

Turning Responsibility Into Powerful Service (TRIPS)

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Purpose

- Equips students to lead successful service trips during breaks.
- Encourages students to put their values and religious beliefs into practice.

Background

After attending training at Break Away, a national nonprofit organization that supports the development of quality alternative break programs, a student trip coordinator at St. Norbert College organized a two-day trip-planning retreat. This group of experienced trip participants and leaders developed the TRIPS model, which combined the best trip practices of the departments of campus ministry and Leadership, Service and Involvement (LSI). This new model included several new trips, instituted a shared revolving budget, and launched the first annual dinner/silent auction fund-raiser.

How It Works

The TRIPS program offers alternative break trips that help students:

- **Serve:** Offer direct service to the members of their group and the community where they travel.
- **Learn:** Gain a deeper understanding of social issues through group interaction and personal reflection.
- **Live responsibly:** Experience shared community responsibility and simple living.
- **Understand differences:** Encounter diverse cultures, new perspectives, and experiences that challenge their faith and values.
- **Lead:** Strengthen their individual and shared leadership through service.
- **Act:** Return to St. Norbert College motivated to continue working in direct service or political action.

Leaders

Trip leaders make a six- to eight-month commitment of about two hours per week. They are compensated with a free trip and may also receive a \$100 stipend when all post-trip work is completed. Training and reflection activities are provided regularly from the September retreat through the April closing celebration. Trip leaders meet weekly or biweekly with their trip participants and are supplied with a leader manual, training materials, and site-specific information.

Participants

Trip participants make a five- to seven-month commitment of one to three hours per week in preparation for the week-long trip. Each participant receives a booklet outlining trip expectations, logistical information, and group leadership roles. Each participant leads or co-leads an aspect of their trip such as the budget, fund-raising, or education. Trip leaders help the participants fulfill their role, which includes a final report that future trip leaders rely on to plan or improve the next trip.

Funding

The trip leader training and the entire trips program, except student coordinator and staff salaries, are funded through a combination of departmental budgets, participant fees of \$100, and fund-raising.

What Makes The Project Unique

This project is unique because trained students lead service trips to help other students achieve their goals, which include leadership and faith development. Trip leaders coach the participants in shared group leadership roles involving meal planning, reflection, issue education, and entertainment. The trip staff provides specific feedback and ongoing training so that students can improve, successfully lead trips, and learn a great deal in the process. Student-led trips allow staff to provide more trips and more experiential leadership and learning opportunities for participants.

Benefits

Alternative break service trips contribute to the creation of active citizens who are more motivated to serve, learn, live responsibly, understand differences, and lead through service. The College's student-led service trips have the additional benefit of increased faith development opportunities.

Timeline

Fall

Trip leader training begins with a 24-hour retreat followed by four weekly meetings. Training topics follow the Break Away model as well as topics and reflections unique to the College's model. Trip leaders review participant applications, conduct interviews, and make selections. All trip leaders and participants attend an orientation meeting and, several weeks later, a diversity workshop. Trip leaders hold biweekly trip meetings for winter trips (monthly meetings for spring trips) to divide up group leadership roles, plan fund-raising, educational speakers, and team-building. Trip leader check-in sessions are held once a month.

Winter

The College president, dean of students, and campus minister speak at the "send-off" events for winter and spring trips. Trip leaders and staff meet for reorientation, evaluation, and post-trip planning. Trip groups complete post-trip projects.

Spring

All who have helped or participated with TRIPS gather for a celebration event. Planning begins for next year's trips, including selecting trip leaders and sites. Trip leader contracts are signed, and fall trip leader training meetings are scheduled.

Resources and Funding

St. Norbert College

- The departments of LSI and campus ministry administer the trips program and sponsor six to eight trips each year.
- The Department of Faith, Learning and Vocation, the Peace and Justice Center, and the student chapter of Habitat for Humanity each sponsor a trip, and require their trip leaders to participate in the trip leader training and trip events. Each trip site is also a key partner in providing educational and service opportunities.

Overcoming Challenges

The shift from staff to student trip leaders was met with some initial resistance. It took a generation of four years of students and continuous refining and training for this new model to be fully integrated into the culture of the campus. In the fall of 2002, the program expanded our two-department partnership to a coalition of five groups, including one student organization. The current structure allows for even further expansion. The biggest limitation is finding students able and willing to make the time commitment to be trip leaders. The biggest challenge is recruiting men.

Evidence of Success

The program's success can be measured by an increasing number of applicants each year, quantitative and qualitative assessment of each participant's learning experience, and large numbers of repeat trip leaders and participants. In their award essays, students often cite their service trip experience as the one thing that has had the most impact on them during their college experience.

How to Make it Grow

The trips program can grow by preparing more students to be effective trip leaders, developing more campus and community partners, and increasing its financial resources.