and greater engagement with social movements.

Finally, volunteer tourism can be hugely beneficial for volunteers in their development of new skills. Many of the skill sets that are encouraged by volunteer tourism are what Lyons et al. (2012) call “soft skills.” These include increased confidence and independence, self-discovery, ability to work well with others, ability to stay calm in the face of adversity, proficiency in effective communication, development of global consciousness, and many more. According to O’Reilly (2006), these soft skills are “particularly suited to the current context of flexible employment conditions” (p. 1012). In addition to these soft skills, volunteers have the potential to develop hard, tangible skills as well. In many volunteer ecotourism models, volunteers have the potential to gain a deep understanding of local ecology, knowledge of relevant conservation methods, and experience in environmental monitoring or restoration (Brightsmith et al., 2008). Tourists also frequently have the opportunity to build their foreign language skills and develop a list of professional contacts that they encounter throughout their travels (Söderman & Snead,
These skill sets not only aid the volunteers in becoming more efficient and effective in their volunteer roles, but these “status-enhancing activities” also prepare them for the workforce and provide them with “marketable skills” (Biehn, 2014; Lyons et al., 2012; O’Reilly, 2006). Many volunteer tour companies emphasize the personal benefits and resume building that will come from volunteer ecotourism experiences (Biehn, 2014). In this sense, these “hard” and “soft” skills continue to benefit volunteers well beyond their experiences abroad.

**Hosts: Economic, Ecological, and Personal Benefits**

According to The International Ecotourism Society, ecotourism contributes to host destinations and communities by providing the following:

- A financially viable tool that provides sustainable solutions to economic challenges and conservation needs of local people; an alternative means of supporting rural economies to help revitalize and sustain local heritage; and a market-linked force connecting and empowering stakeholders (TIES, 2015)

In many cases, the literature agrees with these claims. Researchers in this field most often discuss the economic and ecological benefits of tourism. In their study of a conservation research project, Brightsmith et al. (2008) examine the three-way association between the Tambopata Macaw Project (research project), Rainforest Expeditions (ecotourism operator), and the Earthwatch Institute (volunteer placement NGO) in the Peruvian Amazon. The authors conclude that all three of these stakeholders created positive outcomes for the community and the environment: the Tambopata Macaw Project provided scientific expertise, Rainforest Expeditions provided economic benefits for communities and raised local and national consciousness, and the Earthwatch Institute provisioned funding and labor for the project (Brightsmith et al., 2008). Furthermore, all three organizations benefitted financially from this “mutually beneficial triumvirate” (Brightsmith et al., 2008).

Other studies corroborate these findings, revealing the economic benefits that many communities experience as a result of volunteer tourism (Ellis, 2003; Wunder, 2000). Ellis (2003) finds that the alternative funding from volunteer tourism toward Participatory Environmental Research Tourism (PERT) can truly help small-scale conservation projects and NGOs to complete work that would otherwise have been financially infeasible. In his study of ecotourism in the Ecuadorian Amazon, Wunder (2000) finds that ecotourism activities can provide valuable additional income to local community members. These increased income flows
also aided conservation efforts, as environmental awareness began to transform traditional resource consumption (Wunder, 2000). Wunder describes that over-hunting mammals was previously a common practice in this region, but with the advent of ecotourism, people begin to shift their staple resource base to accommodate the industry (Wunder, 2000). Authors also note that ecotourism and the arrival of volunteers in an environmentally sensitive area can help to boost local awareness and support of conservation issues (Brightsmith et al., 2008; Wunder, 2000).

In addition to these ecological and economic benefits, volunteer tourism also provides cultural and social benefits to host communities. Several studies cite the development of cross-cultural learning and exchange that occurs as a result of volunteer tourism in a region (Broad, 2003; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Wearing, 2001). In their study of two volunteer tourism sites in Peru and Thailand, Burrai & De las Cuevas (2015) conclude that the residents of the host locations benefitted through self-development, “communicative learning,” and building caring relationships with volunteers (Burrai & De las Cuevas, 2015). The residents also mentioned the “transformative” nature of the experience, noting the “improvements of the quality of their life in learning about new ways of working, new lifestyles and cultures” (Burrai & De las Cuevas, 2015, p. 125).

**CRITICISMS OF VOLUNTEER ECOTOURISM**

In past decades, research around ecotourism has portrayed it as an idealistic cure-all approach to vacationing and community development, emphasizing its positive contributions to economic advancement, cross-cultural exchange, and responsible travel. However, the literature on ecotourism (and especially volunteer-based ecotourism) has recently begun to identify several areas in which the sector underperforms. Although researchers have long applauded the positive impacts of ecotourism (Wearing, 2001), the emergence of a body of critical literature on the negative impacts of volunteer-based ecotourism is a new development essential to the investigation of this topic. This research points to various socio-cultural, ecological, and economic impacts that are deleterious to communities and ecosystems at ecotourism sites.

**Socio-Cultural Impacts**

While some volunteer-tourism certainly does deliver some positive results to
communities, in other cases, voluntourism has proved to be damaging in its tendency to idealize modernization, reinforce stereotypes of inequality, and promote neoliberal ideologies.

The Race to Modernization and Power Dynamics

While volunteer-tourism may allow for intercultural exchange, it also brings cultural concepts from the West that can be extremely damaging to indigenous, isolated, remote, or extremely impoverished populations (Guttentag, 2009; Norberg-Hodge, 1992). In her study of the Ladakhi population of Northern India, Norberg-Hodge (1992) observed significant and negative changes in the communities after they were continually exposed to tourists. Norberg-Hodge describes the situation as such: “Nowadays if you go into the village, people will describe themselves as stupid, backward, underdeveloped and they will apologize because they don’t speak English, because they serve local food instead of imported food. It has been a dramatic change” (Norberg-Hodge, 1992, p. 12). This intense “psychological pressure to modernize” emphasizes material wealth over other, perhaps more traditional or spiritual, values (McLaren, 2003). The introduction of technology and exposure to affluent life styles can trigger depression, divisiveness among communities, and the creation of social hierarchies (Norberg-Hodge, 1992; Sin, 2010). The power dynamics and intense hierarchies within local communities that may form as a result of tourism clash with the mission and ideology of this sector. Volunteer-tourism, which aims to form a global community, can instead precipitate the homogenization of culture and the loss of traditional customs and values (McLaren, 2003).

Reinforcement of Stereotypes

Although the volunteer-tourism sector aims to create common space between members of diverse cultures and backgrounds, the ecotourism model and agenda often ends up reinforcing unequal relations and power structures between volunteers and hosts (Lyons et al., 2012). Ecotourists are generally upper-middle class, privileged, young adults from Canada, The United States, Australia, and New Zealand (Bath Rosenfeld, 2014; Lyons et al., 2012). Conversely, tour companies frequently choose host communities and destinations for their apparent “need” (i.e. environmental degradation, poverty, social injustice, etc.) (Sin, 2010). Thus, the dichotomy between locals and volunteers is only accentuated by the gross differences in lifestyle and opulence. This enormous gap can lead to “othering” by both parties and a rationalization of
poverty from the volunteers’ perspective (Guttentag, 2009; Lyons et al., 2012; Raymond & Hall, 2008). Additionally, intermediary organizations and tour companies use sweeping language and generalizations in their literature that characterize host destinations as “underprivileged, stagnant, victimized, target populations” (Biehn, 2014, p.78). This generalized language, in combination with volunteers’ lack of deep processing of events and experiences, can lead to a presumptive rationalization of poverty and inequality. After witnessing rural living conditions and a different lifestyle, volunteers often resort to logic that defends poverty and accepts it as a given for the target populations (Guttentag, 2009; Raymond & Hall, 2008). This reinforcement of stereotypes of the global North and South and the resulting romanticization of poverty represents another crack in the idealism of volunteer-based ecotourism.

Pushing the Neoliberal Narrative

Other researchers argue that volunteer-tourism, while well intentioned, has served to depoliticize both global and local issues and disseminate concepts of neoliberalism throughout its host destinations. Many volunteer-tourism companies advocate for a vague concept of “change,” while never truly explaining or justifying the concrete embodiments of that “change” (Biehn, 2014). Biehn (2014) argues that voluntourism has shifted the way we think about development: from large-scale, systemic, political-economic change to community-level personal change. While both mechanisms of development are valuable, he asserts that voluntourism’s exclusive focus on small-scale change has depoliticized issues of social injustice, race relations, economic inequalities, and corruption, and simultaneously quelled mass movements (Biehn, 2014).

Furthermore, many aspects of the volunteer-tourism sector hint of a neoliberal agenda and ideology. Among the main motivations of environmental volunteers is career enhancement (Bruyere & Rapp, 2007), and tour companies often promote their programs in the context of skill development and resume building (Lyons et al., 2012). Neoliberalism is present in this direct integration of volunteer-tourism with economic hegemonies and competition in the job market. As mentioned above, the huge gap that often forms between privileged volunteers from the global North and less-privileged hosts from the global South promotes a neoliberal framework of superior giver and inferior receiver, an independent core and dependent periphery (Lyons et al., 2012). Finally, the increasingly commodified ecotourism and volunteer-tourism industry brings the entire sector under the umbrella of the competitive, privatized, capitalistic market (Lyons et
Tourism often receives credit for enormous job creation and economic stimulation in host destinations. For years, it has been praised as creating a labor-intensive industry that provides employment to people with diverse skill sets (McLaren, 2003). However, the boost in ecotourism popularity along with the commodification of the ecotourism industry has wreaked economic havoc in many communities (Guttentag, 2009; McLaren, 2003; Sin, 2010). Issues of economic dependence, loss of livelihood, and the neglect of local desires (due to profit-hungry tour companies) are a few of negative economic impacts of the ecotourism sector.

Promotion of Economic Dependence

The ruinous cycle of economic dependence is an issue that researchers have recently explored in their critiques of volunteer tourism. While volunteers’ sympathy and quickness to donate to impoverished communities are well intentioned, they often undermine local sentiments of self-sufficiency and encourage locals to defer to and develop dependence on foreign volunteer tourists (Guttentag, 2009). When volunteers enter communities, they come with agendas and specific projects, and are thus often perceived as “experts” in developing infrastructure, conserving habitats, or teaching. Over time, this sense of foreign proficiency may undermine the propagation of and confidence in local knowledge, while also stripping communities of their motivation to plan and complete projects of their own (Guttentag, 2009; Sin, 2010). In some cases, the ecotourism sector promotes the development of a seasonal service industry (i.e. accommodation, dining, laundry, etc.) that employs many local people in unskilled positions during certain seasons, but cuts off their income during the slow season and reserves managerial and higher-level positions for foreigners (McLaren, 2003). In her study of the impacts of volunteer-tourism on local communities, Sin describes the destructive actions that can promote dependency: everything from bestowing small gifts upon children to helping fund large infrastructural endeavors. In many cases, the tendency of volunteer-tourists to bring small gifts or donations to host communities can result in increased begging and constant expectations by local people (Sin, 2010). On broader level, when volunteer-tourist organizations develop and fund infrastructure projects within communities, these communities begin to expect that this type
of project will always be provided and financed by external actors. Entire communities then come to expect foreign aid and doubt their own abilities in fulfilling their needs (Sin, 2010). Furthermore, Sin (2010) describes a phenomenon of “acting out dependency” in order to attract donors and fulfill the expectations of volunteers, with communities competing to appear to be the “most needy”. The patterns of economic dependency that emerge as a result of volunteer-based ecotourism are worrying, and thus have appeared more and more frequently in the critical research.

*Decreasing Labor Demand*

Another concerning pattern in the volunteer-tourism sector is the displacement of local labor with volunteer labor, and subsequent loss of income and livelihood. A large majority of volunteer-tourists are untrained and lack the specific skill sets that would allow them to be independent and proficient in executing ecotourism projects (Biehn, 2014). Thus, volunteer-tourists must perform unskilled, basic tasks that require very little training or prior knowledge (Guttentag, 2009). In many cases, these exact tasks and jobs that are diverted toward voluntourism could be completed more efficiently, requiring less money and yielding superior results, by local people (Van Engen, 2005). However, the labor of volunteer tourists is free, and participating organizations often receive money in exchange for welcoming volunteer labor (Biehn, 2014). Thus, host organizations can cut their costs by “hiring” volunteers instead of local staff, even if the project quality decreases (Guttentag, 2009). Raymond & Hall (2008) warn that increased volunteer presence in tourism communities is often associated with slumping local employment, and they urge volunteer organizations to better manage and organize their relations with local staff to avoid this disturbance of local labor markets and ensure economic benefit for the community.

*Profit Making and Neglect of Local Desires*

The ecotourism industry along with the ASB model, have been hugely commodified in the past few decades. In the past, many volunteer tourism agencies were not-for-profit (i.e. NGOs, missionary organizations, etc.), however, as the popularity grows, capitalistic ventures into this sector are becoming more common (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Similarly, ASB began as a university-organized, not-for-profit entity. The largest ASB organization, Break Away, still
operates at a non-profit; however, many for-profit companies are beginning to adopt the ASB model as a means for profit making. For example, Projects Abroad, I-to-I, and United Way all offer weeklong ASB trips to college students for a fee ranging from $300 to several thousand dollars (I-to-I, n.d.; Projects Abroad, 2015; United Way, n.d.). This so-called “commodification” transforms volunteers into consumers and the tour agencies into capitalists seeking profits (Cousins et al., 2009).

The recent and continued commodification of the ecotourism sector has created a market in which tour companies must compete to win the interest of potential volunteers. This subsequently leads to a devaluing of local desires and priorities. While many volunteer-tourists cite altruistic reasons for choosing to participate in volunteer-based ecotourism, these philanthropic motivations are frequently complemented by self-serving incentives. According to a study by Bruyere & Rappe, the main motivating desire to be an environmental volunteer is to “help the environment,” however, secondary motives include enhancement of career, self-esteem improvement, traveling abroad, and personal growth (Bath-Rosenfeld, 2014; Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). These self-serving benefits are also cited as one of the reasons why ASB became so popular in the 1990s. An article by Straus (2011) explains that many students choose to participate in this type of volunteerism because it will bolster their experience on their resume. As the ecotourism industry becomes more and more commodified, with large intermediary companies competing for prospective volunteer dollars, these secondary, self-serving motivations become apparent in program designs and agendas (Guttentag, 2009). Recent research has exposed some concerning trends in this respect, with tour companies prioritizing the needs and wishes of volunteers over host destinations in order to maximize their profits.

Troublesome patterns include: conserving and cutting access to resources that are important for local livelihoods, disregarding local advice in order to satisfy volunteers, and disproportionately creating projects to protect popular species. Several case studies point to instances in which the harvesting and utilization of natural resources and wildlife constitutes a large portion of local livelihoods (Matthews, 2008). When volunteer tourists enter into these communities with the goal of conserving these natural resources, locals suddenly lose access to their main source of income. Many ecotourism programs dismiss the local disdain for their activities and fail to create and encourage alternative income-producing activities. Another concerning pattern in this sector is the neglect of local advice. Many tour companies will plan
activities and events that appeal to their volunteers, even if locals warn that these situations may be culturally inappropriate or uncomfortable (Guttentag, 2009). Finally, many ecotourism companies will focus their projects and programs on specific species and locations that easily capture the interests and sympathies of potential volunteers (i.e. large mammals, beautiful birds, sea turtles, and coral reefs) (Speer, 1994). This leads to the disproportionate creation of projects that protect and restore these species, while overlooking the genuine needs of communities and their ecosystems.

**Ecological Restraints**

The central concept of ecotourism focuses on humans experiencing natural areas and their associated communities, with some aspect of preserving and conserving these environmental wonders (Wearing, 2001). However, it is often these same activities that aim to foster stewardship that end up damaging the ecology of a location. Ecotourism concentrates human visitors in sensitive areas, often outstripping the carrying capacity of that ecosystem. The volunteer-based ecotourism sector also struggles to complete worthwhile projects that provide significant benefit to local ecology.

**Overwhelmed Carrying Capacity**

As Buckley describes in his book on the environmental impacts of ecotourism, “a large part of the tourism industry is simply an incremental addition to urban accommodation and infrastructure, and existing transport networks” (Buckley, 2004, p. 10). As tourists flock to ecologically fragile environments, clustered, pollutive infrastructure follows, and even more pressure is placed on host ecosystems. Furthermore, increased human activity necessarily heralds increased consumption of energy, use of water, and disposal of waste (Buckley, 2004; McLaren, 2003). Thus, it is easy for an ecotourism operation to quickly outstrip the carrying capacity of a host ecosystem, especially because many tourists are accustomed to extensive resource use in their everyday lives (McLaren, 2003). As tourism overwhelms carrying capacity, the ecosystem is progressively damaged; the impacts include (but are not limited to): groundwater depletion, surface water flow disruption and pollution, destruction of vegetation and habitat, introduction of new species, soil erosion and compaction, and air pollution (Buckley, 2004).
Project Interruption, Hindrance, and Non-completion

Another detriment to volunteer-based ecotourism is the slow progress and unsatisfactory completion of projects. Frequently, the introduction of ecotourism diverts human resources, capital, and time away from worthwhile conservation and preservation work to accommodate unskilled volunteer endeavors (Guttentag, 2009). Although minimal numbers of ecotourism volunteers possess specialized skill sets, many enter into work environments where specific skills are necessary. As a result, volunteer coordinators and local staff spend huge amounts of time training volunteers and assuring quality control in the project progression (Guttentag, 2009). Brightsmith et al. (2008) found that in participatory research tourism, a lack of volunteer training and expertise actually delayed project objectives and forced the program to assign a supervisor to monitor and quality-check the volunteers’ work. To compound the problem, many volunteers stay for only short amounts of time, and so the local staff ends up spending large amounts of time repeating the same training procedures (Bath-Rosenfeld, 2014). In the end, projects are delayed, and the work is generally inferior to what the local staff could accomplish without the hindrance of volunteers (Brightsmith et al., 2008; Van Engen, 2005). This inefficient use of time and labor leads to inferior ecological outcomes.

THE BIGGER PICTURE: PRIVATIZATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND CAPITALISM

While volunteer tourism is a popular topic in today’s literature, it is a relatively new phenomenon nested within a much broader, more complex socio-cultural context. While it is useful to examine the praises and criticisms of volunteer ecotourism, this polarized view is a symptom of the newness of the sector and can conceal some of the higher-level complexities at play. As Vivanco (2006, p. 157) explains: “It is likely that as ecotourism’s adolescent years bring new crises of self-definition and maturation, its foundational contradictions will intensify…To fully appreciate the implications of this situation requires a reorientation from a polarized discourse.” Instead of proclaiming volunteer ecotourism either effective or detrimental, this section will examine some of the social, cultural, and political conditions that produce and sustain the volunteer ecotourism industry. By discussing the privatization of development, tourism as a form of capitalist commodification, and the emergence of a “new middle class”, this section contextualizes volunteer ecotourism as a small piece of a much larger socio-cultural
puzzle.

**The Privatization of Development**

The last three decades have seen huge shifts in international development mechanisms and strategies. After the 1970s and 1980s brought economic instabilities and repeated failures of top-down development mechanisms, the development community created a “New Policy Agenda,” which stipulated the devolution of public services and placed an emphasis on private entities and the “third sector” (non-governmental organizations) (Bailey, 2007; Sanyal, 1996). Current neoliberal development practice is characterized by the privatization of social services, decentralization of aid, and the transfer of responsibility from the state to the individual and community (Mostafanezhad, 2012). Now, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profits, private foundations, and local communities are seen as the main actors and spaces for development work (Vodopivec & Jaffe, 2011, p. 2). Volunteer tourism is a materialization of this increasing privatization of development work. As social services and the state become more and more decoupled, the voluntary sector becomes a more viable option for carrying out development work (Conran, 2011). It is important to understand the role of volunteer tourism in this much larger phenomenon of privatized and localized development.

