Stanford’s Alternative Spring Break program provides participants with both educational and service opportunities. The process by which participants mentally and emotionally synthesize the two is through reflection. Therefore, reflection is a crucial component of the ASB experience as it serves as the bridge between experiences and learning. Remember, we do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on our experiences.

Although reflection is a natural human reaction to any intensive experience, it is essential that ASB leaders intentionally encourage and facilitate the reflection process. This reflection guide has been created to help ASB leaders foster group and individual reflection during the Alternative Spring Break experience.

**Purpose & Value of Reflection**

- Allows students to internalize the lessons learned on break and connect those lessons to their own personal choices and behavior.
- Helps students to process their thoughts and feelings and to think critically about their experience.
- Validates the feelings of each student; Allows students to share their feelings and realize that they are not alone in their reactions.
- Furthers learning and inspires provocative thought and action; Leads to thoughtful and thus more effective service.
- Encourages students to consider potential long-term solutions to the issues they are exploring.
- Allows for personal understanding, growth, and development in various areas such as civic responsibility, career exploration, leadership development, commitment to service, social justice, and political consciousness.

“The nightly debriefs were the best part of the trip. They allowed us to really flush out and discuss some pertinent issues. The discussions were just awesome learning experiences for me. I did a lot of self reflection and I also think I helped to clarify things for others in my group.”

-Participant 06-07
“The best part of the trip was putting everything together every night in Reflection. The organizations we visited were amazing (and numerous!), so it was good to put everything in perspective.”

-Participant 06-07

Types of Reflection

Individual Reflection
Personal introspection and evaluation is a vital component of the reflection that takes place on an alternative break. The intensive service experience inspires students to spend quality time exploring their personal values and beliefs and evaluating their choices, habits, and priorities. As an ASB leader, you can facilitate this type of reflection by setting aside time specifically designated for journal writing and processing. You can also have one-on-one conversations with students to spark and to guide reflection with each individual.

Group Reflection
Group reflection is the essence of the Alternative Spring Break experience: the students learn from each other’s experiences, challenge each other’s assumptions and comfort zones, and affirm each other’s value as members of the team. Group reflection often happens naturally over dinner or a game of cards, or on the van ride home each evening. But you as a leader need to take an active role in initiating and facilitating such discussions.

When to Reflect

A common misconception about reflection is that it only needs to occur once the trip is over. By having daily reflection sessions, however, members of the group can process their experiences as they are happening; without that ongoing process, frustrations and emotions may accumulate and can become overwhelming by the end of the week and learning opportunities may be lost. Your daily or nightly reflection session also helps you to assess how the week’s activities are working out, and allows group members to let off steam if something is not going as expected. One approach is to have different members of the group facilitate the discussion each day.

Tips on Facilitating Reflection

•Encourage everyone’s participation by asking for comments from others. Some students might need to be asked to speak more briefly or less frequently. Small groups may be used to increase participation from more introverted students.

•Keep track of time. If time is running out, make sure to renegotiate the agenda with the group. Some may want to continue the discussion and some may want to simply end the discussion when time is up.

•Try to hold reflection sessions in a quiet place where the group can sit in a circle facing each other.
• Establish certain guidelines about the time of discussion and emphasize respect for others' opinions, explaining how to create a safe discussion space.

• The facilitator is responsible for asking the questions and watching to make sure everyone is heard, and that there is a comfortable space for everyone to share their experiences.

• Consider having different members take turns facilitating group discussions and/or leading reflection activities.

• Incorporate the representative(s) from the organizations you are visiting or working with by asking them to help facilitate a reflection/debriefing activity or discussion.

• Make use of travel time. Consider utilizing small-group reflection activities during your time in the van.

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**Reflection Activities**

**Journaling:**
Journals can include an account of what students did, how they reacted, what their thoughts were, and what plans they have. Also, by keeping an active journal during both the course and the service experience students see the seamless transition from thought into action and back into transformed versions of both. It also allows them to refer to earlier thoughts from readings, discussions, and speakers.

