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[Employment](#)
[News](#)
[Athletics](#)
[The Register](#)
[Pay Stubs](#)
[Faculty/Staff](#)
[Brag Points](#)
[Ag and Life
Science News](#)
[Argonaut](#)
[UI Facts](#)
[Web Cams](#)
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Communications
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Tuesday, July 11, 2006
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[News Media](#)
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UI Students Choose Service Over Snorkeling for Spring Break

Feb. 28, 2006

MOSCOW, Idaho – Spring break for college students is typically a time to escape from studies, sleep and rejuvenate for the semester ahead. Tropical destinations are booked months in advance and flights fill up quickly. But this March, 63 University of Idaho students will not be thinking about themselves or their tans; rather, they'll spend eight days thinking about the need of others and how to make a difference on an Alternative Service Break.

Headed to Waveland, Miss., March 11-18, the UI students will work with Community Collaborations International – a non-profit organization currently heading up relief programs where Hurricane Katrina struck last August.

"We're going to set up 'UI Mississippi' for a week," said Steven Janowiak, director of the UI Student Activities and Leadership Programs Office. "Normally, we have several Alternative Spring Break options for students to choose from. This year, we've chosen to combine our forces and send one large team to an area that really needs our help. With a group this size, we definitely will make a positive impact."

The group will fly into New Orleans and drive to Waveland, located near the Bay of St. Louis on the Gulf coast. A full schedule for the week is developed by CCI, and the group – along with other volunteers from around the country – will be split into work teams to tackle tree removal, debris cleanup, demolition, light construction and basic repairs.

"With the large number of volunteers that will descend on the area, our work also could include preparing volunteer meals or other service to participants," said Christi Fowler, Alternative Service Break intern at UI. "This project is not just about volunteering, but learning about who you are and your role in the community."

Five staff members and one UI alum – four of whom have previously participated in an Alternative Service Break – will accompany the students.

As the students regroup at the end of each day, the advisers will lead them in reflection activities that help them look at the implications of the work they've been doing.

"This is a win-win situation for all participants," said Janowiak. "We are providing a beneficial service in Mississippi, and our students are learning skills they'll use in life."

Julia Brumer, a previous participant of an Alternative Spring Break and now an adviser for the group, said her experience is something she'll remember for life. "It's challenging physically. It's an opportunity to take risks and develop leadership roles."

The community can follow along with the group on its travels by checking a specially created blog – asui.uidaho.edu/blogs/node/10 – which will be updated daily.

A large portion of the trip's cost – about \$20,000 – is funded by the Associated Students of the University of Idaho (ASUI). Other UI groups, including the Parents Association, Office of the Dea of Students, UI Foundation and Alumni Association, have contributed, leaving students to raise about \$190 each.

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