**Tourism as Capitalist Commodification**

Another structure inherently ingrained in all forms of tourism is capitalist commodification. One of the main processes of capitalist economies is “commodification: the process of transforming things into objects for sale” (IASC, 2003). Tourism is frequently considered a commodification of people and places, and recently, volunteer tourism and ecotourism have been included in this trend (Lupoli, 2013). Fletcher (2014, p. 9) explains the tourism sector’s connections to capitalism: “The tourism industry, in general, has been described as ‘a major internationalized component of Western capitalist economies’, and ecotourism in particular is often described as the cutting edge of this trend, facilitating the progressive commodification of natural resources around the globe.” In addition to commodifying people and places, ecotourism also functions to commodify natural resources for consumers. Other authors suggest that volunteer tourism commodifies and sells feelings of intimacy and a “helping narrative” (Conran, 2011; Vodopivec & Jaffe, 2011). Conran (2011) argues: “The implicit
assumption in volunteer tourism that some lives are for saving while others are for being saviors.” This clear-cut “us vs. them” philosophy is important to the packaging and selling of volunteer tourism trips (Vodopivec & Jaffe, 2011), and further exposes its entrenchment in capitalist markets.

The totalizing force of commodification within the tourism industry heralds a rapid expansion of the range and diversity of touristic offerings (Fletcher, 2014; Munt, 1994). As more and more aspects of tourism are commodified, more and more “market niches” emerge and are marketed to consumers. Capitalism engenders the incessant production of novel experiences, and the tourism sector reflects this pattern. Fletcher (2014, p. 10) describes the emergence of this type of “boutique” tourism: “The 1970s saw the rise of new/alternative tourism offering a diversity of flexible, individually tailored trips concurrent with capitalism’s shift toward a novel, ‘disorganized,’ post-Fordist form…This has led to the development of myriad ‘niche’ or ‘boutique’ markets designed to offer an outlet for every tourist’s particular taste.” This intense proliferation of offerings is a prominent trend within volunteer ecotourism and is, in part, an offshoot of capitalist economics.

**Cultural Capital and the New Middle Class**

The socio-cultural conditions that have led to the enormous ballooning of volunteer tourism are also noteworthy. In an era where many Euro-American travelers are aware and concerned about a wide variety of environmental and social issues, these tourists must justify their travel experiences as “ethical” and more meaningful than mere “self-indulgent frivolity” (Fletcher, 2014, p. 112). In his paper on ecotourism, Munt (1994) discusses this type of justification of travel and the potential for “ethical” tourism to help travelers build cultural capital. Munt (1994, p. 50) asserts: “Holidays have become important commodities through which the new middle classes are able to proclaim their worldly status.” He argues that ecotourism resonates with these members of the middle class because they have the financial ability to travel overseas and they seek to distinguish themselves from conventional tourists. By partaking in ecotourism journeys, these tourists are able to build their cultural capital and morally justify their travel experiences (Munt, 1994).

Fletcher (2014, p. 62) also characterizes the class identity of the majority of today’s ecotourists. He describes this group as the: “‘upper,’ ‘new,’ ‘white collar,’ ‘technocratic,’
‘knowledge,’ ‘managerial,’ ‘professional,’ ‘service,’ or ‘postindustrial’ middle class.” Some of the significant and desired characteristics of this emerging class are self-reliance, self-discipline, self-direction, hard work, and the ability to defer gratification (Fletcher, 2014). This class labors to instill these qualities in future generations and condition them for the educational and professional world. As Fletcher (2014, p. 64) explains: “Ecotourism resonates strongly with this conditioning, typically requiring the ability to force oneself to persevere through deprivation and hardship, both physical and psychological.” Thus, the emergence of this new upper middle class has pushed volunteer tourism and ecotourism to the forefront of the travel industry.

CONCLUSION

The literature on volunteer ecotourism remains largely divided in its analysis of the impacts of this type of travel. Many studies indicate that volunteers grow personally, gain self-confidence, and acquire skills through their experiences as volunteer tourists. Furthermore, host communities frequently glean economic benefits, in addition to personal and cultural paybacks, as a result of volunteer ecotourism. Volunteers can also aid local organizations in conducting research and providing crucial funding and labor. However, a large body of literature argues that these benefits are often outweighed by the deleterious cultural, ecological, and economic influences that come with volunteer ecotourism. Overall, it is essential to remember that this sector is still in its adolescence and is one product of a much broader socio-cultural story.

While the literature on Alternative Spring Break is fairly new and still expanding, this type of critical analysis and academic divide has not yet emerged. Many studies cite the beneficial learning outcomes that ASB can bring to its participants, as well as ASB’s potential to create more active, engaged citizens. My goal in this study was to analyze the portion of ASB that falls into the volunteer ecotourism sector using the abovementioned theoretical framework that has emerged to evaluate volunteer-based ecotourism. My research was designed to fill several gaps that currently exist in the research. By using case studies of ASB trips from the University of Vermont, I hope to identify various challenges and successes of these programs, specifically study the environmental aspects of ASB programs, and acknowledge the unique perspectives of host organizations and communities.
METHODS

INTRODUCTION

The overall goal of this study was to examine and characterize how various stakeholders within ASB trips evaluate and process their experience as leaders, hosts, and volunteers and to use those insights to recommend some best practices or suggestions for improvement in the future. Although the literature has recently shifted to reveal some of the detrimental aspects of volunteer-based ecotourism, little research has been conducted on domestic, short-stint volunteer ecotourism and the issues involved in this specific sector. Thus, this research addressed the question: What are the major issues and successes of ASB (for both volunteers and hosts), and how can the program be improved and become more effective in the future? The main strategy to be employed in this research is the use of case studies of past ASB trips.

EMBEDDED CASE STUDIES: ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK TRIPS

Case studies are an effective method in researching intricate social situations, processes, and relationships (Denscombe, 2003). The case study is particularly applicable when a researcher wants to ask “how” and “why” questions about a certain “naturally occurring phenomenon;” that is, an event or experience that has occurred and will continue to occur outside of the research process (Denscombe, 2003; Yin, 2013). This research strategy closely hone in on one particular instance of a broader pattern or event, and focuses its attention on the forces at work within that singular instance. The in-depth nature of the data collected (using various methods) allows complexities to emerge regarding how and why things happen the way they do (Yin, 2013). The research focuses on these intermediate processes and patterns, rather than the ultimate outcomes and end products (Yin, 2013). Case studies use typical instances and extreme instances to illustrate these processes and provide analysis and conclusions that can be applied to more cases in a larger context (Denscombe, 2003). An embedded case study design allows the researcher to explore a single case or context while investigating and analyzing sub-units within this case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This research design permits analysis within sub-units, between sub-units, and across subunits (Baxter & Jack, 2008).
The use of embedded case studies was well suited to this particular research for several reasons. Firstly, the context or case of UVM’s ASB Chapter served as the overarching case study. Within this context, multiple sub-units (the individual trips) existed (see Figure 4). This model allowed the researcher to explore multiple instances of volunteer ecotourism within ASB and compare the results. The findings from multiple-case designs are often considered to be more robust and persuasive, because they are supported by varied examples (Rose et al., 2014). Thus, the structure of an embedded case study perfectly fits this research. Secondly, the occurrence of ASB trips is “natural”: it occurs each year during spring break, regardless of this research. Also, the goal of this study emphasized the processes and relationships that exist within the ASB trips. These included both the relationships between students and the relationships between students and host communities. The study aimed to understand the processes and patterns that occur on ASB trips and to determine how these processes lead to both positive and negative perceptions of the trip. Furthermore, these types of service-oriented, environmentally related trips are not uncommon within the United States. Most colleges offer these types of programs for their spring break each year. Thus, the detailed, in-depth information collected from this study could potentially apply in various degrees to an enormous host of other cases around the country. Finally, the case study method lends itself to multiple methods and data sources. This study required the perspectives of many stakeholders: students, trip leaders, directors, and hosts. Thus, the case study strategy served this research well.

SELECTION OF CASES AND INFORMANTS

Cases (Sub-Units)

In this study, each sub-unit was represented by an individual ASB trip. These sub-units are referred to as cases throughout the research. I selected cases from the pool of fifteen ASB trips that departed from UVM last March 2015. I confined my pool of potential cases to those...
that dealt with environmental topics and stewardship. These topics are prevalent among UVM ASB trips and include (but are not limited to): animal conservation, ecosystem conservation, pollution control, sustainable agriculture, urban agriculture, wildlife rehabilitation, and participatory environmental research. I also attempted to select cases that were structurally different for various reasons. Therefore, I chose one trip that was new and deemed “unsuccessful” and another that was repeated and deemed “successful.” The following descriptions present the two cases:

Case #1: Wildlife Rehabilitation Center

This Wildlife Rehabilitation Center is a non-profit wildlife rehabilitation center located on the East Coast of the U.S. The organization is funded entirely by grants and donations, and the majority of its workforce comes from volunteers. The goals of the center are to rehabilitate injured wildlife and return them to their natural habitats, provide care and a safe home for non-releasable birds and animals, and educate the public around local wildlife, ecology, and habitat creation. This site has been welcoming spring break students from various universities for seven years, and it is listed in the ASB umbrella organization’s, Break Away’s, online SiteBank database. The volunteer activities for university students include: participation in basic rehabilitative care, helping with local environmental education programs in schools, and learning about the natural history of the various species at the center. The organization requests a $650.00 registration fee for groups of up to ten students. This was UVM’s first time interacting with this organization, and it was a new location for an ASB trip. After traveling there in 2015, UVM’s ASB Chapter chose to discontinue the trip the following year.

Case #2: National Seashore

This site is a designated seashore under the National Park Service. It was created in the early 20th century with the purpose of protecting and preserving the coastal habitat and ecosystems. The seashore provides unique and scenic recreational opportunities and sustains a rich, diverse ecosystem. The site contains a multitude of habitats: beach, dune, shrub thicket, maritime forest, salt marsh, and grassland. This thriving ecosystem houses a large diversity of species, including the endangered piping plover and loggerhead sea turtle. The seashore welcomes volunteers and involves them in a wide range of activities: collecting trash from the
beach and lighthouse, engaging in sea turtle conservation programs, hosting at campgrounds, interpreting for the conservation education programs, and performing office and clerical work. UVM first traveled to this site in 2014, and so the UVM team already had an established connection with the site when they chose to return in 2015. After their experience in 2015, UVM’s ASB Chapter chose to send a trip there the following year.

Informants

While volunteer-ecotourism is a large and continually growing field, this study focused on only a portion of the activities and participants involved. Informants were confined to individuals who were involved in the 2015 Alternative Spring Break programs at the University of Vermont. This pool included the students who participated in the service trips, the student leaders who were selected to organize and supervise the trips, the student directors of the ASB program, and the staff and organizers at the host destinations. The returning volunteers, while not representative of the entire population of volunteer ecotourists, were “information-rich” participants and have relevant and direct experience working in the case of interest (Curry et al., 2009). The information obtained from these subjects did not represent the population of volunteer ecotourists at large, but it characterized patterns, dilemmas, and topics in the critical reflections of these individuals within a specific program. For each site (sub-unit), I interviewed three student participants, two trip leaders, and two representatives from the host organization or community. I also interviewed two student members of the ASB Director Team.

ACCESS TO AND CONSENT FROM INFORMANTS

To identify and contact the interviewees necessary for this study, I employed a variety of methods. First, I contacted the student Director Team of UVM’s ASB program, informed them about the study, and gained their permission to contact and interview the various informants (i.e. trip leaders, volunteers, and host communities)(see Appendix A for approval form). Chain referral sampling (“snowball sampling”) was employed to gain access to potential interviewees. In this process, the interviewees provide the researcher with names of other interviewees (Vogt, 1999). The UVM ASB Director Team provided the names and contact information from the trip leaders, who subsequently provided the names and contact information for host organizations. Interviews were scheduled using email and phone correspondence. Fifteen interviews were
conducted: seven over the phone or Skype and eight in-person on UVM’s campus.

Before each interview, I provided the interviewee with a thorough form outlining the conditions of informed consent (see Appendix B). Essentially, the interviewee understood that the process was voluntary, that he/she could choose to end the interview at any time, that he/she could decline from answering any question, that no names would be used in the final research, and that he/she could ask questions at any point about any aspect of the study. Before beginning the interview, the informant read and signed the informed consent form. I kept this form for documentation. For interviews that were conducted over the phone, oral consent was obtained before I began the interview process.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

After using phone and email to schedule meeting times with the informants, I conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews in a quiet environment (Jacob, 2012). Before each interview began, I went over the consent form (see above process). I used a recording device to record the entire dialogue of the interview and occasionally took field notes to record visual cues and body language that could not be captured by the audio recording (Denscombe, 2003). The meeting began with casual introductions and a brief description of the purpose of the study. I then used a list of 15-20 interview questions to guide the conversation. All of these questions were open-ended (what, where, when, and how questions) and avoided leading the informant to answer in a specific way (Denscombe, 2003; Jacob, 2012). The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed a certain degree of flexibility in the order in which I asked the questions, and in the elaboration of specific topics or areas (Denscombe, 2003). I used a series of prompts, probes, and checks to confirm my understanding of the informants’ words and to solicit more in-depth information on certain points of interest (Denscombe, 2003). Once the informant answered all of the questions, I offered thanks and reiterated how the interviewee’s information would be used in the study.

The first interviews were be conducted with the host organizations (local staff, local volunteers, etc.) (See Appendix C for loose list of questions). The information gained from these interviews was used to shape and modify the questions asked of the volunteers and trip leaders. As the ASB sites were spread out across the United States, these interviews all took place over the phone. For phone interviews, oral consent was obtained, and proper recording protocols were
established beforehand (Burke et al., 2001).

The rest of the interviews were conducted on UVM’s campus or over the phone with student participants, trip leaders, and program directors (see D, E, and F for lists of questions). These interviews with the volunteers and trip leaders asked informants to reflect on their experiences and offer suggestions for the future. The interviews with the ASB Director Team asked about general information about the club, the selection of host sites and organizations, and the measurement of success of ASB trips.

INFORMANT COMPENSATION

This study received a Mini Grant Award from the Office of Undergraduate Research, which allowed for compensation of informants. Unfortunately, the funding was awarded after the majority of the interview process had been completed. However, all of the informants who were interviewed on UVM’s campus received a $5.00 gift certificate to Ben & Jerry’s as compensation for their time. These coupons were awarded to the informants after the interviews had been completed.

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The information and data from interviews was transcribed as soon as possible after the interview took place. I utilized Researchware, Inc.’s HyperTRANSCRIBE software to more easily and quickly transcribe the interview recordings. This software speeds the process of transcription by providing keyboard controls for play, pause, and loopback functions (UVM Helpline, 2012). After the transcription process was complete, each interview was saved and filed in the written format of a dialogue. These text documents did not include the informants’ names; they included the coded name of the informant.

After the interviews were transcribed, I used the process of qualitative coding to analyze the interview data. A code is a word or a short string of words that symbolizes a larger concept, value, or piece of data (Saldaña, 2009). In the process of hand coding, a researcher parses through a text (e.g. interview transcriptions), and codifies them, marking each code next to each line of text where it appears. These codes are then lumped into categories and subcategories, themes, and finally, theories (Saldaña, 2009). This process is excellent for identifying similarities, differences, frequencies, sequences, correspondences, and apparent causations in the
data (Saldaña, 2009). In this study, I coded the two cases separately, identifying 30-40 codes for each case while reading the interview transcriptions. The codes were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, with a code label for each row. Next, the names of the informants were listed across the top of the document as labels for the columns. Data from the interviews populated the cells in the chart, providing a visual graphic that allowed for comparison between informants within each code. After creating this chart for the two cases, the codes were collapsed into larger categories (themes), which were used to structure the Results and Discussion sections. The two interviews with members of the ASB Director Team were coded separately.

This analysis allowed me to develop ideas and theories about the factors contribute to both successes and challenges in ASB trips. In the end, these were combined to create a set of recommendations and suggestions for future site selection, planning, and coordination.

**DOCUMENT ANALYSIS**

Document analysis was employed to triangulate the data and draw from various sources. After groups return from ASB, the Director Team sends an electronic evaluation to site leaders and student participants. This evaluation survey asks about overall experience, the service site, housing arrangements, group dynamics, and suggestions for future ASB trips. In each case study, four students responded to this evaluation. These evaluation responses were analyzed to better understand students’ perceptions and experiences on their ASB trips.

**ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This research deals with a sensitive topic: the successes and challenges of a student-organized and directed program at UVM. The research was not intended to reflect poorly on this program or any of the participants and hosts involved. To ensure that informants did not suffer penalty as a result of their participation in the research, measures were taken to avoid deception and remain honest about the intentions of the research (Bates et al., 2007). Before conducting any interviews, the researcher obtained formal permission for the study from UVM’s ASB directors and gave full disclosure about the intentions of the research. The researcher also informed UVM’s ASB Chapter’s Faculty Advisor about the research before beginning the interview process. Furthermore, the researcher obtained either written or oral consent from all interviewees before beginning the interview process. All informants’ names were kept
anonymous and appear as codes in the written report to protect the interviewees’ privacy and to safeguard against any potential emotional or social damage to the informants. Before beginning the formal research process, necessary permissions from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) were obtained. This project qualified for exemption from IRB review.

LIMITATIONS

• In planning this research, I hoped to interview at least five student participants from each trip. Due to the low response rate (about 50%) from student participants and the temporal constraints on this project, I was only able to interview three student participants from each trip. Thus, I was unable to gain a more holistic view of student perceptions and experiences. For each case study results on student perspective are based entirely on the three student participant interviews, two site leader interviews, and student evaluations.

• Unfortunately, I was not able to travel with the trips when they departed and was therefore unable to engage in on-site participant observation. Therefore, all of the data is a compilation of multiple student and host perceptions, with no third-party observation. Due to the timeline of the study, subject observation was not an option.

• This study provides a retrospective view of two ASB trips from 2015. All of the data in the study was produced and collected after the weeklong ASB experience, and most of it was collected nearly a year after the trips departed from UVM. Therefore, some of the details may be incorrect or skewed, as a large amount of time had passed since informants participated in ASB.
INTRODUCTION

The results are reported in four different sections: overall results for UVM’s Alternative Spring Break (ASB) Chapter, results for Case Study #1 (wildlife rehabilitation site), results for Case Study #2 (seashore conservation site), and finally, a comparison of the two cases. The results for UVM’s ASB Chapter focus on the program’s hierarchical structure, the roles of various players, the process for site selection, and the process for site evaluation and measuring success.

For each case study, informant demographics are presented. The case study results also provide an overview of the host organization’s structure, the expectations and motivations of various players in the case, the major benefits and challenges for these players, and the suggestions from all parties for improving the relationship in the future. Finally, a comparison of the two case studies provides an analysis of various factors across the two sites.

UVM’S ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK CHAPTER

Results in this section are based on interviews and email correspondence with two members of the UVM ASB Director Team (referred to as ASBD1 and ASBD2), the UVM ASB website, post-trip surveys, and other administrative and planning documents shared by the ASB Director Team.