A journal can also be a group reflection tool. This ‘group journal’ is most often made available to participants at all times; writing in it is purely voluntary. Students might decide to share a page from their personal journal, or create something especially for the group journal. The entries can be signed or anonymous, poem or prose, or drawn or penned. A journal anthology can be prepared as a reminder of the service, learning, and experience as a whole.

**Memory Books:**
When thinking about what to collect for historical purposes, consider doing something beyond the typical photo scrapbook. Start a quote book, or other memory book, that group members can add to along the way—writing down inspirational moments, inside jokes, funny phrases, and whatever else stands out. Keep this with you so it can be added to when the moment is right, and then revisit it when you want to remember where you’ve come as a group.

**Taking the Pulse:**
Ask a question of everyone and have everyone write down their responses on index cards. Then collect and anonymously read the responses to the group. (This allows some quiet time and also allows for negative feedback without people having to own it.)

**Quick/Free Writes:**
Ask everyone to take one minute (literally 60 seconds) to write down their thoughts and/or feelings on a particular topic or question. This can help get everyone focused for a discussion, give people a chance to gather their thoughts. You can collect them or not, up to you.

**Artistic Expression:**
Pass out crayons or markers and paper. Ask everyone to draw a picture about what they saw or experienced, or about their feelings in response to the experience. Encourage the group to share their drawings. Consider other forms of creative expression as well, including: developing a song, poem, collage, or skit.

**High/Low (or High/Low/Plus):**
Make a habit of checking in at the end of events/activities by quickly going around and having everyone name their high point and low point. In High/Low/Plus, each person gives a high point, low point and one other thing they want to share with the group. This keeps things structured simply, moving quickly and predictable.

**Graffiti Boards:**
Use large paper around the room (place where you are staying) as graffiti boards and ask team members to record their thoughts/feelings or respond to relevant questions, quotes or statistics.

**Sentence Stems:**
Read some sentence stems aloud and have members write and/or share their thoughts. Examples:  
Today I learned.......  What surprised me about today was......... The most challenging thing about today was..... The best thing about today was......

**Letter Writing:**
- Have members write a letter to themselves at some point during the week regarding what they are experiencing and learning. These letters can be collected and sent to them later in the spring quarter.
- Write letters to an elected official regarding the issue you have been exploring. Ask your host organizations for assistance with this.
- Write a letter to the editor or an opinion piece based on your experience.

**Passing Notes:**
Have members write a response/reaction to a question, thought, quote, etc. Collect, shuffle, and redistribute the cards and ask each member to read the card they received. This can be a good exercise to get a discussion started.

**Pair & Share:**
Have the group break into pairs or triads to discuss/reflect on a question, etc. The pairs or small groups may report back to the larger group depending on time.

**“Consulting Teams”:**
In small groups act as a “consulting team” brought in to critically and creatively address the issue(s) you have been exploring. What recommendations, strategies, solutions, etc. would the team suggest?. Small groups can present their recommendations/plans to one another.

**Storytelling:**
Have one or two members share a story from the day. This may be a personal highlight or reaction to what they saw/learned, or a story about someone they met or something they heard from a community member, etc.

**Articles & Case Studies:**
Consider utilizing an article or a case study as a springboard for discussion and reflection. Revisit an article you read during your GDR or present a new piece. Ask representatives at the various sites you plan to visit for recommended readings or potential case study scenarios.

**“Shaping” the Conversation:**
Rather than asking questions and waiting for responses, prepare a short list of questions (perhaps 3) you want people to answer for themselves and share with the group. Then instruct each person to draw a corresponding number of shapes on their piece of paper, and write a word or phrase as their response to each question in one of the shapes. Then you can have people share what they put in each shape in pairs, small groups, or with the whole group.

3 examples: Square—something you learned about the community we worked with
Circle—something you learned about the issue we’re working on
Triangle—something you learned about our group or yourself

Square—something that went well
Circle—something you’d like to try doing differently
Triangle—someone important to involve in the future

Square—a new skill you’ve developed
Circle—something you understand better
Triangle—a personal attitude/belief that was challenged/affirmed

**“The What?”, “So What?, Now What?” Model:**
This is a way of conceptualizing and structuring a reflection session; its three steps are outlined below.

