

Alternative Break Learning Partner FAQs

Thank you for learning more about the Learning Partner position in UT's Alternative Break (AB) Program. It is our hope that the information below can give you some insight into the rewarding role of a Learning Partner (LP).

Before we start, remind me what all the letters stand for? There are a lot of acronyms in the AB program (See?!):

- **Participants** – Every trip is made up of 12 selected UT students, or trip participants. Participants are involved in pre-trip meetings and service in addition to bringing back the knowledge they learned on the trip to the community of Knoxville. Applications to be a participant are live (online) at the beginning of every semester.
- **Alternative Break Leaders (ABLs)** – Undergraduate student leaders who are paired together to plan and lead the trips. Some have been on previous AB trips and some have not. The ABLs are trained throughout the semester on different topics such as civility, BreakAway's Eight Components of a Quality Alternative Break Trip, diversity, simple living, and much more! 2015-2016 will see 14 Fall and 12 Spring ABLs!
- **Alternative Break Student Coordinator (ABSC)** – This position is filled by a previous ABL and they work all year to enhance the program. They assist the graduate assistant over the AB program with a variety of tasks such as training the ABLs, fundraising, social media, etc.
- **Learning Partners (LPs)** – That's (perhaps) you! LPs are UT faculty, staff, or graduate assistants who support the ABLs before, during and often after the trips. LPs serve in an advisory capacity to enhance the service and learning that happens on each trip. They participate in all service, reflection and FUN that happens on each trip. There is usually one LP per trip.
- **Alternative Fall Break (AFB)** – takes place during UT's Fall Break and trip locations must fall within a 5 hour radius of Knoxville. Participant applications open for AFB at the beginning of fall semester.
- **Alternative Spring Break (ASB)** – takes place during UT's Spring Break and trip locations must fall within an 8 hour radius of Knoxville. Participant applications open for ASB at the beginning of spring semester.

What are Alternative Breaks?

Since 1993, the mission of the Alternative Break (AB) Program is, and has been, to engage students in meaningful and collaborative community service in an effort to increase awareness of social issues and strengthen the communities in which they serve as well as foster a strong sense of community among trip participants and to the university as a whole.

During AB trips, students travel in small groups (15 people total) to new areas where they collaborate with local service agencies to meet specific community needs. Each trip is centered around a service theme that helps students gain a well-rounded perspective of a specific social issue. Students will take steps toward becoming an active citizen by participating in pre-trip meetings and educational opportunities, meaningful reflections throughout the trip, connecting everything they've experienced to the Knoxville community by participating in a pre or post-trip service project, and a post-trip reorientation event. All trips are 'alcohol and other drug free' to all participants, no matter their age.

What is a typical day like on the trip?

You should note that every day will be a little different, but the timeline of a 'typical' day on an AFB or ASB trip is as follows. All participants (students, ABLs and LPs) participate in all events listed:

7am Wake-up/ eat breakfast and pack lunch
8am Depart for service
9am-12pm Morning Service
12pm-1pm lunch (either in transit to the next service site or at the same site, if service is to continue at the same site after lunch)
1pm-5pm Afternoon Service
5pm-6pm Trip to Wal-Mart (perhaps) and back to housing site
6pm-9pm Dinner is cooked by a team of participants, some participants may shower now, dinner is eaten by the group and cleaned up by the 'clean-up' crew
9pm Reflection (participated in by all on trip)
10pm-? Group will play games, continue to have conversations about the day's service, etc.

***In summary- the days are long, and full of strong direct service, but make the trips so worthwhile!*

How many people make up an AB trip?

A typical AB trip consists of 12 selected UT students (freshman to graduate students), two Alternative Break Leaders (ABLs) and 1 faculty/staff/graduate assistant Learning Partner (LP) for a maximum of 15 people per trip.

What is the role of an LP?

A Learning Partner (LP) is a UT faculty/staff/graduate assistant who does not plan the trip, but rather serves in an advisory capacity throughout the duration of the trip. Learning Partners will meet regularly with the Alternative Break Leaders, serve as a resource for the ABLs throughout the planning and implementing of the Alternative Break, and would serve as an aide if any issues were to arise on the trip, Learning Partners are expected to fully participate in all service and reflections throughout the duration of the Alternative Break trip. LPs attend Alternative Break trips at no cost. Serving in the role of a Learning Partner is a truly valuable experience.

What is the role of the ABL?

An Alternative Break Leader (ABL) is a UT student leader who is selected from a competitive application and two-round interview process to plan and lead an Alternative Break experience with another peer. The ABL pairs plan every detail of the trip starting in the summer: from location and service theme to meal plans and reflection topics. There is no requirement to have been on an AB trip before being selected as an ABL.

What will I be eating?

ABLs meal plan and are in charge of shopping for the group (LPs often help with the food shopping). Breakfast and lunch are 'on your own' in the sense that participants can help themselves to bagels, cereals, fruit, etc for breakfast and sandwich meat, bread, peanut butter, granola bars etc for lunch. Participants are responsible for packing their own lunches from this purchased food. Dinners are planned for the group but are usually cooked by a 'dinner crew' (half of the participants) while the other half cleans up.

The concept of 'simple living' is an important factor of AB meal planning. Each participant is allotted \$6 per day (\$1 for breakfast, \$2 for lunch and \$3 for dinner) in the AB food budget. For example, one AFB/ASB dinner can cost \$45 max to prepare (\$3 x 15 participants). Meals must stay low-cost because of our adherence to 'simple living'. Food preferences/intolerances are definitely important to the AB leadership, but if those restrictions require higher-cost items, the participant may be asked to supplement some items due to our low food budget. You are more than welcome to bring your own snacks on AFB/ASB.

Where will I be sleeping?

Just like you don't sign up for an AB trip for the filet mignon (see above FAQ), you don't sign up for the 5 star sleeping quarters either! Just like we adhere to 'simple living' concept for meal planning, we obtain free housing 99% of the time to keep our costs low and to live similarly to those we are serving. This means we sleep on church floors, multi-purpose rooms of Salvation Army's, shower at YMCAs, etc. You should plan on bringing your own sleeping bag and are welcome to bring an air mattress, if you prefer.

Will I have free time available for talking with family/doing work/etc.? Also, what if I know someone in my city?

There's not a lot of free time on an AB trip! However, you are welcome to talk on the phone, catch up on emails, etc. after reflection when the group usually plays games and settles down for the night. We just ask that you stay **present** (both mentally and physically) for the AB experience. If you know someone in your city, the expectation is they find a non-invasive time to come to you, and that you shouldn't leave the group. This is an 'immersion experience' and for some of the same reasons the experiences are alcohol and drug free, we want the group to stay together to have an immersive experience in this experience.

Have questions that are still unanswered? Please feel to direct them to Natalie Frankel (CLS Graduate Assistant) at nfrankel@vols.utk.edu, 865-974-1039 or in Dunford 2238.

Our website is also a great source of info:

http://leadershipandservice.utk.edu/involved_altbreaks.php