Roles and Responsibilities

UVM’s ASB Chapter is primarily orchestrated and run by students; however, a faculty advisor from the Department of Student Life provides resources and support. The following descriptions outline the functions and responsibilities of various players:

- **ASB Faculty Advisor**: The Faculty Advisor maintains regular contact with the UVM Director Team to make sure that logistics and scheduling of trips are timely and that the club is upholding UVM’s policies and rules. The Faculty Advisor also handles the financial aid decisions for the club, prepares risk management training, and receives and approves the itineraries for all departing trips. Another major role is communication with
the ASB trips during the week of spring break in March. The Faculty Advisor receives
departure, mid-week, and return updates from all 15 trips and is responsible for arranging
alternate plans in the case of an emergency. Finally, the Faculty Advisor organizes
reflection materials for the ASB groups to use during the trips to reflect on their service
experiences. ASB advising is an official part of this faculty member’s job description.

• **ASB Director Team:** The ASB Director Team performs the bulk of administrative and
organizing duties for the chapter. The team is normally comprised of 3-4 people,
typically junior and seniors who have participated as site leaders or participants in the
past. These students are responsible for the administration and operation of the club.
Administratively, they manage the website, advertising, social media, the budget,
communication with the Student Government Association, and their partnership with
Break Away. The Director Team is responsible for the purchase and sale of all
merchandise, booking vans and processing medical forms, and planning the site leader
retreat. A large part of what the Director Team does is selection of trips. These students
communicate with returning sites and use Break Away’s online database to select new
sites each year. They maintain communication with the host organizations until site
leaders have been placed. Finally, the Director Team is responsible for interviewing and
selecting all site leaders, assisting in the application process of student participants, and
placing both site leaders and student participants in groups and locations. The ASB
Director Team is unpaid.

• **ASB Site Leaders:** The site leaders are primarily responsible for taking over
communication with host organizations, interviewing and selecting student participants,
and organizing their particular trip. As soon as site leaders have been paired (two per trip)
and given a host organization, it is their responsibility to reach out to their site contact
and coordinate the details of the trip (accommodations, food, preparation, packing lists,
etc.). The site leaders also conduct interviews with participant candidates and make the
decisions about who will go on their trip. Furthermore, site leaders must organize pre-trip
meetings, driving, and halfway housing (if their destination is far away). During the ASB
trip, site leaders are the main facilitators of the group, and they are responsible for
keeping everyone safe and helping the group to reflect on their service experiences. ASB
site leaders are unpaid.
• **ASB Student Participants:** These are the students who apply to participate in ASB but do not have a leadership position within the club. The student participants pay a fee to participate ($200 for a driving trip, $300 for a flying trip).

**Chapter Goals**

The primary goals of UVM’s ASB Chapter, as articulated by a member of the director team and the information on the website, are: education around social and environmental issues, personal growth among participants, beneficial service outcomes for communities, and fun. One ASB director (ASBD1) explained the educational aim of UVM’s ASB:

We hope to educate the folks who are engaging on these trips in terms of the social issue they're working with… We hope that ASB can be either a continuation or the beginning of a mindset that's aware of the social inequities and environmental inequities in this world. And provide one means to engaging with that in a positive way.

The directors intend to design programs and experiences that allow participants to better understand and relate to particular issues (i.e. poverty, gender inequality, education, health, environmental stewardship, etc.). Another main goal of the chapter is to help their partner communities and organizations in whatever ways necessary. ASBD1 explained that UVM trips ask these host organizations to identify their own needs instead of the ASB groups deciding what service work to complete:

Another goal is to help people. But with that, UVM ASB does not have top word on what's best for communities going out there. We talk a lot about how our role as students going into communities across the country is not to tell them what they need or have some pre-prescribed vision.

Another ASB director echoed this sentiment, describing the process that the director team uses to write descriptions for projects and sites: “You work with the community partner, the person that you're going to be working…And they tell us what they need. And then we write the description based on their mission statement and based on the information that we have” (ASBD2). A third goal of UVM’s ASB Chapter is to provide a fun and exciting experience for the students that participate during spring break. ASBD1 discussed the impact that this type of fun learning experience can have on a broader, whole-campus level:

We absolutely want our participants to have fun. I think…that ASB contributes to a positive school climate for those who participate in it, and also those who don't. We send out over a hundred students every spring across the country, so I think another goal is have fun and carry that with you back to campus.
These are the main goals that drive the selection of trips, evaluative processes, and measurement of success in the club (see following sections).

**Selection of Trips and Volunteer Placement**

The ASB Director Team selects all of the locations, organizations, and community partners within the trips. In deciding which sites/organizations to use as trips, the directors cited several criteria: mix of returning and new sites, mix of issues, and locations outside New England. Both ASB directors explained that they like to choose roughly 50% new trips each year while maintaining relationships and using returning sites for the remaining 50%. ASBD1 explained that the returning trips are very important:

> We try to have sites that we return to every year. To further that relationship and show that commitment…That's one method by which we pick… I think the ideology running this is that we do want to have committed relationships with some of the programs we work with.

However, ASBD2 mentioned, “We always try to mix in new places every year,” so novelty is certainly an important factor in choosing the trips. Another element that the director team considers when choosing trips is the balance of social and environmental issues across all 15 proposed ASB trips. ASBD1 discussed the ability of many different types of issues to appeal to a broader, more diverse group of students:

> We send out 15 trips, but we don't want all 15 trips to work with animal rescue. Not because that's not important, but because we want the education ASB could provide to be more expansive for different folks, and also because people are pledging their spring break to engagement service and community, and different folks have different passions, and there's more areas for growth.

Finally, another factor in choosing host organizations and community partners is the location. According to one of the directors, the trips tend to travel outside New England in order to escape the March weather and enhance the fun-having goal mentioned in the previous section:

> “Typically we wouldn't have an ASB trip happen in, say, New Hampshire…People typically we found want to get out of New England. Because we're in New England, and it's March. So that is a factor” (ASBD1). All of these factors (location, issue, and returning/non-returning) influence the ASB Director Team’s decisions about which trips to plan in any given year.
After the sites and community partners are selected, the ASB directors also choose all of the placements of site leaders and student participants. The site leaders and student participants receive an online survey with brief descriptions of each trip. For example, the survey describes Case Study #2 as “Work to preserve and protect a national park.” Other descriptions included: “Rebuilding homes for those affected by natural disasters,” “Food security,” “Organization working with children with special needs/disabilities,” etc. After ranking their top three trip descriptions, the survey is sent back to the ASB Director Team who works to best match site leader pairs and student participants with their preferred trips. ASBD1 explained why the survey does not contain locations or the names of specific organizations:

We don't give it by location and organization, primarily because we don't want the words ‘Miami Florida’ to stand out more than ‘helping folks in an elderly home’…We want the social issue to drive it. So we ask folks to preference the social issue.

Thus, site leaders and participants have limited say in what trip and what issue they work with during the week of ASB.

**Evaluation & Measuring Success**

The main form of ASB trip evaluation is completed by site leaders and student participants a few weeks after they return from their spring break. The ASB Director Team sends a survey and asks both site leaders and all of the student participants to complete it. In the two cases discussed below, only about 50% of the group responded to the survey. The survey asks a variety of questions. Firstly, it inquires about the overall experience of the trip. Then it poses several questions about the specific site or organization (Did your site have enough work for you to do every day? Did you feel welcome at your service site? Would you recommend going to this site again?). After this, the survey requests information about housing (Did it meet all of your needs? Did you feel welcomed? Would you recommend the housing?). Finally, the survey asks about the group dynamic and the ability of site leaders to create a safe space (Did your site leaders create a safe and inviting environment for the group? When things didn’t go as planned, how did the site leaders respond?). The last question in the survey calls for recommendations for social issues to focus on in future trips.

After gathering this survey information, the ASB Director Team uses it in choosing which trips will be returning trips the following year and which trips will be discontinued. As ASBD1 described: “Often if the trips are successful as evaluated by site leaders and participants
and the actual premise and actions of the program, that will be one we return to.” This information is contained within the ASB Director Team and is not shared with future site leaders or host organizations. ASBD2 explained that the post-trip survey, “usually stays within UVM ASB…it's really to decide whether we want to go back there [service site] or not.” When asked if the post-trip evaluations were shared with host organizations, ASBD2 responded:

I think that feedback is very vital, and I think it would be good for us to relay that information to the site contact and be like, ‘this is how the students and the leaders have felt about your trip.’ Because I think that would allow this development.

However, in the past, this information has never been relayed to site contacts, even if the ASB Director Team decides to return to that service site the following year.

The interviews with the ASB Director Team revealed several metrics used for measuring the success of the spring break trips. The foremost concern of the chapter is the safety of the students who participate. ASBD1 discussed this pragmatic measure for success:

Number one: safety. If everyone goes on ASB, engages, and comes back, to me, that in itself is a version of success. Although that's not the driving force of why we do this, it's a hugely important element.

Later in the conversation, ASBD1 mentioned several other factors that the ASB directors look for in successful trips. These included effective group dynamics, communication between host organizations and students, and the personal growth of students:

I think a successful trip is one in which the participants are given opportunities for cohesion and opportunities for challenge and opportunities for flexibility. And ones in which the service organization… is communicative with what's going on

This director also explained that a successful trip cannot be an exploitative one where the students are benefitting and the host organization’s work is hurt or hindered: “I would call that a failure if it was an exploitative process of the organization that we're actually just trying to help” (ASBD1).

Organizational Challenges

The main challenges that UVM’s ASB Chapter faces seem to be a lack of time and human resources and an astounding rate of turnover within the ASB Director Team. The ASB Director Team is almost always composed of juniors and seniors. Therefore, there is a steep learning curve and a high amount of turnover for these positions. ASBD1 explained: “We had an
awesome, awesome director team last year, all of whom were seniors.” When ASBD1 joined the Director Team, she was one of four brand new directors. While the past directors left behind documentation, instructions, timelines, and lists, the coordination and organization of the entire ASB chapter is a time-consuming and complex role that is difficult to fill without mentoring and real-world training. ASBD1 mentioned: “In being ¼ the director team this year, it has been a challenge to simply execute what we know are the expectations.” And in some cases, these expectations are not always clear. When asked about how the re-orientation and reflection process typically works, ASBD1 responded, “I don't know. I don't really have a lot of context outside of what I experienced last year in a much different role.” It appears that this high incidence of turnover within the ASB Director Team leads to misunderstanding and a lack of clarity in the best practices for orchestrating and organizing the chapter.

Another organizational challenge faced by ASB is the lack of time and human resources to complete all of the necessary administrative, communication, and planning work. The ASB Director Team is not paid and is usually comprised of full-time students with separate academic and extracurricular obligations. Therefore, the amount of work that falls onto the directors is often overwhelming. ASBD1 explained this challenge:

We [ASB Director Team] cross as many bridges as we can, but a lot of that means we have to come to them first…And so it is a balance between…an ideal program that we'd like to run. And that ideal program includes in depth return reflection. That ideal program includes very clear guidelines and just flawless communication. What actually happens is much more haphazard than that.

This steep learning curve and enormous workload both fall onto the ASB Director Team, creating some of the main obstacles for the ASB chapter at UVM.
SITE ONE: WILDLIFE REHABILITATION SANCTUARY

Results in this section are based on interviews with representatives of the host organization, site leaders, and student participants (see Table below). The results also draw upon data from the host organization’s website and post-trip evaluative surveys completed by the site leaders and student participants. The results outline the host organization’s perspective, the students’ perspective, the communication that occurred between these two groups, and finally, various outcomes of the experience for both parties.

Table 1. Site One Informant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Gender (M/F)</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Major/Field of Study</th>
<th>Participated in ASB Before (Y/N)</th>
</tr>
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Host Organization Perspective

Overview of Organization

The first case focused on a wildlife rehabilitation sanctuary located on the East Coast of the U.S. The mission of the organization is to take in and rehabilitate all injured and orphaned native wildlife and to promote awareness and advocacy around wildlife on local, statewide, and national levels. The center is relatively small, but is the only official wildlife rehabilitation sanctuary in the county. Thus, the geographic range that the organization covers is quite large. In 2015, the organization admitted 1,150 animal patients for treatment. These animals included (in order of most prevalent): opossums, squirrels, rabbits, wrens, mockingbirds, pigeons, mourning
doves, gulls, pelicans, and loons, among others. The animals that are admitted to this sanctuary receive treatment and then face several options:

a) Re-introduction into the wild
b) Remaining as a resident/non-releasable animal at the sanctuary (in cases where the animals can no longer survive independently in the wild)
c) Euthanization (in cases where the injuries are too severe to treat or where quality of life is severely compromised by an injury or condition)

Therefore, in addition to providing immediate care for injured animals, the sanctuary serves as a permanent home to hundreds of non-releasable animals, namely opossums, ducks, squirrels, swans, and several birds of prey.

The sanctuary is relatively small-scale, with one full-time director (and founder) and a variety of different volunteers who contribute their time to keep the organization running. These volunteers fit into several different categories based on their experience with wildlife, the number of hours they contribute to the sanctuary, and the tasks they complete at the sanctuary.

The categories include the following:

- **Director/Founder (HO1a):** This individual founded the sanctuary and works full-time to support and maintain the operation of the center. HO1a also works as a part-time professor at a local community college. She manages the bulk of administrative tasks for the sanctuary and is the primary care provider for the animal patients.

- **Core Volunteers (including HO1b):** This category includes 2-3 volunteers who contribute between 20-40 hours per week to the sanctuary. These volunteers have worked at the organization for several years and are comfortable completing all of the tasks necessary for the normal operation of the sanctuary. The Core Volunteers are also primarily responsible for training new interns, Seasonal Volunteers, and Alternative Break Volunteers.

- **Interns:** These volunteers apply for a 6-week program, during which they work 30-40 hours per week. Over the course of the 6-week period, they receive training to complete all the tasks that the Core Volunteers complete. By the end of their internship, they are able to become a Core Volunteer and run the sanctuary with minimal assistance.

- **Seasonal Volunteers:** This category includes a wide variety of volunteers who come intermittently for short periods of time. These volunteers include local families, military
personnel (from the military base nearby), individuals with court-ordered volunteer work, and college students from nearby universities. These volunteers work mainly with the non-releasable animals; however, some are able to gain experience rehabilitating injured wildlife. They also participate in grounds keeping, maintenance, and public relations work.

• **Alternative Break (AB) Volunteers:** These volunteers come for 5 days at a time over winter break (January) or spring break (March). The organization typically welcomes 2-4 of these groups every year. The AB Volunteers are trained to do all types of work at the sanctuary, including: animal rehabilitation, care for non-releasable animals, grounds-keeping, and public relations work.

According to the director of the sanctuary “we’re all pretty much passion-run. You do this because you care, because you want to make a difference.” The entirety of the work completed at this organization is volunteer-based, and there is a very high level of personal commitment and dedication among the Core Volunteers and Interns. As Volunteer Coordinator (and Core Volunteer) HO1b explained: “We love what we do. It’s the animals. We both love animals. It’s just in our nature. We’ve always loved them and when we were kids we always brought home every injured animal we could find. And that’s how it started”. Therefore, the labor required for the operation of this sanctuary is fulfilled by in-kind donations of volunteers’ time. The funding for the sanctuary comes primarily from the teaching income of the Director. This income covers the rent and utility costs. The money for medicines, food, bandages, and other rehabilitation materials comes from donations. Other sources of money for the organization include: yearly bake sales and fundraising events, proceeds from T-shirt and bracelet sales, registration fees from ASB trips ($650.00/trip), and various grants.

**Expectations & Motivations**

The expectations and motivations of the host organization representatives in welcoming ASB volunteers focused more on education, awareness, empathy, and tourism than on the physical labor aspect. The director, HO1a, explained this perspective: “To me, the students don’t just come here and do my work. Students have to leave with something that benefitted them. Not just a feeling of, ‘Oh, I did a good job. I did a lot of work.’” Therefore, the ASB volunteers are expected to do several hours of work a day (the 9am-1pm shift), but there are educational and
emotional expectations beyond that work. During the work periods, volunteers are expected to complete all of the normal training and tasks that any Seasonal Volunteer would complete. As the director said, “We have them do exactly what our volunteers would do…They do all the outside work, just as if they were a brand new volunteer starting here.”

In addition to this volunteer work, both HO1 representatives mentioned their expectations that the ASB volunteers would be personally and emotionally affected by their experience with the animals at the sanctuary. One of their main expectations for the students is empathy development. The director explains this expectation:

A lot of these young men and women have never had a chance to see some of this wildlife up close…All of a sudden they realize, okay this is not a vicious creature. Let’s have some empathy for that thing that everybody runs over in the road…If you can get close enough to stare into their [the animal’s] eyes…I think that really makes an impact.

The Volunteer Coordinator (HO1b) echoes this sentiment about building personal connections and empathy between wildlife and visitors: “All of our animals, you can get up close and personal to them. You have a different sense about them.” Both HO1a and HO1b voiced their hopes that students would be able to develop this empathy and then use it to “continue the education that we taught them…have an overall world impact” (HO1b). HO1a explains that one of her goals for the students is for them to get involved in wildlife rehabilitation after their visit to HO1. She provides some examples of this type of post-trip engagement: “Maybe hands-on volunteering, helping to go back and change some of the public thinking, or helping to be involved in laws that protect wildlife. You know, that type of thing that would strengthen the environment.”

In addition to these expectations of empathy development and awareness building, the director of HO1 expects the ASB volunteers to explore the area and become tourists and naturalists for the week. “When the students come, not only are they here at HO1, but we want them to explore coastal [host state].” HO1a mentions several educational and touristic activities that she hopes all ASB trips will take advantage of: the aquarium, the National Parks nearby, a local serpentarium, local cuisine and cooking styles, among other things. Furthermore, HO1a expects that students will use their free time (when they’re not volunteering) to explore the natural ecosystems that exist in this part of the United States. The director’s hope is that the ASB volunteers will “go out and see what kinds of animals and birds there are compared to where they came from…We try to keep all parts of the day educational, not just an hour or two.”
**UVM ASB Group’s Visit to HO1**

HO1 welcomes several ASB groups from colleges around the country to their site each year. Given the large numbers of student volunteers coming and going from the site, HO1 staff did not specifically remember their experience with UVM’s ASB volunteers. The Core Volunteers and director are typically very busy completing the day-to-day work at the sanctuary, and they don’t always have time to form personal connections with the short-term volunteers who work with them. When asked if she remembered the ASB group from UVM, HO1b responded: “No I don’t. I can’t remember what I did yesterday. It’s not an insult. We had so many students last year. There’s no way I remember them all.”

**Student Perspective**

*Expectations & Motivations*

The student motivations (including both site leaders and student participants) for applying and participating in this ASB trip were reported in interviews and were varied. Several students cited their enthusiasm about the “alternative” aspect of this trip and the opportunity to do service work. They were excited about defying the spring break norm: “I like ASB because of their principles and that they emphasize that we’re not just having a fun break. We’re there to do service work”. Another participant mentioned that this alternative to the norm appealed to her: “I’m not one of those types of people that would be like ‘Oh, let’s go to Cancun for the week.’” Other student volunteers said that their interest in animals and wildlife motivated their decision to participate in ASB: “When I applied to ASB, I really wanted to do something with animals…I saw HO1, and they don’t tell you the exact trips, but I saw it was working with animals.” When asked about their motivations to participate, students also expressed an interest and desire to travel and leave Vermont. SP1a addressed this: “It’s a trip. I’ve never been to [HO1 state] before, so it’s just nice to get out.” SP1c echoed this desire: “I’m very interested in seeing the U.S. and seeing the world.” Finally, almost all of the student volunteers were motivated by their desire to help an organization by doing valuable service work. SP1b talked about this motivation: “I just want to be able to contribute something to an organization…I guess I just want to be able to do something that maybe they wouldn’t have done there without.”

