

## **UWO students share alternative spring break experiences via blog**

**by Derek Paulus - Wednesday, April 10, 2013**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/26329/uwo-students-share-alternative-spring-break-experiences-via-blogs/>

For some University of Wisconsin Oshkosh students, spring break was an opportunity to travel and volunteer.

UW Oshkosh hosted five spring break trips as part of its Alternative Spring Break program March 17 through 24. Participants traveled to areas in the United States and Central America in an effort to volunteer and help local communities and organizations.

A key element of the spring trips was a live blogging component. Each trip had a designated student blogger, with others chiming in from time to time, to share details of the trip's happenings, photos of the work being done and places being seen.

"Blogging was a great and easy way to share thoughts with everyone back home," said Taylor Moret, who acted as the primary blogger for the all-freshman trip to New Orleans.

Moret said the blogging can help encourage others to make a difference in their own community or in other areas around the world.

Here is an inside look at the work students performed for their Alternative Spring Break and the bloggers who helped share their stories with those back home:

### **New Orleans**

Though Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast nearly eight years ago, there is still work to be done rebuilding the homes and lives of its victims. That is the work of the St. Bernard Project, which received assistance from UW Oshkosh students during the University's spring break at the end of March.

Moret said the team worked six-hour shifts Monday through Friday painting houses for the organization. The group stayed at the Annunciation Mission, which provides living arrangements and food for groups traveling to New Orleans for volunteer work.

In addition to the hard work, the students were able to experience the sights of the city. The team attended the St. Patrick's Day parade and received beads and souvenirs, watched street performers in the historic French Quarter and witnessed nature in the areas swampland.

### **Honduras**

Also using a paintbrush as their volunteering tool was a group of students who visited Honduras to learn about the issues facing the country's educational system and work with a local elementary school, providing them with a mural on one of the school's walls. The work was done through the nonprofit

group, Organization for Youth Empowerment.

Blogger Ashley Andersen, who is a senior human services major, said she chose the trip because it was focused on educational leadership and was a chance for her to travel abroad while in college.

Andersen said the mural, which contained the UW Oshkosh wordmark, was a way for the students to leave a permanent mark on the community.

The trip also provided students with the opportunity to build lasting friendships, Andersen said.

“It’s good to have those lifelong friendships as well with the people you go on the trips with, and you can always learn something new,” she said.

## **Guatemala**

The other international trip took students to Guatemala, where they worked with As Green As It Gets, an organization that works for sustainable economic development in Guatemala.

The group spent their days picking coffee berries and working on a school construction site. The group picked roughly 30 pounds of coffee berries and received the reward of freshly brewed coffee right at the farm.

Blogger Marie Kroehn, a sophomore human resource management major, said the trip was a shocking experience.

“The view of what is important in the U.S. is so skewed and I think everyone needs to be humbled by seeing how the rest of the world lives,” she said.

Kroehn said the blogging experience was not only a benefit to those reading back home, but also to her.

“Throughout the days I was thinking about what was happening and trying to process it to put it in the blog in a way that would make sense and give impact to readers,” she said. “This was awesome for me because I could gather my thoughts and use this trip as a tool to help others learn... It helped me process the trip to make it real and something I could use to change the local community.”

## **New York**

In the most populated city in the United States, students focused their efforts on providing support for those affected by HIV or AIDS and other life-altering illnesses.

The group began their volunteer work at God’s Love We Deliver, an organization that delivers meals to people struggling with HIV, AIDS and other illnesses. Student blogger Nazek Sankari said that many were unable to leave their home to get food for themselves.

“Knowing that we were sometimes the only human interaction a client would have that day was both heartwarming and heartbreaking at the same time,” she said. “The gratitude and appreciation the clients

expressed when we delivered their food hit me to my core.”

The group also worked with the Gay Men’s Health Club where they served lunch to clients, made safer-sex packets and helped stamp cards for the organization’s upcoming AIDS Walk. Sankari, a senior Spanish major, said the highlight of working with the organization was being able to serve lunch and chat with the organization’s clients.

Much of the work done with these two groups provided a look into the underlying issues of racism, classism and other injustices in society, Sankari said.

“The trip as a whole helped connect some of the values of social justice, diversity and inclusion that I have been taught here at UW Oshkosh with real world situations outside of a university setting,” she said.

### **Washington D.C.**

The final trip stayed within the country’s borders visiting the nation’s capital. This group also provided assistance to those affected by HIV, AIDS and other illnesses.

The group stayed at the Father McKenna Center, an organization that works to provide food, shelter and other assistance to the area’s poor.

Similar to God’s Love We Deliver in New York, the group worked with Food & Friends packing meals to be delivered to those affected by life-changing illnesses. The group also packed food at the Capital Area Food Bank.

While visiting the capital, the students had the opportunity to meet with U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin to discuss issues that affect the homeless population.

Senior English major, Sara Jurisic, blogged about the trip to share with people back home and said she hopes they are inspired

“It is my hope that we are able to inspire others to volunteer, continue our own volunteering work in our community and never forget about those in need,” Jursic wrote on the Alternative Spring Break blog. “Today we have realized that the most important thing is to let people know they are not invisible, that someone cares about them and that a simple ‘hello, how are you,’ can change someone’s day.”

Read more:

- [Alternative Spring Break blog](#)