

VOLbreaks Alternative Break Program

Fall 2020 Weekend Immersions Report

The VOLbreaks Alternative Break program is an immersive experience where small groups of students travel to different communities across the United States to learn about specific social justice issues. These trips combine direct service opportunities alongside non-profits with a plethora of educational components (e.g. guest speakers, workshops, documentary screenings, and robust reflection components). By participating in a VOLbreaks trip, students develop empathy, examine their assumptions, explore social problems and their root causes, and strive to become active citizens in their own communities. Typically, VOLbreaks trips occur during the fall, winter, and spring breaks; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the VOLbreaks program reimagined their experiences to a local immersion over the weekends, encouraging participants to think about active citizenship within a local lens. As a result, the fall 2020 semester included eight trips, all operating across three weekends, each with their own social issue to further explore:

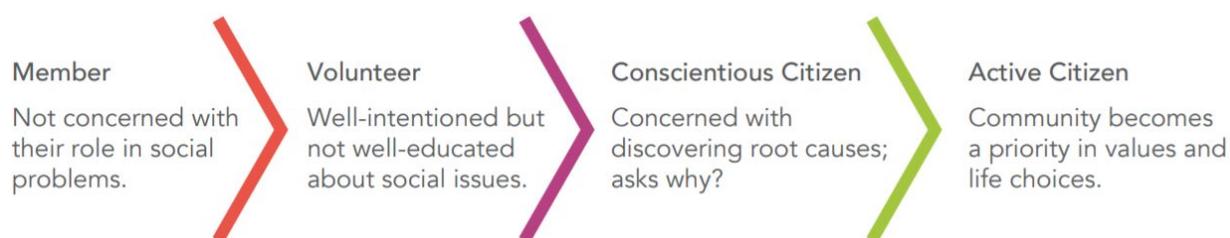
Theme	Leader
Immigration: Policy, Justice & Resources (in-person)	Maria Urias
	Luis Mata
Environmental Sustainability: Conservation and Restoration (in-person)	Alec Apostoaei
	Olivia Crawley
The Health-Wealth Gap: Exploring Wealth Inequality and Healthcare Accessibility (in-person)	Christina Cho
	Luke Dudrick
EmpowHERment: Celebrating & Recognizing Black Girl Magic (VIRTUAL)	Cate Williams
	Dariana Martre
Unpacking Educational Inequality: Youth Development & Education Reform (in-person)	Rachael White
	Saylor Epperson
Criminal "Justice": Mass Incarceration and the Modern US Prison System (VIRTUAL)	Madison Woods
	Taylor Dempsey
Community Resilience: Exploring Resource Accessibility and Income Inequality (in-person)	AJ Thayer
	Joseph Paschall
Women's Rights and Barriers for Political Participation (in-person)	Lexie Judd
	Katherine Fulcher

For our inaugural local weekend immersions, we aimed for our learning outcomes to be that participants would have an increased awareness of personal and social responsibility in the context of community service. The post-trip survey revealed that 100% of students strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of participating in a VOLbreaks experience, they were confident in their ability to explain the importance of serving others to create and maintain a thriving community. Additionally, all participants strongly agreed or agreed they are both aware of service programs they can participate in within the Knoxville community, as well as wish to actively pursue involvement in social issues and/or community service.

BreakAway is an overarching non-profit that provides support and researches best practices for Alternative Breaks programs across the country. They created the active citizenship continuum, which is a model that provides language to describe an individual's transition from mere existence to being a part of community-driven solutions to social justice and social issues. We utilize this model for our students to see their journey and growth as they learn more about different social issues and their spheres of influence to be a part of social change.

Over half of Fall 2020 VOLbreaks participants stated that before going on a VOLbreak, they identified as a member or volunteer, not preoccupied about their role within social issues. However, after participating in a VOLbreak, most participants (over 93%) grew to identify either as a conscientious citizen or active citizen, where community has become a priority in their values and life choices.

The Active Citizen Continuum



Overall, students enjoyed the VOLbreaks Local Immersion just as much as previous long-distance, week-long experiences. One participant stated, “[I] absolutely loved this experience. I learned more in 48 hours than most people do in months, met an incredible group of people, and had my perspective changed for the

better on a number of issues. I have a much more nuanced understanding of sustainability, social justice, service, and reflection now.”

VOLbreaks by the numbers:

	# STUDENTS	# VBLs	# GAs	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	# AGENCIES SERVED	HRS SERVED X TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
UNPACKING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY	7	2	1	10	2	67.6
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	8	2	0	10	4	90
PUBLIC HEALTH & WEALTH	7	2	0	9	2	22.5
WOMEN'S RIGHTS & POLICY	6	2	0	8	1	46
BLACK GIRL MAGIC	10	2	0	12	3	126
CRIMINAL JUSTICE	7	2	0	9	3	72
COMMUNITY RESILIENCE	7	2	0	9	4	90
IMMIGRATION	8	2	0	10	2	90
			Totals	77	21	604.1