The student expectations of the service experience were more consistent across the group. Most of the volunteers were expecting to work full 8-hour days at the organization, work with a
variety of animals, be provided with a structured project schedule, and have a “meaningful”
experience. One leader who had participated in a past trip said “Typically it’s a lot of work. Like
you’re working all day. But it’s fine, that’s the point of going.” This full workday seems to be a
norm for UVM ASB trips, and the volunteers were all prepared to be working at least eight hours
each day. Each of the five volunteer interviewees mentioned at some point their expectation of
lots of work. Several students discussed their expectation of a more organized, project-based
work schedule.

The entire conversation around student motivations and expectations was permeated by a
discussion of “making a difference,” “making an impact,” and having a meaningful experience.
Almost all of the volunteers mentioned this while explaining their motivations and expectations.
SP1b describes this: “I kinda had that expectation that we would be working all day and feel like
we were making more of a difference.” SP1c echoes this sentiment when she says, “I thought of
this [ASB] as a really good opportunity to explore and do something that I would feel like was of
value.” This theme of meaningfulness emerges throughout the interviews with student
volunteers.

Service Experience at HO1

Over the course of the week, UVM’s ASB group accomplished a wide variety of tasks in
several locations. The following sections briefly describe this service work in three categories:
outside work, inside work, and zoo work.

Outside Work:

The “outside work” was the majority of the service work that UVM ASB volunteers
completed during their time at HO1. Every interviewee explained this type of work in their
interviews, and the reports were consistent across the board. This work involves the following
tasks: letting animals out of their cages, cleaning the animal cages, replenishing food and water
supplies for the animals, gathering pigeon eggs, and checking over the animals to make sure they
look healthy and normal. There was a large binder with information about each animal and a
checklist of tasks for the morning. The volunteers were expected to complete the checklist over
the course of the 9am-1pm shift. The outside work involves working mainly with the
resident/non-releasable animals (i.e. squirrels, birds, opossums, etc. that cannot survive
independently in the wild due to injuries or permanent conditions). This is something that the
director (HO1a) mentioned several times, but that none of the student volunteers seemed to understand (see Challenges and Problematic Outcomes section).

Another task that fits into the outside work category is crushing cans. During one morning of their 5-day visit, UVM volunteers were asked to help HO1a crush cans, which were later brought to a recycling center to collect deposit money.

Inside Work:

The “inside work” was usually assigned to one or two ASB volunteers each day on a rotating basis. This work was the more delicate patient care; working with the recently injured or orphaned wildlife. Inside the rehabilitation room, the ASB volunteers worked alongside HO1a and her Core Volunteers to feed and weigh the animal patients, administer medicines, and prepare foods for the patients. This work required more training and skill than the outside work, and so there was a lower ratio of ASB volunteers to HO1 core volunteers than there was outside.

Zoo Work:

On two of the five afternoons that volunteers worked at HO1, they traveled about 25 minutes to volunteer at a local zoo. The owner of the zoo serves on the Board of Directors for HO1, and so HO1a encourages ASB volunteers to travel to the zoo and volunteer in the afternoons after they finish the daily work at the sanctuary. The zoo is situated on a 10 acre of land and houses about 80 animal exhibits with various reptiles, birds, and mammals. The zoo’s season runs from early spring (March/April) through the autumn months. When ASB volunteers come during spring break, the zoo is preparing to open for the season and provides the volunteers with a wide variety of tasks to complete. These tasks include: piling trash, painting, raking and clearing paths, burning brush, moving materials, and feeding animals. After volunteering for one afternoon at the zoo, the UVM ASB volunteers chose to return the following day after working at HO1. UVM volunteer reported this service experience to be one of the most fulfilling of the entire trip.

Communication between Host Organization and ASB Volunteers

Pre-Trip Communication

The UVM ASB Director Team initiated the pre-trip communication with HO1 approximately 9 months before the student volunteers visited the site. The Director Team found
HO1 listed on Break Away’s online Site Bank Database, and they reached out to HO1a to see if a visit from UVM students would be possible. After site leaders were assigned to the trip, they continued the conversation with HO1a and discussed logistics including work scheduling, local accommodations, and packing lists. This type of pre-trip communication is managed almost entirely by the director (HO1a). According to HO1a, this process usually occurs as follows:

We come up with a contract for them that they can present to the school. It’s explicitly outlined as to what students will get out of this experience...All of that is as above-board as we can possibly make it so that they know and are aware before they get here.

However, site leaders reported a slightly different experience regarding pre-trip information. SL1b remembered “They didn’t give us a lot of information ahead of time about what we were going to be doing. It was very vague.” In terms of accommodations, SL1a had a hard time finding a church that would host the group for free (a requirement of UVM ASB is free housing close to the service site). SL1a recalled her frustration using an information list that HO1a had provided: “On her information list, she listed two or three churches. We thought ‘okay, these are all good.’ We contacted them. They don’t do it” [offer free housing].

The discrepancy between what HO1a reports she offers and what ASB groups actually receive in terms of pre-trip communication and information is noteworthy.

Communication During the Visit

At the beginning of their visit to the sanctuary, student volunteers received a preliminary orientation, as described by HO1b:

We’ll do a formal tour with them and we talk about each of the animals that are there. And how they got there. What their role is, what the ecosystem is doing, where they came from, the impacts of what happened...We talk about what this animal particularly is doing here, why, what is it good for?

During this orientation, the volunteers also learned how to perform all of the daily tasks included in the outside work. HO1b (the Volunteer Coordinator) normally leads this orientation and training. After the students have undergone this training, they do not have any other type of formal instruction or interaction with HO1a or Core Volunteers for the rest of the week (unless they are doing inside work alongside the sanctuary staff). As HO1b explained: “Now that’s only the first day or two [the training]. The rest of the week then they just do everything and we go to work.”
Student volunteers reported minimal interaction with the sanctuary staff over the course of the week. As SL1a recalled, “Most of the time we would see her [HO1a] for 10 minutes if that.” Other students remembered HO1a being extremely busy and unavailable to answer questions: “I don't think I worked with HO1a that much in there [the inside patient room]. I think it was more like the other intern who kind of did more. And HO1a seemed always very rushed and running” (SP1b). SP1a worried that she couldn’t ask questions about why certain animals were being kept in captivity at the sanctuary: “I didn’t feel like she gave off a vibe where she was very open to those types of questions.” Due to short staffing at HO1, interaction between volunteers and hosts was largely limited.

**Post-Trip Communication**

In UVM’s ASB model, there is no post-trip communication with host organizations. Once a UVM group leaves the site, that is last time that anyone from UVM’s ASB Chapter communicates with that organization. There is no evaluation or post-trip reflection involving the host organization. In some cases, organizations are contacted the following summer to see if they are interested in hosting UVM students again the following spring. This did not happen in this case, as the trip to HO1 was discontinued after this group’s visit.

**Trip Outcomes**

*Host Organization Perspective*

Positive Outcomes:

Both HO1a and HO1b mentioned that one of the benefits that ASB volunteers provide is physical help completing tasks and doing labor on the sanctuary. The director said “It gives us that extra pair of hands when we really need them.” On their website, HO1 urges people to volunteer, saying, “Our core volunteers who are willing to come in and assist on a regular basis allow us to admit more patients. One of the most precious gifts that you can give to HO1 is your time.” Furthermore, the ASB volunteers commit to volunteering for a full week, which doesn’t normally happen with the Seasonal Volunteers at HO1. HO1b expressed her gratitude that ASB volunteers were able to devote a significant chunk of time to providing service at HO1: “It’s amazing when we have help like that because we know they’re coming all week. We know they’re going to be dependable.”
In addition to providing this physical labor, HO1b spoke about the benefits that volunteers provide by taking burden off of the already taxed Core Volunteers. HO1b explained that ASB volunteers allow Core Volunteers to go home earlier in the day:

An average day at HO1 is normally just two people, me and someone else... we’re usually lucky if we get everything done by 3 o’clock. So when I have a group like that...we can get through everything and be well done by 1:30, 2 o’clock at the latest.

ASB volunteers provide an enormous service by helping to take over some of the tasks that are normally performed by Core Volunteers (i.e. outside work, grounds maintenance, etc.). HO1b also mentioned that when ASB groups volunteer, she is usually able to complete other projects that she normally wouldn’t have time to do:

I can go organize something that we’ve been putting on the back burner for a year because we haven’t had time to organize it. Or to do our supplies, figure out what we need to order. Work on marketing, things like that. That time is needed for other things. Even if it’s just for me to have the time off to re-coop my brain before baby season starts.

Therefore, in the short-term ASB volunteers delivered valuable services to HO1 by aiding them in the everyday operation and maintenance of the sanctuary and providing physical and mental relief for the Core Volunteers.

In addition to these short-term benefits, both HO1a and HO1b reported longer-term, more abstract benefits that they consider an important part of welcoming ASB volunteers to the sanctuary. The following quote from HO1a perfectly summarizes this perspective:

They [ASB volunteers] make a tremendous difference. We look at is as okay the short-term effect is they’re coming here and they’re giving us a week’s worth of help. Long-term I look at it as we are helping with the entire profession of wildlife rehabilitation by exposing it to students who might never have thought of getting into that as a field. So now they might kind of open their eyes to that or look into a kind of career that might involve environmental education…They’re going to make a difference later on in their lives somehow.

Both HO1a and HO1b stressed that an enormous portion of what they do is education. They hope that when ASB volunteers visit the sanctuary, their eyes will be opened to the importance of wildlife rehabilitation and habitat conservation. They work hard to facilitate visits with ASB groups because they hope to change the students’ ideas about wildlife, get them excited about rehabilitation, and turn them into life-long wildlife advocates. Both HO1a and HO1b look at this student learning experience and personal development as a beneficial outcome for HO1 and the wildlife rehabilitation sector as a whole.
Negative Outcomes:

One of the most prominent issues for HO1 is their limited staff and inadequate time. As HO1a reported: “It’s a very transitory population that we have here right now in [name of county] with the military.” Thus, the staffing at HO1 is inconsistent and often inadequate for the needs of the sanctuary. Most of the daily operation, administration, marketing, fundraising, and public relations work falls onto the Director and the Core Volunteers. HO1b explained the chaotic nature of volunteering at the sanctuary: “It’s like I go from one project and then straight into another project and straight into another project. It’s just crazy…and it never stops. It really never does.” This short staffing problem is made even more intense when ASB groups visit for the week. HO1b is the Core Volunteer responsible for training these groups, and she described the challenges that this process entails:

Sometimes the challenge is that I don’t have enough people to help me train them…I can’t be in 2 places at once. So I’m teaching this group how to do this, and then the other group’s waiting. So then I have to teach that group. And then the other group will get done, and then they’re waiting. And so that’s a challenge, I need more people to help me help them.

Unfortunately, the sanctuary is extremely pressed for money because there is very little state and federal support for wildlife sanctuaries: “It’s just a constant battle trying to get that [funding] coming in…We’re in a really tough spot” (HO1a). This lack of funding and staffing is almost definitely the largest challenge that HO1 faces, and it is often intensified when ASB groups visit.

Student Perspective

Beneficial Outcomes:

The student volunteers reported several beneficial outcomes that made this experience rewarding for them, namely the acquisition of social skills and leadership abilities, positive community relations, forming connections with the resident animals, and community building within the ASB student group.

When asked about how this trip might help them in the future (with university or careers), both site leaders cited the leadership skills that they gained from the experience. SL1b explained:

I think group facilitation is a huge skill. And dealing with a lot of different types of people… During the training and stuff, we do a lot of work around social justice and how that relates to service work. And so I think that was definitely very beneficial for me.
SL1a also mentioned her leadership abilities as one of the main benefits: “I gained trip leading skills. Like getting people organized, and dealing with some people who had issues.” Other students remarked that the social aspect of the experience was one of their favorite parts: “I think it was really cool…we were all kind of new to the whole thing, none of us knew each other… We all got along pretty well, and just liked to everyone be with each other for the entire week. It was really fun” (SP1b). Some volunteers told stories about cooking meals and eating together. The social, community-building aspect was definitely a huge component of the trip for many of the participants.

Another benefit that many students remembered was the unique opportunity to bond with animals, particularly possums. SP1a remembered this experience: “It was great when HO1a took out the possums. I loved it… we’d walk the possums, so cute! I love that! Who else has walked a possum?” All five of the student interviewees mentioned the possums in their interviews, and they all fondly recalled the photo opportunities and bonding that took place between their group and these resident animals. This human-animal bonding fulfills one of the host organization’s main expectations of the volunteers: empathy building. The opossums seem to be a useful tool for forming this type of human-animal empathy.

Finally, many of the ASB volunteers mentioned their cheerful interactions with community members as a positive outcome of their trip. The group found free accommodations in a local church, and several volunteers cited this church community as one of the best components of their trip: “One of the most positive aspects was seeing the community that the animal sanctuary was in, and how much they put together to welcome the ASB group and make us feel welcomed. That was really incredible” (SP1c). Another volunteer echoed this reaction: “We were also at a church, where people were so kind. And they brought us so many baked goods and food, and they thought we were doing something so great!” (SP1a). The pastor of the church brought pizza for the students and allowed them to use his gym membership so that they could shower. Several students looked back fondly on this experience within the community.

Negative Outcomes:

One of the challenges that most frequently occurred in conversations with students was the insufficient amount of work that HO1 prepared for the group. Most volunteers expected to work 8 hours per day, and when they ended up only working for 4 hours, they were disappointed.
All 5 volunteers recalled this disappointment in their interviews: “As far as the actual site we were supposed to be at, we would ask ‘is there something we can do? Do you need fence built, do you need this, do you need this?’ But she [HO1a] just didn’t have anything” (SL1b). SL1a also commented on the lack of service work that HO1a had prepared for the ASB group: “We would ask her if we could do things, and she’d say, ‘no, I don’t really have anything else.’” Other student volunteers commented that they felt like they weren’t useful, because they were simply completing the normal, day-to-day work of Core Volunteers: “It didn't really feel like we were necessarily needed. The volunteers that were there definitely could have accomplished the tasks that they had planned for us without us” (SP1c). One participant remembered her frustration with not having enough service work and waiting for Core Volunteers to tell the group what to do: “We'd sit and wait and wait, and then we'd go find a new task and then we'd sit and wait” (SP1c). This was definitely one of the most prominent issues within the student volunteer group.

Another problem reported by students was their lack of understanding of the set-up and purpose of HO1. Many volunteers didn’t understand why HO1 kept certain animals as residents instead of releasing them into the wild or letting them perish: “That was actually one thing that I was kind of confused about, to be honest…There were some animals that I didn't really understand why they were keeping them. Like they had squirrels for instance. And there are a lot of squirrels in the wild…so I don't know why they would use their resources necessarily to save squirrels. And then maintain their enclosures and feed them when there are so many in the wild” (SP1c). Other volunteers expressed this same confusion. Their lack of understanding of the sanctuary prevented them from feeling like they were doing valuable, meaningful work.

Another issue that arose in conversations with student participants was the lack of endangered species that HO1 admitted. SL1a remembered one of her issues with HO1: “The thing about the animal rehabilitation center at HO1, is they’re not exciting animals. They’re crows that can’t be released. They’re squirrels that can’t be released. They’re ducks that she has somehow gathered.” Several volunteers implied that they would have felt more satisfied and fulfilled if they had been working with endangered or threatened species, instead of common animals: “Working at HO1, I don’t know what reason, but it just wasn’t the same experience [as previous years]. And I think it’s because it wasn’t endangered species. It felt like, what are we doing, with squirrels?” (SL1b).
All of these factors contributed to an overall sense that the service work at HO1 was not meaningful or valuable. Many volunteers voiced these concerns in their interviews:

It didn’t feel like my time was valued. Anyone could be doing that (SP1a)
I feel like we didn't really contribute much to HO1 (SP1b)
A lot of the volunteers didn’t feel fulfilled. We talked and we were like, ‘we felt like we did nothing today’ (SL1a)

*Disconnect in Perceived Goals and Benefits*

This section will discuss the host organization’s perceived benefits to the students, and the student’s perceived benefits to the host organization. Some of the largest disconnects emerge in these results.

According to the representatives of HO1, one of the main benefits to the ASB volunteers is knowledge acquisition and education. They see the ASB trip to HO1 as a huge learning experience:

We explain what we’re doing, we explain the why’s, they learn the animal history, they learn what species they’re working with, what caused the injury, what did the animal have to go through to try and recover…We talk about the diets, we talk about the habitats, we talk about can you identify it (not only by species but by age and by sex), we talk about what the role of that animal is going to be in the environment, what they do, what do we need to do to preserve habitat (HO1a)

However, when asked if they thought their experience at HO1 was educational, the volunteers responded negatively:

I know that’s what HO1a sees, she sees it as this big learning experience... But for me at least, I know the importance of wildlife conservation, and I didn’t feel like I learned any more by washing a duck cage (SL1b)

I thought that there was a lot more that she could have done. Like ‘this is what I’m doing’ or ‘let me teach you about this.’ But…most of us would be outside and one person would be inside the actual house, so there weren’t that many opportunities, or they didn’t make that many for us to be learning new things (SP1a)

Many students echoed SL1b by noting that they already understood the significance of wildlife conservation and they felt like there was nothing new to learn from the sanctuary representatives.

There is a glaring disconnect between what HO1 thought it was delivering to the students and what the students actually gained from their experience at the sanctuary.

Another discrepancy emerges in exploring the students’ perceptions of benefits to the host organization. In order to visit HO1 as an ASB group, schools must pay a $650.00
registration fee. Several volunteers mentioned that they believed that HO1 didn’t actually need their help; they just wanted their money:

Cause the thing was you pay a $650.00 registration fee. So that was the one thing. Did she [HO1a] want our money, or did she want us? That was always a question” (SL1a)

With HO1, they didn’t need 15 people there everyday to do the work. The sanctuary is not that big… Part of me feels like…they need money. To be honest, that is probably their biggest need, is money, you know (SL1b)

While the host organization’s representatives mentioned the $650.00 registration fee in the conversation about funding, they never implied that this was their reasoning for accepting ASB groups. For HO1, the primary reported benefits were volunteer work and an expansion of interest in the wildlife rehabilitation profession.

Student Evaluations

The information in this section is based exclusively on the responses to the post-trip survey sent out by the ASB Director Team a few weeks after students returned to campus. Four out of the eight student volunteers completed the post-trip survey. In their evaluations, students seemed to have similar attitudes about their experience at HO1 as the ones reported in their interviews. When asked to describe their overall experience, all 4 respondents mentioned that the group and the church community were excellent components of the trip. However, all of them also had something to say about their disappointment with the host organization:

Coming from an environmental background, I had some issues with what they were doing. In addition, there was didn't seem like there was enough work for us to do everyday. We weren't necessary with the amount of people they already had working there.

I didn't feel like I had made a difference when all was said and done, which was something that I was hoping for in the end.

Our service site was not as organized and did not have as much for us to do than what I expected.

The questions that asked specifically about housing, community, site leaders, and conflict resolution all received positive responses across the board. When asked if the host organization should be repeated in future years, the consensus was a resounding “No”:

This is not a site that should be repeated. We were not doing a service for anyone. If anything, the people at the site were doing a service for us, and that being said the people
at the sanctuary did not teach us much either. It did not make sense to travel all the way to [state] to a small place where we were not wanted.
NO. There are many other great environmental organizations that could use our help more. ASB should be a tiring experience. We should be tired at the end of the day. I didn't feel that way this week.

