New Orleans Service Trip Inspires Activism

This March, a group of Honors College students and faculty members took part in the annual *Alternative Spring Break Trip to New Orleans*. There, they spent a week working in communities of need, while also experiencing the rich culture of the city.

ASB is the product of an idea that Honors College Professor Benjamin Schneider had for many years before it came to fruition in March of 2018.

“When I came to the Honors College full-time in 2017, it’s the first thing I asked about trying to do with our amazing students,” he recalls.

After getting approval from both the University and Honors College Director Peter Sands, the inaugural trip was underway just six months later.

Professor Sands also agreed to co-lead the trip, a decision he made due to his love for New Orleans and his belief that the trip is an important learning opportunity for Honors College students.

Because of the dedication of Professors Schneider and Sands, the trip to New Orleans has continued to be an opportunity for students to think outside of themselves while making their Spring Break plans.

For Aubrie Gorski (Psychology), who went in 2022, the trip was an opportunity to make a difference, while also having a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

“Everyone went out and explored the French Quarter and beyond. There’s a lot of food, so many shops, and so much art,” she says. “There’s no city like it.”

Grace Lyons (JAMS, Digital Arts and Culture) went on the trip in 2022 and again this year. For her, a rewarding part was to see the impact that ASB participants had on the communities in which they worked.

This year, the non-profit organization that ASB works with, HandsOn New Orleans, valued the work the group completed as just over $17,000 in tax credits for the communities in need.

Perhaps the greater impact, though, is on the students who participate. Grace says that the trip empowered her and other participants even after returning.

“What we’ve tried to do is bring our service energy back to Milwaukee and do some of the things that we do in New Orleans in our own communities,” she says, citing projects like the Milwaukee River cleanups and UWM Make a Difference Day.

That connectedness reaches to the community in Milwaukee that supports the ASB trip as well.

“I am extremely proud of the students and of the financial support from our donors,” Professor Schneider says. “The trip is not sustainable without their generosity, and we work hard to live up to their confidence in us.”

The *Alternative Spring Break trip to New Orleans* brings together tourism, volunteering, and learning in a meaningful experience for all involved.