The What?
Step one pertains to the substance of the group interaction and what has happened to each individual. It deals with facts, occurrences and leads naturally into interpretation. Some questions in this category include the following:
What did you observe today?
What happened today?
What did each of you do?
Who did you meet today and how would you describe them?

The So What?
Step two pertains to the difference the experience made to individuals. It looks at the consequences of the day’s actions and gives meaning to them. Members of the group abstract and generalize what they are learning and shift from the descriptive into the interpretive. At this point the questions asked are usually the following:
What did your experience mean to you?
How do you feel about what happened today?
What did you learn from today?

The Now What?

Step three involves the process of taking lessons learned from the experience and reapplying them to other situations and the larger picture. It is a time for deeper thought and considering future application. The Now What? may include discussion of the following questions:

- How will our lives change because of this experience?
- How would you respond the next time you encounter this particular issue?
- What needs to happen to effectively address this issue?
- What will we do the rest of the week?
- What will we do when we get back to campus?
- What will we do in the upcoming year?

Sample Reflection Questions

Regarding the Organization/Community
What is the agency we worked with doing well? What could be done differently?
What role does the organization play in the community?
How responsive is the organization to community needs?
How could the organization/agency better respond to community needs?
How has your understanding of the community change as a result of this experience?
What does it mean to provide effective service to a community?
How did we serve this organization or community?
How did our service affect the people/organization being served?
How do you think the community/organization we visited/served perceive us?
How do you think the people we visited/served felt about our presence/service?

Regarding the Issue
What did you learn about the issue the agency addresses or the population they serve?
How do we contribute to this issue? How do we help address/solve it?
How did the articles, guest speakers, etc. used in class reflect/support what you experienced/learned on the trip?
What social, economic, political and educational systems are maintaining and perpetuating the problem/issue?
How has your orientation to or opinion about this issue changed through this experience?

General Reactions
In what ways were your stereotypes or assumptions challenged?
What expectations do/did you have regarding this experience?
How did you feel about your involvement in this experience?
Were your expectations met?
What was frustrating for you during this experience? How did you handle this?
What was uncomfortable for you during this experience? How did you handle this?
What if anything surprised you?
What made you think today/this week?
What did you/we do today that made you feel that you/we made a difference?
How were you stretched or challenged today/this week?
What is the most memorable aspect of this experience for you?
What emotions did you experience today/this week?
What did you learn about yourself through this experience?
What did you learn about our group and group dynamics?
How do you think differently about the literature we read after this experience?
How do you feel you contributed to this experience? To our team?
What would you do different if you were to do this again?
What are the most important things you will take with you from this experience?

Looking Ahead
How will you share this experience with others?
In what ways have you changed or do you hope to change as a result of this experience?
How does this experience connect to your long-term goals?
What one thing will you do differently because of this experience?
What has this experience better prepared you for?
How can/will you continue your involvement with this issue?
What is next for you regarding service and learning?
What can you do with the knowledge you gained to promote change?

More Critical Reflection Questions
What is the difference between generosity, charity, justice and social change?
How has this experience challenged your assumptions and stereotypes?
What are root causes of the social issue(s) you have explored?
What are root causes of social inequality in general?
What social, economic, political and educational systems are maintaining and perpetuating the problem/issue?
Who is most impacted by the social issue(s) you have explored? Why are some groups impacted more than others? What factors have created these discrepancies?
What public policies are involved and what are their implications? How can they be improved?
How does the distribution of power and privilege in our society create/impact these social issues?
How can service make a difference; and how can it perpetuate systems of inequality?
What might transform the social issue(s) you have explored, and lead to sustainable change?
What is your own vision for a more just society? How could we move toward that vision?

This resource guide was prepared by the Haas Center for Public Service for Stanford University's Alternative Spring Break program. Portions of this guide were adapted from the Site Leader Survival Manual developed by Break Away.