When asked what social justice issue they would like to see in future trips, one respondent mentioned that it was important to work with endangered species instead of the common ones that HO1 admitted:

In the realm of environmental work, it would be much better if there was a focus perhaps on endangered species or something related. There should be a reason animals are being held in captivity, not just because they were injured or are cute.

The ASB Director Team used these survey responses to determine whether they would send a trip back to HO1. Based on the responses, the site was discontinued the following year.
SITE TWO: NATIONAL SEASHORE

Results in this section are based on interviews with members of the host organization, site leaders, and student participants (see table below). Information from the host organization’s website and post-trip evaluative surveys are also utilized as sources in this section. The results outline the host organization’s perspective, the students’ perspective, the communication that occurred between these two groups, and finally, various outcomes of the experience for both parties.

Table 2. Site Two Informant Demographics

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<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Gender (M/F)</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Major/Field of Study</th>
<th>Participated in ASB Before (Y/N)</th>
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**Host Organization Perspective**

**Overview of Organization**

The second case study examined a trip to a National Seashore on the East Coast of the United States. National Seashores are coastal areas whose operation is managed by the National Park Service (NPS), an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The mission for all NPS locations is to preserve the natural and cultural resources within a park while also allowing for public access and recreation. Another mission of the organization cited by one of the park...
representatives is to “grow the next generation” (HO2a). This NPS location puts an emphasis on engaging with younger generations and instilling stewardship principles in students and youth.

UVM first sent an ASB trip to this location in 2014, and then repeated the trip in 2015. Another group traveled to the same site again this year (2016). As of now, UVM ASB groups are the only ASB groups that have worked at this specific site; no other colleges or universities have sent ASB students to this location. HO2 is not listed as a host organization on Break Away’s online Site Bank Database. This case focuses on UVM’s second trip to this location.

This site is unique in its expansive area and its diverse elements. The site stretches over 70 miles of shoreline and includes a variety of historical and cultural landmarks such as lighthouses, historical buildings, and lifesaving stations. This NPS location is host to a huge variety of diverse jobs and volunteer opportunities. The various divisions that exist at this location include: Rangers, Park Management, Park Police, Maintenance, Planning, Resource Management, History, Fire Management, Public Affairs, and Administration. In this case, the UVM ASB group worked within the Maintenance Division. Both HO2a and HO2b are employees within the Maintenance Division, and they communicated directly with UVM’s ASB Director Team and site leaders to facilitate and organize the visit.

HO2 welcomes a variety of volunteers to their site. Most of these volunteers work in the Park Ranger/Interpretation Division during the summer months. Many of the volunteer positions involve interacting with the public and working with participants in the Junior Ranger Program. There are several volunteers who commit time to the organization year-round, but these individuals also normally work outside the Maintenance Division. The Maintenance Division mainly interacts with volunteers who complete community service through the jail system. These volunteers complete standard maintenance projects: mowing, cleaning, repair work, etc. Thus, the UVM ASB group that worked with the Maintenance Division at HO2 introduced a novel volunteer model and a new group of people to this specific NPS division.

*Expectations & Motivations*

While HO2 has expectations for the students to complete valuable service work, their main goals for the ASB volunteers are more abstract and long-term. According to HO2a, the primary goal of the NPS in welcoming the students is to find projects where both parties benefit.
She explained that one of her primary aims is to enable the students to explore the park and everything that it has to offer:

My goal is that the people who come here get to experience the park… We do appreciate the work that’s done. I think it should be shared, educational, and hopefully helping people to appreciate what the National Park Service does and appreciate the resources that are here (HO2a)

HO2b shared in this philosophy. She explained that there are so many unique characteristics of this National Seashore, and the students should have the opportunity to experience all of them:

Take them up to [historical monument] and really understand what went on there. And then go down to [beach], and that place is just a couple feet above sea level…And so they get to see the different elements of this park

Beyond this goal, HO2a discussed the type of work that she usually expects ASB volunteers to complete. She explained that she doesn’t like to give them routine maintenance work (i.e. mowing, cleaning, etc.). She said that she’d rather assign them to a project that is slightly more “special” because she wants them to have a meaningful experience: “I don’t want people here cleaning restrooms because I need my restrooms cleaned. Even though that’s something that volunteers often do for us, it’s not something that I want to do with the [ASB] group.” HO2b echoed this sentiment, explaining that she’d rather the ASB students learn something than work in one place for the whole duration of their trip: “If you're here, come and see it…There's no sense in you just standing inside a building and doing one thing for a week. You're bored and you're not learning anything…There's so many opportunities for them to learn.” HO2a explained that this goal is often tricky to accomplish, simply because the ASB volunteers are only around for a single week “It’s a little easier… when we get the groups that are here for a longer time period, because we can give them a little bit bigger projects to accomplish.” However, both HO2a and HO2b are committed to their goals of making the experience a fun and meaningful one for the volunteers.

The representatives from HO2 also aligned their goals for the ASB group with the broader mission of the NPS. HO2a talked about the need for engaging the younger generations and educating them about the NPS: “While I understand that the goal [of ASB] is volunteerism, the goal of the NPS is grow the next generation.” HO2 certainly benefits from the service work that ASB volunteers complete, but their larger goal is to promote excitement, education, and awareness about the NPS.
Student Perspective

Expectations & Motivations

Student motivations for participating in this trip were extremely similar to those in the first case study. One site leader cited past participation in ASB as a motivation for participating again: “I actually participated in a trip my junior year. And so that was just such a positive experience that my senior year I was interested in a leadership role” (SL2a). Many students mentioned that the environmental focus of the trip was appealing to them:

I was a Bio major, and I'm interested in conservation. I was looking around at the volunteering I could do (SP2b)

I was an environmental science major. I graduated with a BS, so I really wanted to do a project that could have an environmental impact (SL2a)

Another site leader talked about her research experience with state parks and her desire to volunteer at a site where she could apply this knowledge:

For me, it was really interesting because I came in as an Environmental Studies major. I actually got a work-study position in Aiken as a Parks Studies Lab Assistant. So for me...I thought ‘State Parks! This falls in line.’ The familiarity I guess, it just kind of fell in line (SL2b)

As in the first case study, several participants spoke about their desire to travel and leave Vermont. SL2a said that one of her reasons to participate was “wanting to get out and see a different part of the country and getting out of cold Vermont.” Finally, quite a few volunteers spoke about their desire to make an impact and do something meaningful and significant over their spring break. SP2a described what she interpreted as a motivation for her entire group: “You’re on ASB because you want to help people and you want to make a difference.” SP2c echoed this sentiment, saying, “It was kind of a good way to make a week off into something that hopefully was meaningful and a good experience” (SP2c).

Student expectations for the experience were similar across the board. The main theme that emerged in most of the conversations with informants was the expectation of full workdays. Both SP2b and SP2c explicitly noted that they thought more of their time would be filled with service work. SL2a compared the trip to her previous ASB experience: “My previous year we built a trail. That was our work everyday from morning to lunch, take a break, afternoon: axes and digging. So I think a lot of people expected that” (SL2a). Interestingly, SL2b explained that she thought this expectation was imparted onto the participants via the site leaders: “It definitely
comes down on the site leaders to hold that expectation of what ASB is really about” (SL2b). She articulated that site leaders often emphasize the “alternative” aspect of ASB by preparing their groups for work-filled, strenuous trips.

*Service Experience at HO2*

Beach Clean-Ups:

A large part of the service work that ASB completed when they visited HO2 was cleaning up beaches. The National Seashore extends 70 miles, so there were several stretches of beach that needed cleaning. This type of work allowed the student volunteers to travel to different parts of the park throughout the week. Beach cleaning was intensive work, and the students collected everything from small pieces of plastic to enormous chunks of asphalt and mattresses. HO2a explained that beach clean ups are an essential part of the maintenance work that happens at HO2: “That [cleaning beaches] is an ongoing thing because every time there’s a storm, all this debris gets washed onto the beach.” The students all worked in a large group to complete these cleanup projects, and most remembered them taking 2-3 hours each. The ASB group would comb several miles of the beach, pile all the garbage into a heap, and wait for a dump truck to come collect it. The ASB group completed 3-4 beach cleanups over the course of the week.

Lighthouse Maintenance:

Over the course of the week, the students also helped HO2 clean and prepare two of the historical lighthouses for the upcoming spring/summer season. This work consisted of hauling water and cleaning sprays and scrubbing all the inside surfaces of the lighthouse including walls and railings. Over the course of the summer season, these surfaces become caked with grease and dirt, and so each spring, the maintenance staff spends a long time sprucing them up. The students split into three groups to complete the work, and it took them about half a day to finish each of these projects.

Sight-Seeing and Touring:

According to the ASB participants, most days at HO2 consisted of some sort of sightseeing or touring of facilities. SP2c recalled this dynamic: “They [HO2] just let us do something fun cause they wanted to show us everything that the park had to offer. So usually we
would have one fun thing a day.” These “fun things” included: taking a ferry to a nearby island, observing some of the unique wildlife that the area had to offer, going to several museums, exploring the National Monuments in or near the park, touring the staff offices, and meeting NPS employees in various divisions. Once the volunteers had finished the projects assigned to them for the day, they would spend time with HO2a (and occasionally HO2b) who would bring them to see interesting places and meet interesting people.

Sea Turtle Conservation:

According to one ASB student participant, HO2 had intended for the ASB group to assist with a sea turtle habitat project, but local push back prevented this from happening on their trip. This student participant explained that sea turtle conservation was a contentious issue within HO2’s community. Many locals were upset that the National Seashore was closed off to motor vehicles during sea turtle nesting and hatching season. For this reason, the National Park staff didn’t want to start sea turtle signage and habitat projects too early in the season for fear that it would aggravate this already problematic tension. As SP2c explained:

“There was this thing about turtles. We wanted to help with the sea turtle habitats, but it was kind of this political thing where the people who lived in the area would get mad if you put these signs up too early.”

Therefore, a large portion of the work that HO2 had planned for the ASB trip was not completed due to local pressure. This issue will be discussed again the Beneficial Outcomes and Problematic Outcomes sections.

**Interaction and Communication between HO2 and ASB Volunteers**

*Pre-Trip Communication*

This case is unique in that there was not complete turnover in ASB participants from the first year to the second year. One of the student participants at HO2 in 2014 became a site leader for the same site in 2015 (SL2b). Thus, significantly more (and more meaningful) pre-trip communication occurred between UVM’s ASB Chapter and HO2 in 2015 than occurs for most trips. SL2b spoke about this in her interview. She said she was able to communicate with HO2 before the second trip departed and explain what went well the first year and what could be improved upon:
The second time, it was like, ‘this is what we want. Last time we didn't do too much work. We felt like there was a lot of down time. We felt that there were a lot of things that we could have done, but just didn't really know how to ask to do more.’

This site-specific pre-trip communication was vital to the success of the ASB trip the second year at HO2. SL2b acknowledged this: “Between my first year and my second year, that feedback was crucial. And our site contact was very responsive to improving that.” Having a member of the UVM ASB community with site-specific experience was an enormous asset in ensuring that students were more fulfilled and satisfied with their service experience the second year.

Interaction During the Visit

The interaction between ASB volunteers and HO2 representatives over the course of the weeklong visit was relatively extensive. Not only did the ASB group spend the majority of their time with HO2a and HO2b, but they also met a large variety of NPS staff in various divisions and received a large amount of positive feedback on the work they were doing.

Constant Contact with NPS Staff:

During their visit to HO2, the ASB volunteers worked alongside HO2a and HO2b for almost the entire duration of the trip. HO2a made a large effort to facilitate the visit and make sure that the volunteers were being assigned enough work and had the proper equipment, instruction, and training to complete the work assigned to them. In many cases, both HO2a and HO2b actually worked hand-in-hand with the ASB group to complete projects. As HO2b recalled: “Out there on the beach, we all got involved.” SP2c also remembered the two HO2 representatives completing beach cleanups with the group.

Many of the ASB students remarked that they sincerely enjoyed having the company of HO2a and HO2b throughout their visit. One student remembered that the HO2 representatives were able to provide a non-student point of view: “They [HO2a and HO2b] were always with us…It was cool to have those different perspectives” (SP2a). SL2b also recalled the unique opportunities that the close contact with these NPS staff allowed for:

I think what was also really cool my second year…was that HO2a was really with us…She was really engaged in making sure that we were getting from point A to point B. And it was really cool because…we were able to ask her a lot of questions that just came
up in natural conversation, versus [having] a distance between our community partner and what we were doing (SL.2b)

This constant contact with both HO2a and HO2b not only allowed for more efficient and well-organized project completion but also enabled the ASB students and HO2 to learn about each other and form personal bonds.

Introduction to NPS Staff in Diverse Divisions:

Another huge component of the ASB-NPS interaction was the large amount of touring of facilities and headquarters that took place on the trip. While at HO2, the ASB students remembered meeting with the superintendent of the park (a UVM alum), sea turtle researchers, technicians, administrators, and the invasive species team. Many ASB volunteers recall these interactions as some of the most positive memories from their trip. When asked what her most memorable experience on ASB was, SP2a responded: “Probably discussions with the conservation workers.” Other volunteers expressed their gratefulness for getting to speak with NPS staff that could help them network, teach them about jobs, or apply some of the material that they learned in their classes:

One of the guys on our trip was a…nursing program guy, and so he was talking to a lot of people about some of the health implications of the area: the hurricanes, natural disasters (SL.2a)

We also talked to a woman…and she was like the plant person. She did a lot of using of herbicides to get rid of invasive species. And I really liked that because I did undergraduate research on invasive species (SP2b)

These interactions resonated with the ASB group and allowed them to walk away from their experience with a fuller, richer understanding of the NPS and conservation work.

Constant Positive Feedback from HO2:

In addition to these interactions with HO2a, HO2b, and various staff members in multiple divisions, the ASB group received position reinforcement from the NPS team throughout their trip. This interaction allowed many of the ASB participants to realize the value and meaningfulness of their service work and their presence at the site. Many ASB students remembered how grateful the NPS team was for their weeklong service work:

I cannot say enough about how thrilled they were to have us there (SL.2a)
We still helped them a lot. They were really appreciative, and they weren't afraid to tell us that (SP2a)

HO2a remembered that she attempted to explain to the site leaders the value in the ASB group’s mere presence at the park:

I hope that I explained that well enough to the leaders that people shouldn’t leave here feeling frustrated or that they didn’t do anything. Because they need to understand that just their presence here is doing something.

HO2a went on to say that bringing young, inspired, energetic people into the park sends a positive message to the NPS staff and the local community. She explained that this message has value in and of itself, regardless of the volunteer work completed.

Several students remembered feeling satisfied with the projects they completed as a result of their conversations with NPS staff:

We had people who told us, ‘oh my gosh, that was something that was on my plate that just wasn't gonna get done. So thank you so much for getting that done.’ And otherwise it just wasn't gonna happen, even if it needed to (SP2a)

This reiterated appreciation and positive feedback allowed the ASB volunteers to assign value and meaningfulness to their service work at HO2.

Post-Trip Communication

As in the first case study, there was no evaluation or post-trip reflection involving the host organization after the students left the site. However, this case is once again unique in that SL2b has been involved with this site for multiple years. After leading the trip in 2015, SL2b became one of the four students on the student-run ASB Director Team at UVM. Therefore, when the Director Team decided to send a trip to HO2 in 2016, SL2b was able to renew contact with HO2a and maintain the close relationship between HO2 and UVM’s ASB Chapter.

Trip Outcomes

Host Organization Perspective

Beneficial Outcomes:

The host organization reported a variety of benefits, many of which were mutual benefits and overlapped with the reports from the student group. These beneficial outcomes include the
completion of service tasks, bonding with the student group, and involving younger generations in NPS work.

Both HO2a and HO2b were extremely grateful for and impressed with the efficiency and positive energy of the UVM ASB group. The hosts reported that the students were able to help them complete projects that would have normally taken their limited winter staff days to complete in a matter of hours:

When they cleaned the lighthouse, that was a big one. That takes a lot of our manpower to go up there and clean it. So they did it, and very fast and very effective, so that meant we could do something else (HO2b)

A group of people can take care of that [beach clean ups] so much for efficiently than me sending two guys out (HO2a)

This efficiency of the ASB team allowed the host organization to assign their staff to other projects. HO2a remarked: “It really saved us a ton of time and work.” Furthermore, the hosts were impressed with the quality of work that the ASB team attained:

They did such an awesome job [at cleaning the lighthouse], and we typically don’t do it that well, cause we just don’t have the time or staff to do it. So those are huge things. They don’t sound that cool, but they are enormously important to us (HO2a)

These efficiency and quality of the UVM group were cited over and over again by HO2 as positive outcomes.

One of the big benefits for the NPS in welcoming ASB volunteers is what HO2a called “growing the next generation.” HO2a and HO2b were excited to get young, interested people involved in their organization for the purpose of securing the work of the NPS into the future: “We're always saying keep young people interested so they want to come out and work for us” (HO2b). HO2b worried that the NPS does not engage with enough young people: “We're seeing a lot of us older people retiring and wondering where we're gonna get the new recruits from…We gotta keep people interested. Otherwise, we're screwed.” Therefore, HO2 made a point to introduce the ASB students to the various opportunities and benefits of working in the NPS. Interestingly, this is a mutual benefit across both the student and host group. The students are able to learn about a new career path and network with influential NPS staff, while HO2 gain new recruits for their organization.

Furthermore, HO2a and HO2b expressed their gratitude for the positive energy and enthusiasm that UVM’s ASB group brought to the site:
Most of all, it’s really refreshing and it’s good for us to have that little jolt of enthusiasm and reminder that the things we’re doing are actually kind of cool. What’s a job to us is actually fun for somebody else (HO2a)

Both host representatives had a great time getting to know the group of ASB students and recalled the positive impact that they had on their staff and community. HO2a also mentioned that the continued relationship and rapport that continues to grow between UVM ASB and HO2 is a huge benefit for her:

I would say that the biggest success is simply [ASB] coming back and doing it again. You know, every time building that rapport… just kind of building that relationship. So I would have to say the relationship is probably the biggest success

In HO2’s eyes, these sustained relationships and connections are some of the most valuable outcomes of the ASB students’ visit.

Negative Outcomes:

When ASB first traveled to HO2 in 2014, it was the first time that this specific NPS site had welcomed ASB volunteers. HO2a explains that this new model and type of volunteering was new to both her and the host organization as a whole:

I’ve only been with the park service three and a half years. So I was only here a year before your [UVM’s] first group came down. So that was a little more challenging, because none of us were really sure what was supposed to be happening.

HO2a also explained that most NPS staff at HO2 is unfamiliar with ASB. Therefore, coordinating projects and working with multiple divisions will continue to be a challenge until a majority of the staff understands what ASB is and learns effective ways of interacting and working with the students:

Every year I think we’re getting better at it, because now people are starting to understand what’s involved and what needs to happen. So they’re getting used to it. And there’s a learning curve with anything, and it was new for this park (HO2a)

This steep learning curve has definitely been a challenge for the host organization.

Another challenge from the host organization’s perspective is identifying projects for ASB volunteers to work on. HO2a spoke a great deal about finding the sweet spot at the intersection of weather-appropriate, useful, and meaningful work for the volunteers. HO2a emphasized that she does not want ASB volunteers to complete routine maintenance work; she
wants them to experience the full range of activities at the park. However, this limits the type of projects that she can assign to the volunteers: “If I was a tiny park, it’d be easy. Because we could do everything in one little spot, and still experience that park. That’s not the case here” (HO2a). Another requisite for HO2a in finding projects is that they actually benefit the park and the work of the NPS: “We try to keep it fun and try to have it benefit the park.” However, the final requirement in HO2a’s selection of projects is that they are special and meaningful to the ASB participants. She often struggles to find projects that will meet all three of these requirements. She described this challenge:

In May, the world’s wide open. In March, not so much. So we end up cleaning lighthouses, which is very much needed from the park perspective, but not the most glamorous duty for the people coming in here (HO2a)

The identification of suitable projects for ASB groups is thus one of the biggest struggles for HO2.

When the ASB volunteers arrived at HO2, another difficulty was preparing project sites and supervising the students. HO2b explained this difficulty:

It takes a lot of energy on our end. To just set things up and make sure everything is set to go. You just don't say, ‘go clean the lighthouse.’ You gotta make sure you've got all the supplies ready, as well as just checking on the weather (HO2b)

The park committed lots of resources to the ASB students’ visit, most notably the time and effort of HO2a and HO2b. While HO2 appreciated the service that the ASB group completed, finding enough time and staff to plan projects, prepare equipment, and supervise the group continued to be a challenge. HO2b explained that facilitating the ASB groups’ visit displaced her regular, day-to-day work and was challenging: “Also if they come in, it takes the place of what we normally do. So it throws us out of our normal comfort zone, puts us in a different location.” HO2a remarked that she would never be able to accommodate two ASB groups at the same time for this very reason:

I have had a lot of requests from people [other ASB groups] since your [UVM’s] group has been coming here. And it’s like, ‘no, only one. Only one at a time.’ We have trouble handling one, because we are so spread out

This facilitation and supervision of the ASB visit is a challenge, albeit rewarding, for HO2.

Student Perspective
Beneficial Outcomes:

Over the course of the week, the ASB volunteers reported a variety of beneficial outcomes including tourism and education, career building and networking, bonding with NPS staff, and gaining a deeper understanding of service.

Several students fondly remembered the wide variety of touristic activities that their group experienced. They traveled to National Monuments, visited historic sites, and also went through the entire Junior Ranger Program. This program is typically geared toward children who visit various sites and receives pins and badges from each one. The entire ASB group was allowed to participate in this program, and SL2a looked back on this experience as a beneficial one: “Everywhere we went, we were like, ‘we want to be Junior Park Rangers!’ So we would get the Junior Park Ranger badges, and then they would give us a pin.”

In addition to this touristic aspect, many students reported deep, experiential learning outcomes. A large source of this education was the interesting community relations that existed between the NPS and the local community. During sea turtle nesting and hatching season, tensions flare in the community regarding motor vehicle access to the beach. As a result of this, several establishments in the nearby town refuse service to NPS staff. In reflecting on this intense dynamic, ASB volunteers realized that they were able to learn a great deal from this situation.

I found it really interesting because at the time in one of my NR classes, we were learning about…local interests versus the tourism industry. People need to make money, and I think part of the reason why they were driving on the beach was to help with their fishing industry. But then you have people who make money off the tourism industry and want to keep the beach nice…So there's always competing interests and it's not always us vs. them. And I thought that was very important (SP2c)

Another student spoke about how this learning experience was so different and more valuable than the average, formal classroom experience:

You can go to classes and read a textbook and hear about these problems. But to be there and to see the passion and to see these sides, you get that cultural aspect, and you feel it… It definitely has that impact on you (SL2b)

Another student remarked that her experience at HO2 provided her with the opportunity for experiential learning around climate change. She talked about sea level rise and picking up large chunks of asphalt (remnants of old parking lots) during the beach clean ups: “I never really thought about sea level change…but actually seeing it was just like: oh my gosh, this is a
problem” (SP2a). She went on to describe why this type of experience was superior to a classroom setting:

That's one of the reasons why I like doing these kinds of things. Because learning from a book and power points and lectures and stuff, that's cool... But you're not actually absorbing it until you see it for yourself and experience it (SP2a)

These deep learning experiences were enormous benefits that every student informant mentioned.

One of the huge benefits that every student interviewee mentioned was HO2a. As soon as I mentioned her name, the students smiled and remarked on what a great site contact she was. SP2c expressed this: “She did such a good job. She's just an awesome person to be around too.” Making that connection with HO2a as well as HO2b was a valuable experience that many ASB volunteers cited as a beneficial outcome.

Additionally, many students explained that their experience at HO2 had allowed them to gain a better perspective of what a job in conservation is like:

It just gave me more perspective on what the different kinds of jobs are in the park service, and what kinds of jobs are actually available, and what kinds of things you actually do within those jobs. So I think that was kind of eye-opening for me (SP2a)

The same student remarked that she was grateful that so many NPS staff were willing to talk to her and share their experiences: “They were really excited that there were people who were interested in learning about what they're doing there. And they understood that networking is important” (SP2a). SP2b felt that HO2 offered him an opportunity to learn about a new potential career path about which he had very little prior knowledge:

I was interested in conservation, but I had never met anyone who did it. It's like this weird specific field...So it was cool to actually go somewhere and see people working on it, and see what the job's like and what people can accomplish (SP2b)

The connections that ASB volunteers made throughout their trip to HO2 were not only personally enriching, but they also allowed them to explore and consider their future career paths.

Several students reported that the service component of the trip was extremely fulfilling and/or allowed them to reflect on the broader concept of service. One student remembered the beach cleanups as especially satisfying:
It was really cool when we were doing the beach cleanups. You would first arrive and you could see all the trash. And then when we left, you would just look around and it was a really good feeling just knowing: wow, I helped this, I did this (SP2a)

Furthermore, many students were able to reflect upon their service experiences and reported that they had a deeper understanding of service work after this trip. Many students remembered that they struggled to understand the value in basic maintenance work (i.e. beach cleanups and lighthouse maintenance). However, over the course of their trip, they realized that this was what the host organization and the community needed, and therefore, it was valuable. SL2b describes this mental hurdle:

I have a desired outcome, I have an intention. But it's not just about me. It's about that community aspect. It might be great to cleanup beaches; I might have my heart set on that. But if the community doesn't need that, I shouldn't be going and forcing that on them. So it's that give and take mentality.

SL2b gained a clear understanding of this concept as well: “We definitely expressed like ‘Hey, we're not doing as much as we could.’ But we kept reminding ourselves: this is what they need (SL2a). Other ASB volunteers remembered having to modify their expectations after realizing the service work that HO2 needed and understanding that service and change are slow processes:

I think sometimes I glorify it in my mind: I'm gonna do all these great things and I'm gonna make a difference instantly! And it's not actually like that (SP2a)

You think you're gonna do this big great thing, and then you have to dial it down and be like ‘what can I do to actually help?’ (SL2b)

This reflection on the meaning and value of service was a significant outcome for many ASB volunteers, and it allowed them to have a more positive, satisfying experience.

Negative Outcomes:

Again, a notable challenge for ASB volunteers in this case was the insufficient amount of service work and projects that they were able to complete over the course of the week. SP2a explained this challenge: “I kind of wish we were doing more volunteer work. Cause most days it was just like work for a couple hours and then the rest of the day we'd just walk around.” Other participants remarked that they didn’t feel HO2 provided ample projects for them and the ones that were provided were limited due to weather and other factors:

I remember we had a good amount of time, but 1) there wasn't that much work that we were given, and 2) we couldn't do it all day. Even though we wanted to, but we just
couldn't ever... There's only so long that you can be with the chemicals that you use to clean the lighthouse (SP2c)

Another student remembered that she spent a significant portion of time waiting to work. She expressed her frustration with the projects assigned to the group and said that she wished the projects had been more straightforward and achievable:

I found myself getting frustrated that when we were sitting around, we were just sitting around. Like waiting for a job, but we were just sitting around. I kind of wish that it was more like: we have these things set aside, and this is what you're going to do for this week (SP2a)

SP2c also discussed the issue around sea turtle conservation efforts. She shared that she was sad that the group couldn’t participate in creating sea turtle habitat due to the local situation:

You could tell they [HO2] had so much to do, and I think we actually saw the signs and the fences in their warehouse...And you could tell they were kind of understaffed. But HO2a kept saying that we couldn't get into that work yet. And I remember that really kind of disheartened me. Because we did have a lot of free time and we were like ‘okay we love sea turtles, of course we would want to help them’ (SP2c)

While this lack of tangible projects was a challenge for many of the ASB volunteers, some explained that they were able to come to terms with their frustration and enjoy the experience at the National Seashore: “I would have preferred to do more work, but I wasn't really disappointed cause we still got to see some cool stuff” (SP2b). This shortage of feasible projects for the students was also extremely linked to the aforementioned challenges with weather.

A few ASB students remembered feeling guilty about the lack of work they were doing, especially because they were partaking in so many touristic, enjoyable activities in their abundant free time. SL2a explained this feeling:

We were all kind of expecting to do service that day, but we didn't. And it was more just like a straight up tour. And it was, again, a feeling of like, ‘I feel like I should be doing something now’

SL2a also recalled that many students’ expectations had been to work for full days and that most other ASB trips end up working for 8-12 hours per day. When this expectation was not met, she said she felt very guilty: “We were so prepared to work, and now we're sightseeing and other people [other ASB trips] are working. So I think there's a guilt to some degree.” This sense of guilt existed among several volunteers; however, other volunteers were happy and excited to use their free time to explore the park and the beaches.
Student Evaluations

The information in this section is based exclusively on the responses to the post-trip survey sent out by the ASB Director Team a few weeks after students returned to campus. Four of the 8 participants for this trip responded to the post-trip evaluative survey sent out by the ASB Director Team. When asked about their overall experience, responses were all positive, with several respondents mentioning their disappointment about the insufficient service work provided:

It was great. We learned a lot of the history in the area, about the Park Service, about many projects they are working on, environmental threats to the area, etc. We got to see and do a lot of cool things. We cleaned beaches that a lot of locals and Park Service workers were really appreciative of.

Great - great group, great site contact, great place - but we all wished we could have done more

When asked if their host organization provided enough work for them every day, three out of the four respondents replied: “no.” All four respondents affirmed that their housing situation met all of their needs and should be utilized in the future. When asked if they would recommend this trip as a future ASB site, three respondents enthusiastically answered “yes”:

Yes. Although it wasn't as warm as I was expecting, the NPS were very friendly and created a great environment. They gave us the inside scoop on the day-to-day jobs

Yes! 11/10

The fourth respondent replied that she would want the host organization to guarantee more service work before she committed to returning to the site.
COMPARISON BETWEEN SITE ONE AND SITE TWO

The table below compares and contrasts some of the most salient characteristics of the two cases. These comparisons are examined in the Discussion Section.

Table 3. Comparison of characteristics between sites one and two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Case Study #1: Wildlife Rehabilitation Sanctuary</th>
<th>Case Study #2: National Seashore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of Organization</td>
<td>Very small (3-4 full-time volunteers)</td>
<td>Large (Hundreds of full-time employees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Volunteers</td>
<td>Integral (all workers are volunteers)</td>
<td>Peripheral (volunteers play a role, but the majority of work is completed by paid employees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget Constraints</td>
<td>Extremely high (completely funded by donations and grants)</td>
<td>Low (federally funded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee for ASB Volunteers</td>
<td>$650 registration fee for the group</td>
<td>No fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Work for ASB Groups</td>
<td>Day-to-day, routine chores for sanctuary</td>
<td>Project-based work specific to season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours Worked/Day</td>
<td>Approximately 4 hours</td>
<td>Between 3-6 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals for ASB Volunteers</td>
<td>Education and awareness around rehabilitation, empathy for wildlife</td>
<td>Education and awareness around conservation and NPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with UVM ASB</td>
<td>No pre-existing relationship before this trip</td>
<td>Established relationship with SL2b and understanding of ASB group’s mission and expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators of ASB’s Visit</td>
<td>Combination of volunteers, interns, and the director</td>
<td>HO2a and HO2b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Spent with Staff/Hosts</td>
<td>Very little (initial tour on the first day and sporadic interactions after that)</td>
<td>Large amount (nearly constant contact with a representative from NPS throughout the day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Free housing in local church</td>
<td>Free, on-site housing in NPS volunteer house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Time Activities</td>
<td>Go back to housing</td>
<td>Talk to NPS staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walk around the town</td>
<td>Tour the National Seashore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Go sightseeing in the area</td>
<td>Visit historic monuments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Go to the beach</td>
<td>Go back to housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Largely ineffective (many students)</td>
<td>Effective (students explained how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>of Goals</strong></td>
<td>did not understand mission or overall purpose of HO1</td>
<td>their service work contributed to a larger whole for HO2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Feedback from Host Organization</strong></td>
<td>Low (no reports of positive feedback from the organization, many volunteers felt like they were in the way)</td>
<td>High (many volunteers reported the huge amount of gratitude expressed by HO2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Experience for Volunteers</strong></td>
<td>Low (reported already understanding the content, not being assigned educational projects or service work)</td>
<td>High (reported development of deeper understanding of service, networking with NPS staff, understanding conservation issues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaningfulness for Volunteers</strong></td>
<td>Relatively low (didn’t feel that they made an impact, did not report high amounts of reflection)</td>
<td>High (felt that their work was valued, critically reflected on their experience)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

The results from these case studies reveal some interesting insights into the functioning of UVM’s ASB Chapter and the environmentally focused trips that they organize each spring. The two cases demonstrated various outcomes, and this section will delve into some of the causal factors that contributed to those outcomes. First, the results demonstrate that the amount and type of communication impacted various stakeholders’ expectations as well as students’ perceptions of the meaningfulness of their work. Second, this section will discuss some of the organizational characteristics that either enable or hinder effective communication and management of volunteers and will exhibit the irony that this study uncovered in regards to volunteer management. Finally, this section will identify several ways in which the commodification and commercialization of the volunteer ecotourism sector influenced these cases.

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION ON TRIP OUTCOMES

Various forms of communication had significant impacts on the outcomes of these two cases. These methods of communication include: pre-trip coordination between UVM and hosts, promotional materials given to prospective leaders and participants, on-site interaction between volunteers and hosts, and post-trip coordination between UVM and hosts. The existence and nature of these various forms of communication influenced pre-trip expectations as well as post-trip impressions of meaningfulness and value.

Incongruent Expectations

The two case studies demonstrate that the expectations across the student and host organization groups differed. However, the expectations of students and hosts at the National Seashore were more clearly aligned than those at the wildlife rehabilitation sanctuary (see Tables below). In Case Study #1, the students hoped to work full, 8-hour days and make a physical impact on the sanctuary, while HO1 was much more interested in providing education and empathy building experiences to these students. A small overlap existed in both parties’ desire to learn/educate around wildlife rehabilitation and conservation; however, this expectation was not fulfilled on the part of the students.
Table 4. Expectations and goals for Case Study #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASE STUDY #1: Expectations &amp; Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hard work (8-hour days)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provision of organized, project-based work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gaining skills and knowledge about wildlife rehabilitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Helping” an organization, “making a difference/impact” (meaningful experience)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, the expectations of students and hosts in Case Study #2 were more closely aligned. The most important overlap to note in this case is the provision of a meaningful service experience for the students. Based on communication and feedback from SL2b the previous year, HO2a had a strong understanding of the amount and type of service work that student volunteers expected. This understanding allowed her to adjust her goals and expectations when the students returned the following year.

Table 5. Expectations and goals for Case Study #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASE STUDY #2: Expectations &amp; Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hard work (8-hour days)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education around conservation and National Parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Helping” an organization, “making a difference/impact” (meaningful experience)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Case Study #1, the lack of aligned expectations of students and hosts led to problematic outcomes (i.e. insufficient work for students, no project-based work) at HO1 and created disappointment among student volunteers. In this case, a lack of effective pre-trip communication most likely led to the observed disconnect in expectations. Firstly, the ASB Director Team’s literature and communication to site leaders and student participants about the trip was unrealistic. In the form that site leaders and student participants used to select trips, the
work at HO1 was described as: “Working with animals and environmental issues.” The site leaders and student participants expected to be working with animals, not scrubbing feces off of cages and filling up water pans. This description did not accurately match the nature of the work that HO1 expected from volunteers, which led to frustration within the ASB group upon arrival at the site. This is not a new phenomenon. Research demonstrates that when promotional material does not match the true nature of a service project, volunteers can become frustrated and dissatisfied with their experience (Bath-Rosenfeld, 2014; Coghlan, 2007; Lyons, 2003).

Promotional literature did not match the nature of the work expectation in this first case. Furthermore, the mismatched expectations in the first case can be attributed to vague and incomplete communication between site leaders and host organization representatives leading up to the trip’s departure. In their interviews, the site leaders explained that HO1 was vague and indirect about the nature of the service work assigned to ASB groups. Thus, the students were unprepared for and unaware of the exact work that they would be completing, and the host organization was uninformed about the ASB group’s goals and expectations. In their study of volunteer tourism in Ecuador, Needham & Grimm (2012, p. 497) concluded: “It would… be helpful for managers and coordinators to know volunteer motivations ahead of time.” They argue that host organization’s perceived motivations of volunteers are often skewed, and this can lead to unsatisfactory outcomes for volunteers. The absence of an exchange of expectations was another point where pre-trip communication broke down and likely contributed to the disappointment and dissatisfaction that the students felt about the service portion of their trip.

In Case Study #2, both students and host organization representatives were more cognizant of the other group’s expectations and goals for the trip. The key to this heightened understanding was the relationship between HO2a and SL2b. Since SL2b participated as a student volunteer the previous year, she was able to transmit a great amount of information to the group before the trip departed. This communication allowed the group to more deeply understand the nature of the service trip and manage their expectations before departure. As one of the primary contacts with HO2a leading up to the trip, SL2b gave feedback on the first year’s trip and explained how it could be modified to more fully meet student expectations. HO2a subsequently decided to plan and emphasize more “meaningful” tasks for the volunteers from ASB. As Brightsmith (2008, p. 2838) explains, the selection of these types of tasks is crucial to maintaining volunteer interest and satisfaction: “Meaningful tasks are vital because the
volunteers are relatively intolerant of doing tasks that they do not perceive as being important.” The role of SL2b as a middleman with an established relationship with both groups (HO2 and students) impacted the expectations of student volunteers and the activities and amount of work assigned to the students during their trip. The existence of these ongoing relationships and “middlemen” appears to be a crucial factor in designing and sustaining a successful and meaningful environmental ASB trip. The Conclusion section makes recommendations to improve this type of institutional memory moving forward.

**Perceptions of Value & Meaningfulness**

The nature of the communication between hosts and volunteers also impacted the volunteers’ ideas about the value and meaningfulness of their service work. Communication around organizational missions and purposes, context of volunteer service, supervision, and student recognition greatly influenced the students’ feelings of meaningfulness after the trip.

**Mission & Purpose Communication**

Studies show that an understanding of an organization’s mission can allow volunteers to link their service activities to a broader purpose and to feel more fulfilled by these activities. In many cases, volunteer tourism is a short-term endeavor in which volunteers cannot necessarily see or experience the impact of their work. In her thesis on the communication of goals, Bath-Rosenfeld (2014, p. 41) discusses this concept: “They [volunteers] could not see the long-term results of their labor. Therefore, the volunteers needed these long-term goals explained to satisfy their altruistic motivations of wanting to do something positive for the environment.” At the National Seashore, HO2 was able to explain and portray the bigger picture of volunteer labor and how it tied into conservation efforts. Conversely, the organizers at HO1 were not able to effectively communicate these broader goals and missions, and this left the volunteers feeling dissatisfied, uninspired, and unhelpful.

In Case Study #1, many of the volunteers lacked an understanding of the organization’s purpose and mission. In their interviews, three out of the five volunteers posed questions about why HO1 was keeping certain animals in captivity. However, HO1’s website clearly outlines their philosophy for caring for non-releasable animals who can no longer survive in the wild. The website even specifically addresses each of their resident animals (including the squirrels) and
explains the rationale for keeping the animals in captivity (e.g. nerve damage, faulty imprinting after birth, etc.). Evidently, the communication of these philosophies and rationales was not verbally communicated to the student volunteers. Furthermore, the student group had not used HO1’s website to educate themselves and prepare for the trip, and thus, the meaning of HO1’s work was largely lost on them. The results of this combined lack of preparation and ineffective communication? The results demonstrate that volunteers felt that the work they were doing didn’t matter. An understanding of the mission and philosophy of the organization (and of wildlife rehabilitation in general) could have ameliorated these issues. This problem could potentially be solved by encouraging more pre-trip research on the part of the student volunteers. This is a recommendation for UVM’s ASB Chapter moving forward (see Conclusion section).

Cousins et al. (2009) describe in their research that volunteers who do not feel useful in an organization will not feel fulfilled or satisfied with their service experience. Volunteers at HO1 perceived the tasks assigned to them as useless and mundane. One student even commented that she felt like she was “in the way” at the organization and was not accomplishing anything significant. In many cases of volunteer tourism, the work assigned to volunteers is routine and tedious. However, research demonstrates that when volunteers understand the implications of their tasks on an overarching goal or project, they are more inspired and interested by these small tasks (Bath-Rosenfeld, 2014). While the volunteers at HO1 felt that they served as redundant labor (completing the same work as the Core Volunteers), HO1a and HO1b explained that this labor was crucial and allowed the Core Volunteers to leave earlier and work on other projects that they wouldn’t normally have time to complete. However, this essential, subtle service provided by the ASB group was not communicated to the students, and thus, they left feeling like they hadn’t made an impact.

In Case Study #2, more consistent communication around the National Seashore’s purpose, mission, and importance was more effectively implemented. One mechanism of this goals communication was the large amount of travel and touring that the group completed. In order to help the students fully understand the scope and goals of the NPS, HO2a organized multiple trips to the various beaches, historical monuments, and NPS sites included in the National Seashore. The group also visited a variety of different NPS staff members and gained a full perspective of all of the work completed by the NPS. This allowed the students to contextualize their service work within the broader scope and mission of the NPS. Research in
the field of volunteer tourism reveals that this type of place-based orientation and communication with multiple members of host staff allows volunteers to more profoundly understand the mission and purpose of a host organization, and thus, understand their individual role in that mission. In her analysis of two volunteer ecotourism sites in Ecuador, Bath-Rosenfeld (2014, p. 42) describes this phenomenon:

Both Site 1 and 2 take volunteers on hikes around the reserve, in order to highlight the ecological beauty and diversity their time and money are contributing to protect. If these points are not constantly highlighted, volunteers can forget their role within the wider scale of conservation and forest management.

In the National Seashore case, volunteers were able to use this knowledge of the organization to realize the value of their work, and subsequently, feel that their time, effort, and service was meaningful.

*Supervision & Recognition*

Over the course of the weeklong ASB trips, the amount of interaction with host staff and the level of positive reinforcement received by this staff seemed to impact the level of satisfaction and meaningfulness reported by student volunteers. At HO1, the ASB volunteers reported minimal interaction with the organization director and Core Volunteers, and thus, were not rewarded with large amounts of positive feedback. Conversely, HO2a arranged to spend the entire week with the ASB group, serving as their supervisor, local guide, and friend. Furthermore, the ASB group’s increased exposure to NPS staff members seemed to contribute to their understanding of the value of their work.

In Case Study #1, volunteers reported minimal contact with staff at the wildlife rehabilitation sanctuary. One student noted that the director, HO1a, always seemed like she was “rushed and running” while another mentioned that most days the ASB group would see HO1a for a matter of minutes every day. The Core Volunteers at struggle to maintain proper communication and supervision with large groups when they visit the sanctuary. This lack of on-site communication during the service project led to confusion and frustration among the volunteers, and many reported feeling unnecessary. Bath-Rosenfeld (2014, p. 41) discusses how this lack of on-site supervision can contribute to problematic outcomes for volunteers: “Volunteers would be drained of energy and give up quickly if they did not enjoy the task, or if the coordinator was not present to provide leadership.” Furthermore, a lack of positive feedback
from HO1 left the ASB volunteers feeling unsure about whether they were contributing to the organization. At some point in their interviews, all five student informants expressed their doubt about the value of their service to the organization and wondered why they were needed there.

Evidently, HO1 was unable to commit enough time or resources to explain the value of the ASB group’s work to their organization. In their research on volunteer retention, Murk & Stephan (1991, p. 75) explain that volunteers must understand the meaningfulness of their contributions to an organization: “Perhaps the greatest benefit obtained from…training is the continued reinforcement provided when volunteers are reassured of the value of their services to the agency’s program.” The lack of communication and positive reinforcement at HO1 led to reports of frustration and dissatisfaction from the students regarding the service portion of their trip.

The situation at the National Seashore was extremely different. The constant presence of HO2a and nearly constant presence of HO2b had an enormous impact on student satisfaction. Many students fondly described the fulfilling experience of becoming close with the site contacts due to their constant interactions. All five student informants mentioned their positive relationship with HO2a and how that shaped their trip to HO2. This is not surprising, as organizations that train staff members to work with volunteers report higher rates of volunteer retention (Hager & Brundy, 2004). Furthermore, HO2a formed close bonds with the group, and became a friend and mentor figure to many of the ASB volunteers. Skogland (2006, p. 218) demonstrates that these bonds and friendships contribute to overall volunteer satisfaction: “volunteers will be satisfied with volunteering if they have the chance to develop friendships, share experiences, communicate with others, and develop support groups.” The consistent and approachable presence of a NPS staff member who had prior experience working with volunteers (the previous year) played a major role in the outcome of a meaningful service experience for the ASB group at HO2.

The repeated positive feedback that the ASB volunteers at HO2 received also influenced their level of satisfaction with the service trip. One of the best management practices cited by Murk and Stephan (1991, p. 75) is to “emphasize the roles of volunteers as important and integral parts of the agency or organization.” At the NPS, this type of positive reinforcement was integrated into the service experience. All five student informants were able to explain how and why their service work contributed to the NPS. A broad study of charities by Hager & Brundy
asserted: “Charities that say they have adopted to a large degree the practice of hosting recognition activities for volunteers have a higher rate of retention.” This practice of recognition and positive feedback was a large factor in keeping the ASB volunteers at HO2 happy and fulfilled.

THE CATCH-22 OF VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Communication obviously plays a large role in volunteer management and fulfillment, but what are other recommended management practices, and did these cases demonstrate those practices? This section discusses best management practices in the field and exhibits the rift in adoption of these practices by HO1 and HO2. This disconnect is ironic in that HO1 truly needs extra hands, but HO2 has the infrastructure to attract and retain those extra hands. The section concludes by questioning the adaptability of the ASB model for organizations with various managerial capacities.

Best Management Practices & Organizational Capacity

In assessing the outcomes of the two ASB trips, various organizational differences between HO1 and HO2 come to light (see Table 3 in Results Section). These differences and their impact on the outcomes of the student service experiences merit discussion. Proven best management practices for volunteer programs (and the adoption of these practices by the two case study organizations) will frame this section.

The literature on volunteer management reveals several trends around best management practices in this field. These practices are outlined below and align more closely with the treatment of volunteers at HO2 than at HO1. According to Ellis (1996), one of the most important aspects of volunteer management is having an appointed manager (often called coordinator) who spends a portion of their work time facilitating the service work of volunteers. Another recommended practice is volunteer recognition: “Volunteers must receive a sense of appreciation and reward for their contribution. This sense can be conveyed through a number of processes, including both formal and informal recognition systems” (McCurley & Lynch, 1996, p. 122). Brudney (2000) asserts that successful volunteer programs must also create written policies for their volunteers, provide training and development for employees who work with volunteers, and allocate a specific budget to the organization’s volunteer program. These best
management practices were adopted at different degrees by the host organizations in this study. The table below compiles some of the most important volunteer management practices noted in the literature (Brudney, 2000; Ellis, 1996; Hager & Brudney, 2004; McCurley & Lynch, 1996) and indicates whether HO1 and HO2 adopted these practices or not.

Table 5. Adoption of volunteer management practices by HO1 and HO2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES</th>
<th>HO1</th>
<th>HO2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of Volunteers</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Training for Volunteers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Supervision and Communication with Volunteers</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Record-Keeping on Volunteers</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from High-Level Officials for the Volunteer Program</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for Employees Who Work with Volunteers</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget for the Volunteer Program</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletter and Press for Volunteers</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation/Measurement of Volunteer Impact</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the literature and the mixed rates of adoption of best volunteer management practices between HO1 and HO2, it appears that HO2 has a greater organizational capacity to implement a successful volunteer program for the ASB group.

The factors that might contribute to this incongruity in organizational capacity include the scale of the organization and role of volunteers within the organization. Hager & Brudney (2000, p. 5) report in their study of various charity organizations: “As we might expect, the size of a charity matters in whether most practices have been adopted or not.” In this quote, they refer to the best management practices outlined above. The sizes and scales of HO1 and HO2 certainly impacted their respective abilities to implement successful volunteer programs. At HO1, the small size of the sanctuary and the on-site staff prevented adequate communication, supervision, funding, and recognition of ASB volunteers. The smaller scale and budget constraints of HO1 necessitated that the ASB volunteers pay a $650 registration fee for the week. This created
tension and doubt among the ASB volunteers about the value and meaning of their service work. HO1 was unable to provide on-site housing (due to the small physical size of the sanctuary), and this ultimately created distance between the host organization staff and the ASB volunteers. Furthermore, the lack of full-time staff at HO1 forced ASB volunteers to find their own free time activities, which led to feelings of boredom and uselessness among students. The larger scale of the NPS and the National Seashore allowed HO2 to implement many of the strategies noted in the table above. Volunteers stayed in official NPS volunteer housing, were not required to pay a registration fee, and had nearly constant contact with NPS staff. The role of HO2a as a full-time, experienced facilitator of the group prevented the communication and recognition issues encountered at HO1. Volunteers at HO2 spent their free time with NPS representatives, getting to understand their site and meet members of the host organization.

Another element that contributes to organizational capacity is the role of volunteers within a host organization. At HO1, volunteers are the lifeblood of the wildlife rehabilitation sanctuary. Without these volunteers, the organization would cease to operate. Thus, volunteers perform relatively mundane, day-to-day tasks related to the upkeep of the center and regular care of the animals. At HO2, volunteers are less essential to the overall functioning of the organization. While the National Seashore accepts volunteers in various divisions, these volunteers are rarely crucial to the day-to-day work of HO2, and they serve as supplements to the full-time, paid NPS staff. Thus, volunteers at HO2 tend to contribute to specific, seasonal projects rather than day-to-day maintenance and operations work. These differences impact the capacity of HO1 and HO2 to create and carry out successful volunteer programs. Studies by Ellis (1996) and Brudney (2005) suggest that volunteers should serve as supplemental labor to paid staff: “Paid staff are primarily assigned to the most important daily functions, while volunteers handle work that can be done on a periodic basis or that makes use of the special talents for which the volunteers have been recruited” (Brudney, 2005, p. 323). Research demonstrates that practices that cater more to a host organization’s needs than to volunteer needs will be less successful at retaining volunteers. According to Hager & Brudney (2004, p. 12):

Charities that adopt the practices most directly concerned with satisfying volunteers reap the highest rates of retention. Practices that cater more to the needs of the charity than the needs of volunteers are unlikely to motivate volunteers and, in fact, are not related to retention of volunteers over time.
Due to the differing roles of volunteer labor within their organizational structures, HO1 and HO2 achieved these recommended management routes at distinctive levels. While HO2 offered supplemental, volunteer-centered activities and projects, HO1 could not afford to do this and instead offered day-to-day, organization-centered work.

Suitability of ASB Model

The irony of these findings is glaring. The smaller organization that depends on volunteers for its operation and functioning is the one that struggles to keep volunteers satisfied and retain a volunteer workforce. On the other hand, the larger, federally funded organization that has a paid workforce and uses volunteers as supplemental labor reports more positive outcomes and volunteer retention rates. Unfortunately, it seems that host organizations with superior infrastructure and resources are able to more effectively implement successful volunteer-based ecotourism programs for ASB.

These findings beg the question: Are certain organizations more suited as hosts for the ASB model? ASB is a distinct form of volunteering, which provides host organizations with a short, intense burst of volunteer labor: 10-12 volunteers for five days once a year. HO2 was able to absorb this intense burst of labor by engaging the students in seasonal, project-based work and allowing them to tour the site. Unfortunately, HO1 struggled more to absorb the ASB group and effectively incorporate them into their organization. Perhaps a more appropriate structure for volunteering at HO1 is not 10 volunteers for one week, but the inverse: one volunteer for 10 weeks. HO1 depends on volunteer labor, and these findings absolutely do not suggest that HO1 is an incapable host organization for volunteers. However, they do reveal some of the problems that emerged when the small organization was overrun with a surplus of short-term volunteer labor. Therefore, a more sustainable and beneficial model for HO1 might be to recruit individuals who are extremely passionate about or interested in wildlife rehabilitation. As HO1a explained: “We’re all pretty much passion-run.” This passion and personal dedication seems to be a pre-requisite for volunteers to succeed, feel meaningful, and maximize their usefulness at the wildlife rehabilitation sanctuary. With smaller numbers of longer-term volunteers, staff at HO1 would likely be able to properly train, communicate goals, and build a meaningful relationship with volunteers. Due to their scale and the role of volunteers at their site, it seems
that the needs of HO1 are not quite compatible with the volunteer experience that ASB groups expect and strive for.

The suitability (or lack thereof) of the ASB model for host organizations is an important point to consider in assessing and improving UVM’s ASB Chapter, as well as other ASB Chapters around the U.S. The in-depth studies of these two cases provide evidence that certain organizational characteristics have an impact on student outcomes and satisfaction on environmental ASB trips. These findings could help to inform future selection of trips. Recommendations for this process are outlined in the Conclusion.

THE ADVERSE IMPACTS OF COMMODIFICATION

While ASB is slightly removed from the ballooning volunteer tourism market, it is not immune to the impacts of commercialization within this sector. Student expectations for “helping” alongside incessant novelty in trip selection are just two reflections of the increasingly capitalistic nature of volunteer-based ecotourism. In these cases, the indirect impacts of capitalist markets on ASB’s philosophies and policies are largely negative.

The Pervasive “Helping Narrative”

In her discussion of volunteer tourism, Conran (2011) asserts that this sector of the travel industry perpetuates a “helping narrative” among travelers, which establishes two groups: people who are saviors and “others” that require saving. This image of a “needy” or underprivileged group is ubiquitous in the promotion and marketing of volunteer tourism and has become a sought-after commodity by consumers of these experiences (Sin, 2010; Vodopivec & Jaffe, 2011). This “helping narrative” emerged throughout the interviews with ASB volunteers in this study. When asked about their motivations for participating and their expectations for the experience, almost every single informant cited their desire to “help,” “make an impact,” or “do something.” These expectations were not only a result of ASB’s promotional materials and communications, but also of a more pervasive, cultural connotation around volunteering. Volunteering tends to be perceived as a form of charity to a group in need, and the ASB volunteers expected this cultural standard to play out.

Issues arose when these expectations for rigorous, “helpful” work were not mirrored by hosts, who chose to focus more on education and awareness building than on physical service.
work. In both cases, the volunteers struggled to overcome their original impressions of what volunteering and service work entailed.

The literature notes that this commodified “helping narrative” tends to “perpetuate a logic which suggests a binary opposition which creates an ‘us’…vs. ‘them’” (Conran, 2011, p. 1464). In both cases, this us vs. them dynamic was a pre-conceived expectation going into the trip. This polarization of a privileged group helping an unprivileged group proved to be detrimental to the outcomes of these cases. At the wildlife sanctuary, a lack of interaction between volunteers and hosts prevented the breakdown of this stereotype and left the volunteers feeling unsatisfied. At the National Seashore, the relationships that formed between volunteers and hosts allowed the volunteers to question and challenge their assumptions about their identities as volunteers and move beyond the dichotomized us vs. them logic. By acknowledging the reciprocal nature of volunteer work, the ASB students at HO2 were able to more effectively reflect upon and understand the value of their service.

This “helping narrative” is a documented symptom of the commercialization of the volunteer sector. By moving beyond this discourse, volunteers were able to glean more meaning and value from their service.

Trip Selection and Capitalistic Novelty

In my interviews with ASB Directors, the concept of newness and novelty arose multiple times. When asked about their criteria for selecting trips, both directors mentioned that they attempt to choose 50% new trips each year. They cited the need for new experiences and fresh trips as a rationale for this policy. One director also mentioned that they often intentionally avoid sharing information between site leaders year-to-year, because they want to allow the site leaders to make the experience their own. Both of these policies are indirect reflections of the “boutique” and “niche” markets that have emerged within the tourism sector. Authors describe this trend as a “proliferation of offerings,” (Vivanco, 2006) “individually oriented tourisms,” (Munt, 1994) and “individually tailored trips” (Fletcher, 2014). All of these patterns have played out with UVM’s ASB Chapter. The ASB Directors have a cultural understanding of this need for newness, and they’ve intentionally incorporated that desire into their planning and trip selection. However, this constant turnover seems to hurt the overall success of the ASB trips. Firstly, ASB Directors spend innumerable time and effort identifying and communicating with new site
contacts, which takes time away from the other myriad tasks for which they’re responsible. Furthermore, the constant turnover of trips prevents institutional memory from forming on either side, and discourages relationship building between volunteers and hosts. This is a detrimental practice, however, it seems to be a reflection of the tourism industry at large and the incessant production of new, customizable experiences.
CONCLUSIONS

This research analyzed ASB’s model of volunteer-based ecotourism using two case studies, one at a wildlife rehabilitation sanctuary and another at a National Seashore. The research also investigated UVM’s ASB Chapter as a larger case and context for the two individual case studies. Through interviews with multiple stakeholders, the study aimed to identify some of the factors, experiences, and situations that contribute to both positive and negative outcomes for volunteers and host organizations. The research draws several conclusions regarding the significance of expectation management, volunteer-host communication, institutional memory, and organizational capacity in determining ASB trip outcomes.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND TAKEAWAYS

The following conclusions are based on the data from interviews with the ASB Director Team, site leaders, student participants, and host organization representatives as well as student responses to post-trip surveys. These conclusions serve as the basis for recommendations and future improvements for UVM’s ASB Chapter, and potentially other ASB Chapters around the country. The major findings and takeaways of this study determined that:

• ASB volunteering is a unique form of volunteer tourism that provides a short-term burst of labor to host organizations. Basic infrastructure and resources are needed on the part of the host organization to absorb this labor and properly support the model of short-stint ASB volunteering.

• Various forms of clear and frequent communication between volunteers and hosts can lead to more realistic expectations, a fuller understanding of a host organization’s mission, relationship building, and a heightened perception of trip meaningfulness. Gaining an appreciation for the surrounding community, ecological resources, and staff members also helps volunteers to infer the long-term results of their service work and can make the experience more meaningful.

• Certain organizational characteristics (i.e. amount of paid staff, existence of volunteer coordinator, training for volunteer coordinator, financial resources, existence of project-based work, etc.) allow hosts to cater to environmentally focused ASB trips. It seems that
organizations with these characteristics are able to more successfully deliver the experience that ASB volunteers seek and help to make this experience meaningful.

- The existence of institutional memory and established relationships (for both host organizations and ASB groups) is an important factor in effective management of expectations and communication between volunteers and hosts throughout the ASB process. Fostering and building these relationships over time can also promote student-host bonding, which improves the experience for both parties.

- Ironically, small host organizations that need volunteers are less likely to satisfy ASB groups than organizations that have fewer needs but have the infrastructure, staffing, and resources to attract and retain their volunteers. These larger organizations may be better suited to absorb the intense, short-term burst of volunteer labor provided by ASB groups.

- The commodification of the tourism industry is reflected in certain elements of the operation and philosophy of UVM’s ASB Chapter. The pervasive “helping narrative” and the need for novelty in trip selection are most likely offshoots of broader, capitalistic trends in volunteer ecotourism.

- Moving beyond the “helping narrative” to acknowledge the reciprocal aspects of volunteering can be an important step in enhancing the meaningfulness and value of a service experience.

- These specific ASB trips provide rich experiences for student groups, allowing them to build community and exposing them to an important environmental/conservation issue. Regardless of the reported meaningfulness of each trip, each student reported some type of positive outcome of the trip, and almost all were inspired to become more involved in volunteer work.

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO UVM’S ASB CHAPTER**

The following list provides several suggestions for generally improving the outcomes of ASB trips in the future, enhancing communication and relationship building with host organizations, and creating meaningful experiences for students (and hosts). These recommendations and suggestions are specifically based on the two case studies in this research, and have not been tested across multiple locations or organizations. It is at the discretion of the
UVM ASB Director team, site leaders, and student participants to implement and adopt these suggested practices.

**Trip Selection and Trip Repetition**

- It seems that maintaining long-term relationships with site contacts builds institutional memory both within UVM’s ASB Chapter and also within the host organization, which can ultimately lead to better outcomes for students and hosts. The ASB Director Team should work to stabilize their trip locations, and aim for 15 repeated trips each year. This still allows students to visit diverse organizations and work with diverse social issues, but it reduces the blindness of directors, leaders, students, and site contacts going into the service experience. It also reduces the enormous workload and learning curve of the Director Team.

- When possible, records and feedback about past trips should be used to inform future communication with the site contact at the host organization. Student feedback (and host feedback) should be well documented and should be accessible to future site leaders who are assigned to the host organization. Long-term records and documentation could also help to maintain institutional memory and relationships with sites.

- In assessing the potential of new sites (especially ones that focus on environmental or conservation-based issues), look for evidence of best volunteer management practices in the hosting organizations. These include: existences of a volunteer coordinator/facilitator, training for employees that work with volunteers, volunteer recognition activities, and regular communication and supervision with volunteers. The existence of these characteristics will not determine the success of a trip, but it appears to have an impact on overall volunteer experience and perception of meaningfulness.

**Managing Volunteer Expectations**

- Before presenting the trip and assigning site leaders/student participants to a site contact, the Director Team should attempt to get as much detail about the work to be completed as possible. In communicating with the site contact, ask questions like: How many hours a day should the volunteers expect to work? Is the work primarily day-to-day or project-based? Who will work alongside the volunteer group? The more detailed and accurate
this description is for the volunteer group, the more accurate (and achievable) their expectations will be.

- The trip blurbs in the site leader/student participant preference form should be edited to truly reflect the nature of the work. This form should describe more than a general issue, but rather, the specific type of work that volunteers should expect to complete. Matching this “promotional literature” with the true nature of the trip is crucial in managing volunteer expectations.

- In student orientation, site leader training, and pre-trip meetings, the advantages and disadvantages of volunteer labor should be addressed. Volunteers should understand that organizations that welcome ASB groups must do a great deal of preparation. This preparation can be time-consuming and difficult, especially for smaller-scale organizations. Students should understand this strain on the service sites, and be prepared to accept that situation going into the trip. Students should understand that there might not be full days of work for them to complete, and they should prepare by:
  - Researching the surrounding area and finding exciting, low-budget activities to do in their free time
  - Contacting and making agreements with other local organizations (perhaps the church that hosts the group) to complete several hours of service work over the week to fill in periods of free time

- ASB groups (site leaders and student participants) should make an effort to research the host organization before departing. A clear understanding of the organization’s purpose, mission, and type of work is crucial for all volunteers before they arrive at the service site.

- ASB groups should attempt to have serious, guided discussion around the pervasive “helping narrative” in an effort to expose and challenge the assumptions of volunteer work. Many useful resources and guides for these discussions can be found in the Literature Review of this thesis.

**Managing Host Organization Expectations**
• Before departing on the trip, site leaders should communicate their hopes and goals with the host organization. Site leaders should be as clear as possible regarding the amount of time that the ASB group expects to work and their capability to complete projects.

Gaining On-Site Understanding of Staff and Place

• When possible, ASB volunteers should make an effort to tour their site and surrounding community (either individually or with host organization staff). This will allow them to better contextualize the meaning and long-term objectives of the work they are completing at the organization.

• ASB volunteers should attempt to engage with host organization staff whenever possible and opportune. Students should be encouraged to ask questions of the staff about the purpose of the work they are completing and how it ties into a broader, organization goal. Whenever possible, students and hosts should eat meals together and spend time outside of service work periods. This helps to develop relationships and allows for smoother, more comfortable communication between the two parties.

Post-Trip Procedures

• Engage the host organization in the evaluative process for each trip. Send out a survey to the site contact asking about successes, challenges, and recommendations for changes in the future.

• Provide positive (or negative) reinforcement to encourage a higher response rate on the student evaluation survey. Only about 50% of the volunteers responded to this survey in these cases. More perspectives would provide richer feedback and more diverse ideas for improvement in the future.

• In the student evaluation survey, ask more questions about the nature of the work completed. If the work was fulfilling, why? What types of projects/tasks were completed? What was the perceived impact on the organization? How was the on-site relationship with the site contact and host organization staff? Was the service experience meaningful?

Chapter Management
• Consider creating a part-time position (to be filled by a graduate student or recent graduate) to provide administrative and managerial support to the chapter. The roles and duties of this person would include:
  ➢ Increasing pre-trip exposure and communication with host organizations. This person could dedicate more time to understanding the true nature of the service projects at each site and helping to edit forms and applications to reflect this.
  ➢ Increasing and improving post-trip communication with the host organizations. This person could administer the post-trip survey to the host organizations as well as sharing the results of the student survey and discussing ideas for improved relationships in the future.
  ➢ Helping to identify and assess new trip locations (when necessary)
  ➢ Assisting with the training of new members of the Director Team and providing administrative support to this team when necessary

• Develop mechanisms for less intense turnover within the ASB Director Team. The Director Team should always contain students with staggered class years, so that no team is entirely new to the job. Perhaps a Director-in-training program could be implemented to introduce and familiarize sophomores who are interested in the position.

FUTURE WORK

This research, while revealing some interesting findings about the two specific case studies, is not comprehensive in its scope and leaves gaps for future research and development. One gap in this study is the role of Break Away (the national, overarching organization that provides resources to its member chapters) and its Site Bank database in shaping expectations and values in its chapter groups. Break Away certainly has an impact on its member chapters, and the nature of this impact would be an interesting point of inquiry. Another gap in the findings of this research is how environmental ASB trips compare to social justice trips. Do interactions between volunteers and hosts differ across different issues? Do volunteers have similar expectations of trips with a social justice focus? What organizational characteristics are important regardless of trip topic and issue? Finally, a more extensive study of multiple universities’ ASB chapters would be illuminating and could help to develop best practices for ASB management and leadership.
PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

When I set out to write this thesis, I felt slightly bitter about my volunteer experience in Ecuador. I somehow felt that I had taken advantage of a community by not genuinely “helping” them. I was an inexperienced educator, and I had no business teaching English to a rowdy classroom of third graders in my mediocre Spanish. After returning to the U.S., I continued to realize how little “service” I had provided to the community, and I struggled to settle the feelings of guilt that came along with those realizations. And yet, I still looked to those three months spent in Ecuador as some of the most formative of my life.

Completing this research has helped me to begin reconciling these internal clashes. I, like so many of the volunteers in the ASB case studies, entered into a volunteering experience with the expectation to “help” and to “give back.” But volunteering, it seems, is not such a clear-cut, one-way street. In many cases, the goals of your hosts (the people you’re trying to “help”) are not to glean every ounce of physical labor from you, but rather to form relationships with you, educate you, and inspire passion in you. Of course I cannot make this assumption of all volunteer tourism experiences, but it’s an important point to note. When these types of relationships form between volunteers and hosts, they produce meaningful, memorable experiences for both parties. This was certainly true of the case at the National Seashore, and also of my personal experience in Ecuador. The bonds that formed between my Ecuadorian friends and myself were far more valuable than any English or afterschool art class that I instructed.

Perhaps this relational, reciprocal aspect of volunteering is one that we should emphasize more often. The conventional perception of volunteering frames it as a form of charity; with one privileged group assisting a less privileged group in need. However, these new forms of volunteer tourism do not follow this standard structure. They are intentionally designed to allow for cross-cultural exchange, community building, and education. So why do we continue to perceive them as forms of charity, when in reality, they are enriching exchanges and interactions between diverse groups of people? In designing, framing, and preparing for these types of programs, this notion of exchange vs. help should be food for thought.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Formal Approval from UVM ASB Director Team 2015
Reflections from Alternative Spring Break

The research described on this form will be conducted by Amelia Fontein, a senior in the Environmental Studies program at the University of Vermont, for her Honors College senior thesis. The intention of the study is to use ASB trips as case studies of volunteer ecotourism and to identify what factors in this experience lead to successful outcomes for both participants and hosts in achieving their goals. The study will also attempt to recommend steps for future programs to improve these participant and host outcomes.

I give my approval to Amelia Fontein to conduct research on past Alternative Spring Break trips run through the University of Vermont, and I understand the following about the nature of this research:

1. **Subjects:** This study will gather information from past ASB participants, site leaders, director teams, and host organizations (directors, staff, local volunteers, etc.). The study will use two past ASB trips as case studies, and it will attempt to interview both site leaders from each trip, at least five student participants from each trip, and at least two host site members from each trip. The study also aims to conduct interviews with 2-3 program directors. All participation is voluntary, and subjects are permitted to withdraw from the study at any point.

2. **Interviews:** Amelia Fontein will contact the Director team, past ASB student participants, past ASB site leaders, and hosting organizations to be interviewed. The interviews will consist of 15-20 questions, will last 30-60 minutes, and will be conducted by Amelia Fontein. All interviewees will receive and agree to an Informed Consent form before participating. Field notes will be recorded during the interview, and an audio recording will tape the interview. The researcher will later transcribe the audio recording to create a written dialogue. Informants will potentially be compensated for their participation with Ben & Jerry’s coupons (pending funding).

3. **Document Analysis:** With permission from individual site leaders and the Director Team, the researcher will use various journals/logs and trip evaluations as another source of data. Publications from newspapers and periodicals may also be considered for analysis.

4. **Risks and Benefits:** All participants in this study will remain anonymous, and the information collected will not cause penalty or injury in any way to any of the participants. In exchange for participating in this study, participants may receive compensation in the form of Ben & Jerry’s coupons (pending funding).
5. **Confidentiality:** All names of people and organizations will not be disclosed in any part of the study or written report. Identities will remain confidential and all written files will be coded so as not to disclose the identity of each informant.

6. **Publication of Information:** The results of this study will be delivered to UVM’s ASB Director Team and will also be posted on UVM’s electronic thesis database, [http://scholarworks.uvm.edu/](http://scholarworks.uvm.edu/). The researcher has no intention to use the results of this study for any commercial purpose.

7. **Questions:** The Director Team and all informants are free to ask questions or request more information at any point during the research, and all involved are free to contact Amelia Fontein at any point before, during, or after the study (contact information at the bottom of this form).

I have read and fully understood the explanation of this research. I have asked all relevant questions and received answers. I have also received a copy of this informed consent form for my own personal records, and I give my approval of this research study.

1. 
   (Director Team Member, printed)  
   (Signature of Director Team Member)

2.  
   (Director Team Member, printed)  
   (Signature of Director Team Member)

3.  
   (Director Team Member, printed)  
   (Signature of Director Team Member)

4.  
   (Director Team Member, printed)  
   (Signature of Director Team Member)

          
   (Date)

   (Name of Researcher, printed)  
   (Signature of Researcher)

          
   (Date)

*With any further questions or concerns, please contact:*

Amelia Fontein  
ameliazfontein@gmail.com  
(802)-282-2845
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent for Interview Research Participation
Reflections from Alternative Spring Break

This interview will be conducted by Amelia Fontein, a senior in the Environmental Studies program at the University of Vermont, for her Honors College senior thesis. The intention of this study is to use ASB trips as case studies of volunteer ecotourism and to identify what factors in this experience lead to successful outcomes for both participants and hosts in achieving their goals. The study will also attempt to recommend steps for future programs.

I have willingly volunteered to participate in research. My interview is one of 15-20 that Amelia Fontein will conduct for this study. I understand the following about the nature of this interview:

1. **Voluntary Participation**: My participation is voluntary, and I may decide to withdraw or stop the interview at any point without injury or penalty. If I feel uncomfortable answering a question or at any other point during the interview, I may choose to end the interview or decline to answer.

2. **Duration and Recording**: The interview will last 30-60 minutes and will be conducted by Amelia Fontein. I will be asked about 15 questions. Field notes will be recorded during the interview, and an audio recording will tape the interview. The researcher will later transcribe the audio recording to create a written dialogue.

3. **Risks and Benefits**: My participation in this study will remain anonymous, and the information I provide today will not reflect poorly upon me or cause penalty or injury in any way. In exchange for participating in this study, I will receive compensation (TBD).

4. **Confidentiality**: My name and personal identity will not be disclosed in any part of the study or written report. I will remain confidential as a participant in this study. All written files will be coded so as not to disclose the identity of each informant.

5. **Questions**: I may ask questions at any point during the interview, and if I have questions after the interview is over, I may freely contact Amelia Fontein (contact information at the bottom of this form).

I have read and fully understood the explanation of this interview. I have asked all relevant questions and received answers. I have also received a copy of this informed consent form for my own personal records, and I consent to participate in this study.

(Name of Participant, printed)  (Name of Researcher, printed)

(Signature of Participant)  (Signature of Researcher)

(Date)  (Date)

*With any further questions or concerns, please contact:*
Amelia Fontein, ameliatfontein@gmail.com, (802)-282-2845
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions for Host Organization/Community Members

Tell me a little bit about your organization. What is your mission?

What type of work do you do? How are you funded?

How often does your organization welcome volunteers to help with your work? Who are these volunteers?

Are volunteers essential to the work that your organization completes? What kinds of work do they do?

What is the process for selecting and accepting volunteers? Is there a training? How long does it take and who is responsible for it?

If you didn’t have volunteers, how would your work be completed? Would it be possible?

How and when did you become connected with UVM’s Alternative Spring Break Program?

Did you ask ASB volunteers to prepare before they arrive?

How did you interact with ASB leaders before, during, and after the trip?

What benefits did the UVM volunteers provide to your organization? What projects did they work on? Could you describe the state of the projects before they came and after they left?

Were there any drawbacks in accepting UVM volunteers to help your organization? How did they compare to other volunteers that assist your organization?

Provide examples of good and bad experiences with ASB volunteers.

Did your staff have to re-do or modify any of the work that UVM volunteers completed after they were gone?

In what ways did the UVM ASB volunteers contribute the most to your organization: financially, through physical labor, through social interaction with your staff and community, etc.?

What makes your job easiest?

Would you accept UVM ASB volunteers to help at your site again?

How would you change the relationship and experience with UVM ASB to improve it in the future?
APPENDIX D

Interview Questions for ASB Student Volunteers:

What is your name, your age, and your connection to the University of Vermont?

Where did you go? Tell me about the organization and community that hosted you.

What originally motivated you to participate in volunteer ecotourism over spring break?

Can you tell me a little bit more about what you did during your volunteering experience? Where did you live? What people did you work with? What sorts of tasks did you complete? Reconstruct a typical day.

What were the dynamics within your volunteer group? Did everyone get along? Did you encounter issues with group dynamics?

Who was the host community/organization? What was the relationship between your group and the community?

How did you prepare for this trip? Was the trip different than you expected it to be? How?

When did you/your group have issues, and when did you feel most uncomfortable?

What did you learn about environmental topics and issues throughout your ASB experience? Did you gain any skills, knowledge, etc. that you can apply to your studies, career, or future plans?

Did you feel you were able to effectively complete the work assigned to you? Why or why not?

Do you feel was your group’s greatest contribution was physical labor, financial resources, social/cultural interaction? Something else? A combination of several?

What were the best and most memorable parts of your service experience?

How has your volunteer experience shaped your present life?

How has your perception of your trip changed between when you first returned to now?

Would you recommend the specific program/organization in which you participated to peers or family?

What improvements would you suggest for your specific ASB experience/site if you could?

Would you ever consider going on another volunteer ecotourism trip? What would you choose, and how would you choose it?
APPENDIX E

Interview Questions for ASB Trip Leaders:

What is your name, your age, and your connection to the University of Vermont?

Where did you go? Tell me about the organization and community that hosted you.

What originally motivated you to participate in volunteer ecotourism over spring break? What made you want to be a trip leader as opposed to a student participant?

How did you prepare for this trip? Was the trip different than you expected it to be? How?

What were your responsibilities pre-trip, during the trip, and post-trip?

Can you tell me a little bit more about what you did during your volunteering experience? Where did you live? What people did you work with? What sorts of tasks did you complete? Reconstruct a typical day.

What was the most rewarding aspect of your experience as a trip leader?

What were some of the big challenges that you encountered as a trip leader?

What did you learn about environmental topics and issues throughout your ASB experience? Did you gain any skills, knowledge, etc. that you can apply to your studies, career, or future plans?

What were the dynamics within your group like? Did you have to deal with behavioral issues or conflicts between students?

What was your budget? Did you feel you had enough money for the week?

Did you feel you were able to effectively complete the work assigned to you? Why or why not?

Do you feel was your group’s greatest contribution was physical labor, financial resources, social/cultural interaction? Something else? A combination of several?

How has your volunteer experience shaped your present life?

Would you recommend the specific program/organization in which you participated to peers or family?

What improvements would you suggest for your specific ASB experience/ site if you could?

Would you ever consider going on another volunteer ecotourism trip? What would you choose, and how would you choose it?
APPENDIX F

Interview Questions for ASB Program Directors

How did you first become involved with ASB?

What is the process for becoming a director?

What is the overall mission statement and the goals of UVM’s ASB program?

What are your primary roles and responsibilities as a director of the program?

How is ASB funded? What is the relationship between the Break Away organization and UVM’s ASB program?

What is your process for searching and selecting sites for trips? Which characteristics do you look for in a potential site, and which do you try to avoid? Is it easy to find sites that are willing to work with you?

What is the protocol for selecting trip leaders? What is the application process, and what types of questions do you ask in the interview?

What is the process for selecting students to participate in the trips? What percentage of applicants do you accept? What characteristics do you look for in these applicants?

How do you measure the success of ASB trips?

What are the most successful programs or sites? What makes these programs stand out?

What are some of the biggest pitfalls or problems with ASB in your opinion? What do you struggle with the most?

How do you change your program from year to year based on suggestions from previous years’ students and site contacts?

What do you think could be done to improve the successfulness of ASB trips for students? What about for hosts?